

Egoist Agorism

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*“Free competition is not ‘free,’ because I lack the **things** for competition. Against my person no objection can be made, but because I have not the things my person too must step to the rear. And who has the necessary things? Perhaps that manufacturer? Why, from him I could take them away! No, the State has them as property, the manufacturer only as fief, as possession.”*

– Max Stirner

Egoism has a long history among illegalist anarchists. These illegalists rejected the moralistic ideals of their comrades, who argued that seizing the property of the capitalist class was an act of reclamation: one that was justified by the unjust nature of the present property system. But the illegalists found this justification unnecessary. Drawing from Stirner’s work, they argued that since law itself is a system of moral enforcement, it therefore commands no authority. They saw no need to follow the law.

Independently of the illegalist tradition, another current of thought (with a similar disregard for the law) developed. Agorism emerged as a critique of the praxis of the existing anarcho-capitalist tradition and the Rothbardians, who they felt lacked the means to achieve their end goal. In their place, the agorists embraced a rejection of law in order to engage in the sort of free market activity that they were trying to achieve on a wider societal level. This embrace of the black market and disregard for the law puts them well in line with the basic principles of the illegalists, and therefore makes agorism an appealing approach for egoists.

Stirner critiqued “free competition” in *The Unique and Its Property*, so it may seem incongruent for someone to simultaneously embrace his arguments and the agorist approach. However, his critique of “free competition” was an immanent one, not a conceptual one. His objection was not to free competition in principle, but to free competition in practice: liberal, state-created markets based upon civil property.

To Stirner, free competition is not free because the state restricts the individual’s access to the means of competition. Benjamin Tucker raises similar issues when he speaks of the Land Monopoly – the enforcement of the ownership of unused land – but Stirner’s critique is broader. Stirner argues that buildings, materials, and additional starting capital are as much of a problem as land.

But such a critique also serves as an indictment of any propertied system enforced by the state. Stirner's claim is that by engaging in statist free markets, we are acting as a vassal to the state and the property we compete with is merely ours to use, but the state's to own. He states that the individual is not even left with the land they stand on in the regime of civil property.

Within these critiques, we find a basis for a Stirnerite agorist praxis. If all state-enforced property is truly owned by the state, then any egoist who wishes to have anything of their own has to find property outside the realm of the state. Indeed, if an egoist is to seek real free competition, then they must abandon all respect for the present regime of civil property and take what they need to finance their own competition. When the state tells us we cannot engage in that sort of market competition, it is up to us to defy the state so that we can enjoy the gains of such competition for ourselves.

Of course, given the radical nature of the egoist critique, an egoistic agorism would break from Samuel Konkin's conception of agorism on several points, but the largest difference would be on the issue of "red markets." Konkin distinguishes between markets based upon violence and theft not approved of by the state ("red markets") and markets which exist outside of the statist sphere but are consistent with the non-aggression principle ("black markets"). However, that distinction wouldn't be of much use to an egoistic agorist. With no need for moral justifications like the non-aggression principle, an egoist agorist would certainly find a space for red market activity. For example, the assassination market, proposed by the cryptoanarchist Tim May, wherein people bet on the death days of individuals and the use of assassins in order to make it happen, would be just as acceptable to an egoist agorist as growing and selling weed where it may be illegal.

However, despite our disagreements, egoistic agorists and more traditional agorists will find ourselves agreeing on more than we disagree. While we may have different justifications for our views and a different perspective on red markets, we have a lot we can agree on. We can agree on the necessity of building a countereconomy in order to supplant the state. We can agree on the foolishness of electoral politics as a means of achieving our ends. We can agree on the necessity of acting now to create a better world, rather than waiting for a mass movement to develop. And, finally, we can agree on personally benefiting from our disobedience to the state.

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