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# Bloody Rule and a Cannibal Order!

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2022

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These essays are a contribution to the C4SS Mutual Exchange Symposium on Anarchism and Egoism. Parts I and II are a response to Jason Lee Byas' series of essays: "*Against Moral Cannibalism*," "*Anarchy is Moral Order*," "*The Authority of Yourself*."

Part III pertains to other authors, namely Alexander Craig's "*Christianity and Egoism*," Joseph Parampathu's "*The Ego and his Cross*," Andrew Kemle's "*Egoism, Morality, and Anarchism Under Complexity*," and Evan Pierce's "*The Eco- and our Home*."

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tionaries, Stirner. P. 6; The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 225

but rather my full *engagement* in it. The wonder Pierce describes is one means of interest, one form of my self-enjoyment.

## A Stirnerian Challenge

In the *unique* the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born ... 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.<sup>32</sup>

My main hope with each of these essays has been to articulate what I've come to label the *Stirnerian Challenge* for a new audience. A final roar against alienation and the terrible consequences that follow, it is the particularization of all into me — the all-creative, all-consuming Nothing. But it is unfortunately a challenge against which its opposition here has yet to put up an adequate response and — if I'm speaking bluntly — I don't think they *can*. Of alienated thinkers, dogmatists can only put forward ruling thoughts and phrases I must revere, while critics can only replace old rulers with new ones; but neither can challenge the hierarchy of thinking, of ruling thoughts and phrases. But what, then, can they put forward against such a challenger? What can they create that I cannot dissolve again? What can they build that can stand under its own weight? What can they present that is not already mine? They are helpless. Against me, the inconceivable, "the realm of thoughts, thinking, and spirit shatters;" of me, the Unique, is "the last possible phrase, capable of bringing the whole regiment of phrases to a halt;" and if, before me, all ideas "sink down to a *material*," never again can I be made to serve them.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 231

<sup>33</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Ps. 100; The Philosophical Reac-

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shape our changing selves and we can shape our changing world,” that we can strive beyond “the narrow confines of our human egos.” But what he, like Kemle, seems to miss is that through this only the “ego” – that phrase, that self-conception – is lost, while *I* am expanded! His wonder for what lies beyond our “narrow confines” finds its conclusion in my creative nothing. In it, I spill out of my narrow self into my wider self, my *property*. I melt into the clouds, pour into the rivers; in every blade of grass I see only my *self* that I consume (enjoy, experience).

We verge on a richer, more concrete integration with the world when we see the world as our own. But like our own anarchism or sociality, a thoroughly *ecological* ownness might seem unnerving, if not downright uncomfortable. We are not talking of a hierarchical reverence for the world. Rather, we would be learning and exploring the world as a part of ourselves, taking in its beauty as something enjoyed (used).

In Byas we saw all *thought* dissolve into nothing, in Kemle *society*, now with Pierce *the world* follows in hot pursuit! In every drop of dew and flake of mica, I have a world to explore, and in this world – my world beyond my narrowness – Pierce is right in hinting that I ought to lose sight of my *self*. In my world, I forget my *self* – self-forgetfulness – as my focus shifts away from my “narrow confines” into the new object of my attention. I realize at last that all that I have “is still itself its own at the same time, i.e., it has its own existence; it is the unique the same as [I].”<sup>31</sup> I do not simply act upon the world but interact within it; it acts on me, dissolves me as I dissolve it. And am I any less for this? Just the opposite! Are my world and I not my own in my consumption of them? I, myself, am one to gaze up at stars and lose myself in dancing snowflakes; the eyes of a loved one would have no power if they did not stare back at me! My nothingness is not my *separation* from the world,

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<sup>31</sup> Stirner’s Critics, Stirner. P. 11

So here we return to the argument first articulated by Pierce: that “one’s eco-system should be at least as important as one’s ego system — perhaps moreso, considering the latter utterly depends on the former.” His view is one of wonder at our world, at our improbability and simultaneous uniqueness; moreover, it is a call against the goliath of industrialized “ecocide” threatening that world. In this perspective, Pierce is the closest author we’ve looked at to stand up to the actual *Stirnerian Challenge*, but insofar as Pierce *contrasts* his wonder to the Stirnerian, he has come no closer than Kemle or Byas; he remains firmly rooted in the moral swamp.

It was Pierce for whom my “ego is a fragile phantasm,” a petty blip “utterly dependent on the continued functioning of critical external systems.” But if we quickly dissolve this rhetorical distinction between my “ego” and my “I,” all Pierce has said with this is that I am my property! Without *it*, I am *not*. But am I subordinated by this? Sure, I am “utterly dependent” on my property just as Pierce is “utterly dependent” on a continuous stream of oxygen and the beating of his heart, just as the mightiest rivers are “utterly dependent” on rainfall, or our world’s dry land is “utterly dependent” on the motion of tectonic plates. If *I* am what he calls a “phantasm,” then so is *Eurasia*, just on a different timescale — and why should I be compared to a continent?

Yes, I am dependent on myself for my continued living; I am dependent on my every gasp of air and gulp of water and I only *am* through the uncountable others I share it with. I am dependent on them and they on me; the air in my lungs is the same as the air in theirs.<sup>30</sup> But Pierce’s conclusions do not so neatly challenge the Stirnerian as he seems ready to believe. It is *because* of this that I am my own! It is my *taking* of the air and water, of my others, of the world, that I *am*. Pierce is correct when he argues that we “can

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<sup>30</sup> The way in which each individual is relatively intersecting and overlapping with other individuals is arguably the strongest justification we have for a kind of communism in revealing our intersubjective evaluations in the face of non-exclusivity.

## Part I: The Egoist

Many problems rear their heads when attempting to establish moral systems. Determining proper criteria, defining rights and wrongs, or establishing a certain degree of objectivity are just some of the rocky surfs on which these different attempts have run aground. As such, it’s unsurprising that we see these very problems in the so-called moralist “egoism” described by Jason Lee Byas in a series of essays written against the idea of Stirner’s applicability to anarchism; essays about Stirner where Stirner’s actual thoughts seem typically misunderstood. Byas’ work — *Against Moral Cannibalism*, *Anarchy is Moral Order*, and *The Authority of Yourself* — represent the latest in a long history of surprisingly similar critiques perhaps all wondering that maybe if they say the exact same thing as their predecessor, *this time* they’ll get the grab on the Stirnerian Cheshire cat. This is meant to be a grinning response.

### The Unconscious Moralist

*I am* all in all, consequently even abstraction or nothing; I am not a mere thought, but at the same time I am full of thoughts ... but I, as *I*, again devour what is mine, am its master; it is only my *view*, which at any moment I could *change*.<sup>(1)</sup>

The crux of Byas’ argument is simple: Anarchism is moralism and the moralist needs sound moral reasoning to beat the immoral

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Pg. 215

into submission. While ultimately they'll "have to be able to say that the problem is in the doubter, and their defective reasoning will not lift them above morality," the moralist still needs to do so by demonstrating that the immoral "have a reason to accept morality's claims." Morality must be *objectively reasonable*, "because if morality has no *rational* hold over us, it has only whatever social, psychological and physical hold that people give it," and thus we have "no *objective reason* to follow it." Without this objectivity, the enforcement of morality would be what Byas calls *moral cannibalism*: the moralist enforcer wouldn't "reject domination per se, just domination practiced by those outside of their chosen gang." They would be merely "one perspective," one *gang*, "among many."

His focus on objectivity is important because an opponent like the *amoralist*, i.e. the *Stirnerite*, someone who "just [wants] to do something, and then [does] it," poses a unique challenge to a would-be anarchist moral order like the one Byas is proposing. This is what he labels as the *amoralist challenge*: "Why be moral in those instances where morality has clear costs and ignoring it has clear benefits?"

Byas' problem is one of hypocrisy: the moral gang operates "in terms of reasons" — set criteria of right and wrong — but if they were to simply uphold their order over and against the amoral, someone who doesn't accept *their* reason, well then the moral gang "does not defend itself in terms of reasons." The brutalized amoral are not objectively wrong, per se, just objectively *overpowered*. The gang's existence is a contradiction: acting without an objective reason, it is nothing but an "amoralist in disguise." The moral can't feast on their *equals* — that would be cannibalism! — no, they need them to first be *sinner*s.

But, if Byas can demonstrate that his moral order makes objective demands of the amoralist — how self-interest and morality align — then he also demonstrates "a defect in the amoralist's reasoning:" he shows how the *amoral* are objectively *immoral* (leaving them free game for the moral gang). His aim is thus to demonstrate

as a part of myself leads me to acknowledge only that my interests interact with theirs in dynamic, mutually-catalyzing ways. If my borders with these others are blurry, it means only that I am larger — *greater* — than I had previously realized, but I am no more my others than I am my arm. They are a part of me and structure me, but they are *not* me in my entirety (in the way that Kemle treats them). It does not follow from Kemle's premise that I or my interests are wholly indistinguishable from my others; neither can we conclude what my interests 'ought' to be anymore than we can declare the nonexistence of my egoism. Quite the opposite! We can only articulate a potential interest of mine, we can only lay the groundwork for a new self-exploration. But even acknowledging that, I do not express the interests of others but rather — as my interests are not predetermined or exclusive to me — of *myself* more fully.

My others dissolve into my nothing, as I into theirs; our relations are our own, are consumed by us, are always particular to us. It is the overlapping of our power which makes the resulting *union* ours, particular to us, serving only *ourselves* and it's only through this *own sociality* that we can begin to develop a real *anarchy*. I refuse the demand to mediate my sociality through this or that *absolute* rationalism and affirm in its place only my own *relations*. We cannot approach any kind of anarchism if we forever see our social relations as something fixed outside of us. If we are incapable of consuming them, dissolving them into ourselves, we will rest permanently in the language and mindset of service — authority.

## ***The World and The "I"***

As the world as property has become a *material* with which I start to do what I want, so spirit as property must also sink down to a *material*, before which I hold no more sacred awe.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 225

## *The Enemies of Society*

I cannot be isolated from those around me, not when their emotions spark the same emotions in myself. What is their pain, their rage, other than *my* pain, *my* rage. I am not homogenous! I feel nausea in my stomach through a medium of coupled neurons leading to a tangled brain; pain, nausea, and rage are signals and responses, what are these coming from others except signals and responses on another medium? But the conclusion here is not morality. It's not that my interests are isolated from others because we are not the same, but rather that my interests erupt from them – rest always in relation to them – because they are my *own!*

This doesn't mean that I am all powerful, but rather that I am the content of my power. My relation to an external power is different when I make it mine (am its definer). What are relations that overpower and degrade me other than my *opponents*? My degradation, my being overpowered, is a product of my *lack of power* over those social relations – capital, familial, governmental, etc. – that degrade me; they appear alien to me, outside of and above me. But the creation of *morality* is only the internalization of this *alienness*. I must not only be overpowered, but *revere* that overpower. If not capital or state, then the community, the people, or any other phantasm. In making these powers my own, I relate to them authentically and as I am capable.

If we dissolve the “other”, then we set ourselves up to dissolve with it all other social phrases: we assert ourselves as the enemies of every “society” – that phrase which describes, fixes, and regulates our social interests. Here, I see myself here as a Unique in constellation with other *Uniques!* I dissolve all others as they dissolve me. Kemle's problem comes into play, then, when his lack of a clear understanding of Stirner becomes unbearably obvious. He argues, for example, that if “the boundaries of the self are inherently fuzzy, then the very *concept* of ‘egoism’ becomes incoherent,” as if by acknowledging the existence of others, I disappear? Seeing “others”

that *his* moral order, *his* anarchism, emerges from our own aims and, in so doing, “makes real moral demands of us.” For Byas, we cannot escape morality; it will come speaking “to [us] in our own voice, even if [we] refuse the call.”

And speak in our own voice it does! In fact, according to Byas, the call was right in front of us the entire time, coming straight out of Stirner's own mouth, no less – right among the pages of the *The Unique and its Property* he notes how Stirner, “after rejecting the call to make the cause of truth or love his own ... considers the reply that God makes these causes His own.” He then poses “a question Stirner was not bold enough to ask. Might we be like God?”

What's impressive here is that Byas has seemingly managed to take Stirner's own argument, water it down, and claim it as his own! He has, quite spectacularly, *missed* Stirner's explanation of *why* love is God's own (because God is all in all and so love is his property); *missed* the part where Stirner *mocks* his Christian caricature for claiming God is all in all (but that he, Stirner, is not); and so *missed* Stirner's response (proclaiming boastfully that “*I am* all in all”)! *Stirner* wasn't bold enough to ask if we might be like God? He *proclaims* it on the same page Byas is quoting! After calling God an egoist, he sounds loudly that he would prefer to be the egoist himself, because if God has enough content to be for himself all in all, Stirner doubts he would lack it any less.

But we're not done yet, because Byas wants to show how not only *can* his moral order be our self-interest, it *necessarily* is, not just for you or me, but nearly everyone! To tackle this gordian knot he points to a simple “method of self-honesty.” If, Byas argues, we are all honest with ourselves, we'll realize that “feeling guilt when you've done wrong, resenting others' wrongdoing in any way beyond personal annoyance, thinking highly of others for their virtue” all provide the parameters for our moral order. Now, “perhaps there is an ideally-coherent Caligula who can take this self-reflection as a confirmation of his amorality. But I suggest

that reflection because it is not true for me, and I suspect it is not true for you ... and just as I suspect it is not true for you, I suspect you suspect it is not true of others you know.”

Byas’ argument essentially boils down to him assuming that others think like him, view the world as he does, and thus come to similar moral conclusions so long as they’re honest with themselves. If we engage in self-honesty, moral order erupts from our own egoist cause, and thus we “know the objectivity of morality by self-examination, and its universality by reasonable inference.” Thus, Byas’ gang get to be cops, not cannibals, when they enforce their rule.

To say this doesn’t present anything remotely close to a defect in the Stirnerian challenge is an understatement. Byas’ argument is that we are all essentially the same, that while we may differ in some respects, our common *essence* remains. We are all, consciously or unconsciously, moralist egoists: beings who produce a moralist egoism.

It seems that Byas has taken a page out of Feuerbach’s notebooks. So how about I ask a simple question: should I be that which I am not?

Now, this might seem ridiculous, but let’s draw the argument out. If I am capable of both one thing and another, I am not reducible to the former. If I am capable of both walking and running, I am not reducible to walking; walking is not my essence. I am only what I am in my entirety and to present walking as my essence is to put up only an *idea* of what I am. As I am also capable of running, to present walking as my essence is not to *reveal* the true me, but to *reduce* me, to lose me. I am no more a walking “I” than I am a running “I.” I am only what I am in my all. I am irreducible.

In another sense, if I am sometimes irrational, then I am incapable of pure rationality because *I am not* purely rational; it is not my reality, and rationality itself cannot be my essence. I am no more reducible to it than I am *irrationality*. I am *myself* only in the combination of my *unique* rationality and irrationality. Absolute

actually be. He denies the validity of these systems breaking down and the *difference and contradiction* in interests that complex agents visibly have. If we view the networks that self-organization implies as prone to dissolution *and* creation, we can begin to see just how problematic Kemle’s claim that we’re “in a situation where acting against the interests of others is identical to acting against your own interests,” really is. However connected I am with others, I am still *not* them, our interests are *not* identical — either now or in anarchy. His statement is rooted in phrases that dull the complexity and dynamism of our *actual* relations.

*Who are these others?* Are they my fellow human beings? And do we thus share a human interest? A class interest? Kemle seems to argue our complexity implies some common interest, but this doesn’t actually clarify anything as regards the (*concrete*) contradictory systems we find ourselves embedded in. Surely I, as a good, up-standing Anarchist, wouldn’t act in the interests of the oppressors, and Kemle seems to agree; as he puts it, “the nature of CAS means that any agent that seeks to create a highly rigid social system will be actively restricting their ability to accomplish their goals.” But this raises more questions than it answers! Kemle seems to assume that domination occurs due to the machinations of powerful individual agents and so, like those agents, his understanding of domination becomes equally abstract. As a result, he doesn’t actually get that far in either articulating anarchy *or* challenging egoism on its own turf as set himself up to try.

The word “other” is a phrase. Like the “Human Being” it seeks to fix and fully describe those around me, but this time to present them as something truly separate; while Kemle’s complexity goes a long way in breaking this separation down, he only does so by challenging it with another phrase – complexity – which just reproduces the alienation of my sociality in a new form. The “other” vanishes *permanently* only in my Nothing.



people are rational and they act irrationally, either we remove the assumption of rationality (and morality with it), or, we remove the model (and morality remains indefensible).

### ***A General Concern for the Interests of Others***

Is there ever a time in my life in which I am *not* in some way “concerned for the interests of others?” That is, do I really need morality to convince myself to *be* social? This is perhaps the greatest weakness of the moralist approach: the assumption that my self-interest is somehow of no interest to me! Moralists like Byas and Kemle seem to work under the assumption that the lack of sanctity implies a lack of interest, but in reality, sanctity is the alienation of my interest into a fixed-interest, an *absolute* interest. At every moment of my life I have been a social being. Moralism, as usual, has it backwards: I don’t need to be convinced to be social by morality, but rather first *have* my own social interests in order to be able to see sociality as sacred!

The ethics of complexity Kemle has outlined and his claimed “general concern” are not the same thing. The latter acknowledges my situation relative to others, the former prescribes particular relations I must abide by. Kemle has resigned himself to ignore what it really *means* to overlap with “other.” He leaves my “others” purely abstract, my relations wholly *theoretical*. My self overlaps with other selves, but this reciprocity implies not just harmonious *comradery* but in equal parts inherent *contradiction*. What I mean here is that Kemle has not remained true to his own premise of complexity: there is a wider horizon of human activity that we can expect from our mutual overlapping than what his own conclusions account for.

His argument thus far has rested firmly in the maintenance and evolution of complex adaptive systems in a way which does not seem congruent with how dynamic concrete human relations can

rationality — absolute reason — is only an idea second to *my* rationality, *my* reason, *my* own (real) rationale. In the face of absolute reason, I am incapable of absolute reason and it cannot be expected of me. I have no reason to make it my cause. It seems to me that no matter what *reason* the moral gang puts forward, they will always be cannibals. It will always be *their* reason, a reason outside of me, rather than one of my own.

See, I may very well produce a perfectly reasonable moral egoism, but the moment I lapse in my commitment, haven’t I ceased producing this particular reason? Even in such a case, my capability to *not* do so, my capability to *sin*, is just as much a part of my all as my capability to do right by Byas’ morals; even as a conscious moralist I am still only *half-moral*. By the simple virtue of my capability to be *anything else*, feel *anything else*, my so-called essence evaporates.

Let’s return to Byas’ original question — “Can we be like God?” — and examine what it actually *means* if the answer is “yes.” Love is God’s own because God is all in all, and so God is love. But when we say “God is love,” does that mean that everything God does is done in respect to love, that God makes love his cause? Byas might have us believe the answer is yes; after all, if love originates in God, it must produce with it a moral order which binds him. So I’ll ask a question of my own: When God drowned Noah’s world, was that love?

I don’t have an answer because I don’t need one. If the Flood was an act of God’s love, it means that God has the power to define for himself what shape his love comes in. If the Flood was not loving, or not wholly loving, it means that God is *more* than just love and can be unloving or not wholly loving without betraying his cause. In either instance, love is God’s own; it is defined by him, consumed by him, never leaving his grasp. God has based his affair on nothing, *his* nothing, nothing but himself, and so love, as God’s own, takes on whatever form God may like and is only expressed

should God wish to express it. It is God's *unique* love and is never more than *Him*. For God, there is nothing higher than God.

If I, like God, am myself all in all, then anarchism is my property, but it is my *unique* anarchism, as I am unique, and I am always *more* than an anarchist. I am not, contrary to Byas' hopes, essentially an anarchist, a being from whom *his* anarchist moral order eternally blooms or who, by self-reflection, reveals the anarcho-moralist within them. It of course *can*, but perhaps only something like it, as any anarchism that does sprout from me is always *my own*. It is a unique anarchism — a shareable, contestable, personal anarchism and perhaps one very different to the dogma Byas envisions. It, like all ideas within me, is *my* idea, an idea which I can *change*. For me, there is nothing higher than me!

Stirner's self-interest is not limited to notions of frugal benefit, self-gratification, or any one concept in particular. It can *be* just about anything. It remains fundamentally undefined, *unconceptualizable*, just like I am undefined, unconceptualizable. I have based my affair on nothing, my nothing, nothing but myself, and so my self-interest is *whatever I am interested in*, whatever captures *my attention*. That is, in order for Byas to have answered the amoralist challenge within his own parameters, he must demonstrate how his anarchist morality is within my self-interest — by which I mean that it is *interesting to me — at all times*. Perhaps this is why he has refused to seriously consider someone with an authentically alien morality to his own: his thesis demands that he deal not with *people* but *concepts*.

## Je suis anarchiste

I can love, love with all my heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved for anything other than *nourishment*

justification? Ironically — given his theory's attack on domination — inherent in this moralistic approach is an argument not about how people act but how they *ought* to act. That is, insofar as it is moral, it is *reactionary*. It sets a charge forward to describe our reality, but after coming to its conclusion, it presents itself as a reaction *against* any further description. He has made a claim of how we act and derived from that a claim of how we *ought* to act, while acting contrary to it he levels as *irrational* (invalid).

I'll admit that this is a harsh accusation. At first, calling Kemle's argument reactionary seems like attempting surgery with a battle axe. But I have chosen this route specifically to call out the perspective that Kemle has taken in articulating his theory — alienating our own sociality by prescribing how we ought to be after describing how we already are — and that targeting this perspective is generalizable to a huge variety of social theories well beyond just him. As we'll see, his premises likewise lead us to conclusions that his own arguments largely condemn.

His description aims to denigrate those social actions which rest outside of its criteria of rationalism, his method assumes the creation of fixed descriptions that we must adhere to — i.e., it entails phrase-making and so, authority.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, that he is attacking the “immoral” means there are people who simply *aren't* acting the way his description claims they ought to be. If, in his own paradigm, people are acting irrationally, then it is *Kemle* who is wrong, *Kemle's description* which has failed to describe reality. It doesn't really get us very far in analyzing society when all we do with our analysis is label society as “bad.” If, in Kemle's model, the dominant mode of social organization today is labeled as wholly irrational, does that not force us to question his assumption of rationality in the first place? If, in our social model, we assume that

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<sup>28</sup> Moralism requires a moral object which I find sacred, which I relate to in the way morality dictates; if this object, say sociality, is my *own*, even if I have it, I do not have it in the *way* morality dictates, and thus I must be the only other thing morality allows to exist: immoral.

the former is freedom, the latter is domination, etc. Kemle hasn't actually engaged with any of his supposed opponents, he has simply drawn his line in the sand and claimed that anyone outside is his opposite.

I also need to make clear that Kemle's working definition of morality – “a general concern for the interests of others” – is different from the writers whose ideas he's attempting to develop further. It's a change which, apart from confusing how his moralism relates to these others, presents a major tension in his approach. We have, on the one hand *complexity*, generally speaking a theory of free association, but on the other hand *morality*, a theory of rule.<sup>27</sup> As a tactic, this puts me in an awkward position: If I challenge his morality, then I'm challenging *anarchy*, because after all, isn't that just what morality means? We're in a rhetorical hostage situation: if you challenge the “moral,” that means you want to *dominate*. Take that, *immoralists!* But this tension might actually be useful to parse out, because it means that Kemle has approached anarchy as a moral order (and so has fallen prey to the same mistake as Byas).

## ***Moralities and their Reactionaries***

With Kemle we verge on articulating anarchy only to take a huge leap backward; our language and mindset rests firmly in the realm of authority. His project is not a simple description of the world but a challenge to the *immoral*, i.e. the irrational – those who take their false self-perceptions “to automatically entail that they can disregard the interests of others.” As if the patently immoral need to satisfy *moral criteria* to justify their immorality? I thought the terrifying problem of amoralism was that it didn't *need* external

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<sup>27</sup> And this does seem to be the case; Kemle's crash course into CAS centers three themes: emergence, self-organization, non-linearity, which, in my opinion, all have very clear conceptual links to the myriad ideas of free association we see throughout anarchist theory.

for my passion ... how indifferent he would be to me without this.<sup>(2)</sup>

There is another point around which Byas' argument orbits that we would do well not to ignore: a question of commitment. More than just demonstrating that egoism can fall in line with *his* anarchism, Byas wants to demonstrate that it must *remain* there. As he puts it, “morality [is] a practical necessity for anyone's anarchism to be a stable commitment.” The problem for Byas is that egoists, in his eyes, are fickle, flippant and unpassionate, and should they not be, “this is because they are moralists. Instinctively, they revolt at the idea that anarchism is yet another phantasm preventing them from achieving their full potential.” The fact of the matter is that for these unconscious moralists, “there is something real that makes it different from their passing attachment to a sports team.”

The assumption, to put it bluntly, is that the removal of the sacred leaves the egoist undependable and insecure; that passionate interest presupposes *fixed* interest. There can be no *real* investment in one's interest, not without making that investment a *ruling* investment. Anarchy is a usurer paid only in duty or death.

Similar to the inevitable barrage of accusations mistaking anarchy for the lack of any social relations at all, Byas has mistaken the lack of fixity for volatility. But from Stiner's perspective, there is no talk of “full potential” just as there is no talk of absolute (philosophical) self-interest. Nothing prevents me from adopting full, impassioned interest in any topic; there is nothing here against undivided attention, staunch belief, or self-sacrifice. It is the potential sanctity around these ideas which is not *denounced* – declared immoral or illicit – but deemed *illusory*. Byas is simply wrong in his belief that my own ideas are made shallow unless they are imbued with a certain degree of *reverence*. He has confused my interest in

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<sup>(2)</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Pg. 189

a topic and my reification of it, the *authenticity* of my interest and that interest's *religiosity*.

Neither, by the way, has he actually *demonstrated* the amoralist's volatility! He has only rhetorically linked the two, such as by comparing an amoralist's anarchism to their "passing attachment to a sport's team." All he has done is assume — blindly declare — that authenticity entails a kind of virtue ethics. But the fact that Byas has trouble thinking outside of the box doesn't actually prove his argument. My emotional, intellectual, and personal investment in my interest is not the same as my alienating that interest into a virtue, a fixed-point around which I seek to orbit and validate myself. The validity of my interest comes from my *enjoyment* of it, my *use* or *engagement* with it; I am not validated through it, but rather it through me! My genuine investment in this interest presupposes its alienation, as without this investment, I would have nothing to alienate into a virtue to begin with. Every action I take is authentic to me as no action of mine is *alien* from me! It is the *moralist* who needs to demonstrate their authenticity, not the other way around.

I can be convinced utterly of the 'rightness' of my beliefs, but that doesn't stop what I find right from being *my* right. What's more, my fanatic anarchism does not leave that anarchism *permanent*; nor would it be permanent if I proclaimed it *sacred*.

Byas chooses, for example, to interpret James Walker's teeth-gritting endorsement of white, working-class violence against Chinese immigrants as a failing in Walker's *commitment* to anarchism. The anarchist option, so to speak, was simply less personally beneficial to the immediate benefit for "white workers who feared a threat to their income ... 'just overthrow the existing political and economic order!' wasn't an immediate option. Murder was." So, while Byas agrees that "most Stirnerites will probably stay anarchists, and [that] most of them won't even have lapses like Walker's ... morality is still a practical necessity for anyone's anarchism to be a stable commitment."

doesn't seem to demonstrate that he actually knows the difference — or even that there *is* a difference — between Stirner and Rand; they are both simply "egoists" to him. So, when Kemle argues that, through his theory, "the very *concept* of 'egoism' becomes incoherent," I can only say "of course!" because no *coherent* egoism was challenged in the first place. Whatever his "egoism" is, as a critique of the Stirnerian, his focus against "rational actors" or for a more dynamic view of the self is a critique of a "metaphysical position" that we *do not largely abide by*, or in the case of the latter, *actually argue for ourselves!*

Like with Parampathu, the situation becomes a lot clearer once we start paying attention to how Kemle uses these terms in context. His piece opens with a claim of critiquing "amoralism" or "egoism," but what Kemle *actually ends up challenging* are theories of "thin rationalism," the "Homo Economicus," or a bourgeois view where "inequalities in wealth can be justified on the basis of incentives." His moralism is meant to strike "a deathblow against the notion that a society is best served by catering to the already rich and powerful."

In understanding his morality through the lens of complexity, his "general concern" acts really as a particular, *complex* concern. Through this juxtaposition, then, his *undefined* "amoralism" or "egoism" *takes on* the meaning of 'not moralism.' Look at how the moralists turn "black into white and white into black!"<sup>25</sup> If moralism carries the meaning of a complex concern, what else does *any position* labeled "amoral" become other than a *lack* of this concern (i.e. antisociality, domination)? It doesn't matter what these positions are, that they are 'not morality' means that they are labeled *immoral*, i.e. are understood only as whatever morality *isn't*.<sup>26</sup> If morality is sociality, amorality is *antisociality*, if

<sup>25</sup> The Philosophical Reactionaries, Stirner. P. 3

<sup>26</sup> These positions are thrown into the only camp that the moral knows other than morality, "into that of the — immoral." (The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 45)

are simply another part of me? Byas' failing (one of them at least) was attributing to the Union of Egoists – that being *my* union, my *communion* with others – the same flippancy as he assigned my self-interest. But if I act socially (and clearly, I do) that only means that I *have* sociality. That I am a social being is not the same as the construction of some necessary *moral community*.

Andrew Kemle is just this kind of communitarian. In his essay, *Egoism, Morality, and Anarchism Under Complexity*, he means to build on two previous authors, Chris Matthew Sciabarra and Jason Lee Byas, by using his view of “complexity and complex adaptive systems (CAS)” to argue that “self-interest and caring for the well-being of others need not be separate concerns.” For him, “self-interest [is] embedded within morality ... [and] *morality* (taken here to mean a general concern for the interests of others) is embedded within self-interest.” But rather than just repeating their points, Kemle hopes to go above and beyond these forerunners by taking on “the metaphysical groundwork that amoralists utilize” via a critique of an atomistic self. He means to challenge the notion that “the ‘self’ in ‘self-interest’ is cleanly delimited from other selves” which, he argues, is an assumption “many immoralists take ... to automatically entail that they can disregard the interests of others.” It's *rational*, then, “to care enough about other people to respect them as autonomous agents,” and given “the nature of complexity, [we'll] find that even a thinly rational person ought to be acting in the way Byas and Sciabarra delineate.”

All in all, Kemle sets a disappointingly awkward critique against the “metaphysical groundwork that amoralists utilize,” mainly because he leaves it unclear as to what exactly he means by “amoralist” (a term he funnily shifts to “immoralist” halfway through that particular paragraph before ceasing to use either word entirely). One might assume he means Stirnerians, given his praise of Byas's “interesting (and effective) challenge to Max Stirner's critique of morality,” but he also praises Matthew Sciabarra's approach to Ayn Rand in the same way. So, Kemle

But are there really only two solutions to this immediate problem? Pious asceticism awaiting revolution or white, racialized terror? Was there no link an anarchist could have made between real material benefit and the question of greater social change?

Walker's stance on the matter, in Byas' view, was simply a lack of *commitment* to the anarchist virtue. As if, from Walker's perspective, his anarchism was anything other than as committed as ever? As if, in Walker's *Killing Chinese*, he doesn't crudely justify his stance through the lense of his understanding of anarchism? For Byas, it's simple: truly committed anarchists either don't have sinful ideas or they recognize certain ideas as sinful and avoid them. Their thoughts never leave the safe confines of the fully developed *Spirit of Anarchy* (as understood by the moral gang, of course!). The question now, though, is where this leaves every other anarchist throughout history?

When we read through the lives of others within the anarchist tradition, be it Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin, or Malatesta, *change and evolution* are the only truly consistent aspects of their thought; even those anarchists who continued to identify as anarchists can hardly be considered to profess the *same interpretation* throughout their lives. Nor were these interpreters thoroughly without sin! Bakunin and Proudhon are remembered both for their contributions to anarchism as well as their vicious misogyny and anti-semitism, while Kropotkin kept the label for the entirety of his adult life and is notable for supporting Russia in the First World War. Was it that these great figures simply lacked the proper *commitment*? Was it only belief in the *sanctity* of anarchism that was necessary to prevent these ideas? This isn't to say that upholding something as sacred has *no* effect on one's investment in an idea, but it *is* to acknowledge that few more publicly denounced the threat of “Stirnerism” than Bookchin – someone who abandoned the title “anarchist” altogether in favor of his own brand of good government. Even among anarchists, moralists included, their permanence as anarchists is hardly guaranteed. It seems to me that not

only is morality not required for a consistent anarchist, it doesn't do all that fantastic a job of ensuring one in the first place.

Byas' view of Walker also creates a very problematic understanding of racism. His labeling it as a simple, even rational immorality occurring only in the *absence* of morality positions racism as if it were a cold, economic calculus made in lieu of virtuosity rather than a deeply permeating material and discursive *structure*; a worldview, a structure of *virtue*, heavily ingrained into our society and selves. I point tangentially to the incessant ebb of questions from anarchists new and old wondering why we would ever need a *feminist* anarchism, isn't anarchism *inherently* feminist? But misogyny and racism, unless overtly and *loudly* eviscerated, are not inherently destroyed by adopting anarchist beliefs; they can quite easily corrupt them instead. Ideas are not only banished by other ideas, they catalyze one another. Let's not ignore that racism, too, is a spirit, a *virtue* for the racist. As a great deal of historic anarchists have shown, alienating anarchism as a virtue does not entail freedom from sin and neither is sin as simple as a question of *commitment*, of *piety*.

Are we seriously expected to believe that a proclamation of faith, or even present internal consistency, is meant to overpower the general tendency of people's ideas and living situations to change? Are we to believe that our lived understandings are independent of our living, social experience? That our ideas are not constructed and mediated through one another? Or is it rather that people's ideas drifting gives Byas' moral gang the justification they need to deal out the necessary punishment?

Simply put, Byas has put forward a non-issue: *theory* can no more guarantee people's allegiance to the spirit of anarchy than we can prevent that shifty spirit's evolution over time. Professions of faith cannot prevent lapses in faith, while faith is no synonym for real investment. I am no less of an egoist for remaining something my entire life than I am more of an egoist for changing my views with each sunrise. Anarchism can be — and in my case *is* —

my end; it is from me that my world and thoughts come into being, that they develop and dissolve. What a horror to learn that God is not my maker, I am his!

I can never be rid of what I "think [is my] own;" if I have something, it is mine! How can I go against my own nature in this? My nature (that phrase) says what I am; but I am *all* that I am and am only *myself* in this *all*. I will never be in harmony with "the Good," that is, *Craig's* good, his divine, spiritual — i.e. theoretical, conceptual — good; but what a pale thought that is compared to *my* good, the only good which *is*, and which only *is* because I first *am*. With my good — what is good for me, the nothing into which "the Good" dissolves — I am *always* in harmony. This "nothing" has no criterion outside of itself, no right not owned by itself, and no cause alien from itself; that is, I am myself unjudgeable, always right by myself, and always in myself *all in all* — i.e., perfect, complete, all that I can be in that instant and with no need to be anything else. As a Christian, I am given freedom, i.e. shackled in service, half-empty and degraded by phrases; as the Unique — who is who they are — I am always in harmony, always *myself* in my *fullness*.

## ***The Social Community***

The association is there for you and through you, while society, on the contrary, lays claim to you for itself and is still there without you; in short, society is *sacred*, the association your *own*; society consumes *you*, *you* consume the association.<sup>24</sup>

The Unique is who they are, how redundant is that? But what else can I say except that I am that I am, the *all* that I am, my *property*! If I am my everything, can I really say there is anything outside of me? Can there be *others* — those alien to me — if they

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<sup>24</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 199

yes, but only through letting their ego die – and being born anew in Christ.” But in this exaltation all that we’re faced with is either the loss of the egoist – in which case Craig is wrong, the egoist cannot be exalted and still remain an egoist – or the admittedly hilarious quandary that such an *own* Christianity would put us in the awkward position of claiming God as our *property*, that over which we express the fullness of our *power*.<sup>22</sup> Following Craig’s pursuit of “the highest fulfillment,” would I not be sinfully loving what I am – or am to be – under God rather than God himself? Yes, I can find the Christian good to be good for me, but coming at it in this way seems to make it not quite Christian anymore.

Even ignoring this, do I get far enough in Craig’s egoism to “be in perfect harmony with the nature of the Good?” In “the emptying out of [my] self” – my baptism – do I truly *lose* myself? If I were to kowtow before the divine light, it would be through *my* power that I bend. It, like everything I do, is a product of *me*, and I – not exaltation – am always the content of it. No matter how empty I become, how clear I am, or how much of the divine light shines through me, I remain. Exaltation always remains a dream of tomorrow, ruined today. I am that through which the divine light shines – that who *shines* it (as it is powerless, originating in me) – I am that which gives it its *hue!* No matter how deeply I bow, I am always the bower, the product of myself; however total my service, I am only ever a sinner.<sup>23</sup> Before the divine good, I must always degrade myself, hope to escape myself, because everything which is my own is *not* divine. But I can *never* get away from myself! I am my *creator!* My world began at my beginning and will end at

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<sup>22</sup> Acknowledging a Christian universe, one’s **egoism** implies not its reverence but a particularly *unchristian* ownership of it; God is not revered, but *consumed* – who’s to say we praise God as he so angrily demands? What is this other than the premise of a new *War in Heaven*?

<sup>23</sup> See. *Part I: The Egoist*, “my capability to *not* do so, my capability to *sin*, is just as much a part of my all as my capability to do right by Byas’ morals; even as a conscious moralist I am still only *half-moral*.”

a self-interest of mine; it is something I am invested in. The fact that it never escapes the confines of my power – or rather, that it is created only *through* my power – is not synonymous with disinterest. You cannot assume to know the extent to which any one thought fills my thinking.

Byas’ question of permanence also breaks down his own argument. His *unconscious moralism* relies on a view where my self-interest produces the virtues that bind me. But the alienation of my interests into my virtues is a product of *my power*, my reification is a constant process. I am impermanent, my interests are not independent of my world, they are catalyzed by it. Without my world, without my *own*, I have no interests of any kind. My power, and so my *impermanence*, produces my faith, not the other way around. If virtue comes from me, and I am subject to change, my virtues cannot guarantee the permanence Byas wants them to.

While we’ll only begin to explore it here, this view has many consequences, not least because an anarchism which is thoroughly *our own* really begins to change the meaning of anarchism. For that reason, it’s not enough to stop at Byas’ account of Stirner; we need to gnash our teeth against his conception of *anarchy*.

## Part II: The Anarchist

There is something else happening in Byas' account of our own self-enslavement that I find interesting. It's not just that Byas' portrayal of anarchism is meant to be retroactively binding, emerging from our selves only to ensnare us after the fact. There's something about this portrayal that forces a binding conclusion.

### Anarcho-Protestantism

The most extreme liberals ... want to hear nothing more of heresy trials. But no one is to rebel against the "rational law" ... they do not want a free movement and currency of the person or of me, but of reason, i.e., a rulership of reason ... the bourgeoisie wants an *impersonal* ruler.<sup>(3)</sup>

In his second essay, *Anarchy is Moral Order*, Byas describes the snare that is meant to spring out of our self-interest. In his view, *anarchism* provides a projected end goal in *anarchy* — a society defined by "cooperation without power" — and, like all end goals, there are things which help reach it and things which get us lost along the way. That is, "if you want to get to Decatur from Atlanta, you need to go east." What's more, anarchism "requires irreducibly moral concepts" to remain coherent, as "without any morality to which we can appeal, the distinctions [between domination and non-domination] fade away, and rejections of aggression and dom-

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<sup>(3)</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Pg. 75

I allow myself to be whoever I am in the moment, to dissolve into myself. It is effortless, thoughtless self-consumption. My consuming, what he and Craig have alienated into "ego-death," is nothing less than what I always do all of the time: it is my *living!*

In the Unique — an empty word without thought-content — I see myself for what I always am: complete. I have nothing to fulfill or develop into, because each change in me brings me only into ... myself. Does it not occur to Parampathu that in order to "realize myself through living" all I would have to do is live? If I am unfulfilled then I am personally dissatisfied, but I am never *incomplete* (how he treats the word fulfillment). My satisfaction always comes from my interest; if I lose interest, then I am satisfied — *sated* — if only for that moment.

Sure, Parampathu is not technically wrong when he claims that "the egoist Christian can live in accordance with an idealized spirit," an egoist can certainly still believe in a Christian reality; did I not say, after all, that spooks aren't self-deceptions? But do I truly "come to myself and my own" through exaltation?<sup>20</sup> If one is actually, *consciously* egoistic, I'd argue that any degree of self-awareness poses some problems for this egoist's Christendom.<sup>21</sup>

We see an amusing attempt to avoid this conclusion back in Andrew Craig's *Christianity and Egoism*, where he puts forward a (potentially sacrilegious) theology by positing loving the Christian God as "the highest fulfillment available to any human being." By engaging in Christian ego-death and following the Christian path, Craig argues, "we will be in perfect harmony with the nature of the Good, the foundation of all that exists, God Himself. We will lose the things we think are our own but are merely the things we have picked up contrary to our nature ... the egoist can be exalted,

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<sup>20</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 115

<sup>21</sup> Even ignoring whether or not this egoism is at all Stirnerian, what I might call the egoistic *dissolution of ideas* tends to catalyze not a small degree of change on behalf of those ideas.



curs not by losing them, but by having them! A phantasm vanishes when I take it as property, when it dissolves into my nothing. That Stirner criticizes reason doesn't mean I must abandon reason (i.e., practice agape), it means that *absolute* reason is only ever the alienation of *my* reason. My reason is my own: a tool I enjoy, a thing I consume. If I am ever rid of reason, it will be because it was first mine. My being rid of it comes only through my prior power over it. I *must* be rid of nothing — I *am* the devourer of everything!

It is another thing entirely, then, when Parampathu says that “all things are subordinate to the Unique” because *I* am included in this subordination! Parampathu's Unique is a *what*, not a *who* (and a what to be “fulfilled,” at that!). According to Parampathu, I must be free of spooks and thereby free of rationalism, i.e., practice agape — but what is this other than trading the spook of rationalism for the spook of irrationalism? What is this freedom other than *servitude*? Servitude not toward myself or rationalism, but toward irrationalism (and a specific irrationalism above all others). Posited as a goal, Parampathu has made a *reason of unreason!*

In this we see how he has gotten Stirner's analogy of the dog and the flower backwards. A dog doesn't bark in service to a cause and neither does a flower bloom; it only “applies all its forces to enjoy and consume the world as best it can, i.e., it sucks in as much of the earth's juices, as much of the ether's air, as much of the sun's light, as it can get.”<sup>18</sup> The flower simply *is* — simply *is itself*, unscrupulously and in self-validation. Do my lungs breathe in service of a cause? No! My lungs breathing is my use — *consumption* — of them that occurs irregardless of whatever cause is attributed to it. I have no calling, I simply “disperse [myself] as time disperses everything ... [this] is not [my] ‘destiny,’ because it is present.”<sup>19</sup> Parampathu's ego-death is nothing less than the alienation of my own *self-dissolution*. My heart simply beats, my lungs simply breathe —

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<sup>18</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 207.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 211

ination start to become meaningless.” Byas has already attempted to demonstrate that morality is our cause; what he attempts to do here is prove that this morality *is* anarchism. Still, there's something here that looks to me as if he is attempting to catch us in a bait-and-switch.

Byas doesn't define “power” overtly, but through his treatment of later terms like “aggression” and “domination” it seems to mean some kind of *violation of the self*. As an example, he puts forward a hypothetical where Max attempts to take his toothbrush, which is clearly wrong, not because of any legal title, but rather because of a moral one; Byas owns the toothbrush and is violated by its nonconsensual loss. In a similar sense, “associations”, whatever they may be, put forward a non-bullying agreement and enforce it against Max, someone who wants to bully; Max is not violated by a no-violation rule as “a principle of non-domination is itself the grounds on which Max is prevented from bullying, not just that people don't want him to be a bully.” That is, it's because these rules' enforcement uphold the assumed moral order that they are not dominating.

See, Byas doesn't want to *avoid* his moral gang from squashing its detractors, he wants them to have a *good enough reason to do it*. As he notes, “domination involves someone being able to command another person, and that other person being compelled to obey them,” *but*, “it's important in talking about domination that what must be obeyed is the person, not a principle.” What's important for Byas' anarchism is not that we are not commanded, but that we are “compelled in the name of reasons, not persons.” For Byas, like all moralists, we must not serve any one person. Instead, we must serve the spirit, the idea, that rules us. Anarchy is our ideal city on the hill and the *immoral* stand in the way of its utopic realization!

It's not too difficult to see the inherently *governmental* quality to this kind of analysis, that domination is not gone, only done in service to *the right cause*. We still have polities, associations which

put out rules, and we still have *rule* in some form, it's just that now there is *proper justification*. Really, there is very little difference between the 'moral' order Byas lays out and the various attempts at 'good government' we've seen come and go over the years. His anarchism is nothing other than (in the Stirnerian sense of the term) a *social theory*: a means of *social regulation* and all the violence that it entails. The "associations" which he describes as establishing a series of rules to enforce, even if these rules are "anti-bullying", still entail a social order in which a collective of some kind is capable of, in large part, expressing itself as a *polity*. It still entails a legitimization of some authority, one legitimized by its close proximity to a moral order — one perspective among many — in a way not dissimilar to the mandate of heaven or the rubber stamp of democracy.

But there's something else going on here that we *have* to address, because in his own way, Byas is correct. Let's ignore, for a moment, the point that at the end of the day, reason's command is only realized by a real person's fist. We still encounter the same problem Byas is raising: Pursuing *anarchy* does seem to entail understanding, to repeat his metaphor, whether we drive east or west out of Atlanta. We need a way to clarify and define anarchism, "to make sense of a rejection of aggression, we need a way to distinguish aggression from mere force ... to make sense of a rejection of domination, we need a way to distinguish domination from mere social compulsion." That is, anarchism, here understood, is in a way a map and compass. It is a *conceptual world* which we construct and navigate.

What I sought to demonstrate in the previous section was that a Stirnerian is already well-equipped to construct this world themselves and not at all the way that Byas envisions. Now, however, I want to show that the world we ourselves can begin constructing is far more vibrant than Byas comes close to allowing. I think the problem we are presented with is less the presence of a necessarily

ing how he's using these terms in context.<sup>16</sup> "Egoism," here, is the fulfillment of the Unique, which is unfulfilled when encumbered by "spooks;" "spooks" themselves are self-deceptions, lies, among which is rationalism; the absence of rationalism, irrationalism, also has its own meaning here: "agape," or unconditional Christian love; and "realizing our lives by living" means living *unencumbered* by "throwing [our] life away," itself meaning to act in martyrdom — throwing our life away in *unconditional service* to irrational love.

Now everything is clear! If we are to be truly Unique, "fulfilled" Uniques, we are to be no longer *encumbered* — encumbered by *lies* — and what better way to get rid of *lies* than to abandon them entirely! Parampathu's Unique is unique in their *freedom*, their *poverty*.

Parampathu has read that "Stirner criticizes a life preoccupied with self-preservation" (and criticize, too, has its own meaning: to negate)<sup>17</sup> and "condemns reason as a false guiding principle;" therefore, he presents Stirner as wanting us to be self-sacrificing and unreasonable! The entire project is obvious: we're being spoken to "in our own voice," our language twisted around and spat back out. If Saint Max critiques reason, surely that means he *abandons* reason. Given that agape is the definition of unreason, the "fulfilled Unique" — a Christian Unique *rid* of spooks — is a Unique *rid* of reason.

How does this compare to what we actually find in the Stirnerian tradition? Well, phantasms — spooks — are not self-deceptions or sins we must be *free* from (*rid* of). While deceptions may be phantasmic, it's really an affair of squares and rectangles. Rather, a phantasm is a fixed-idea, an idea *alienated* from me in that it appears outside my power (*indissoluble*). Their *dissolution*, then, oc-

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<sup>16</sup> To be clear, I am not critiquing the use of context to further develop a word's meaning; I do that myself throughout this essay and I'd argue it's unavoidable. Instead, I am bringing attention to — and critiquing — the meanings that Parampathu has assigned to these terms.

<sup>17</sup> But does Stirnerian critique negate? "No, nothing is to be lost [but has] to become our own." (*Unique*, p. 106)

something to be “fulfilled” in a particular way (in this case, ego-death).

See here then: Parampathu says one thing – a denial of ideals – and does another: puts forward an ideal! Similar to a saint who (by pure coincidence, I’m sure) shares a name with a heathen god, the ego-dead Unique we’re presented with here is an ideal in denial, a teal/black puppet stuffed with Christian theology hoping to convince us poor sinners that the light was inside us all along. Let’s look at it more closely:

Ego-death, in Stirner’s egoism, is not so much a path to transcend the ego, but rather to fulfill it. To do otherwise would be to deny the Unique, and farcically, require a self-deception through creating a spook. Egoistic self-denial is ‘the negation of what we imagine we desire’ ...

The Christian idea of *agape* love (from the Greek translation, as opposed to other Greek biblical love-words like *eros* or *philos*) mirrors this egoistic idea of the fulfilled Unique ... While the unfulfilled Unique (a person living encumbered by spooks), may quite rationally practice *eros* and *philos*, their spooks (self-deceptions like rationality, spirituality, or legality) prevent them from practicing *agape* love ... They are unable to love something unconditionally ... unable to, as the sheep or dog, realize their own life through living. They are unable to take up their life by throwing it away; blinded by the spook of idealizing an ego, they cannot experience the ego-death within egoism.

Because Parampathu has obscured his meaning behind a Stirnerian façade, let’s piece together some proper definitions by assess-

governmental or (in the Stirnerian sense of the word) hierarchical element to anarchism and more a lack of imagination on Byas’ part.

## An-Archy

The state is founded on the—*slavery of labor*. If *labor* becomes *free*, the state is lost.<sup>(4)</sup>

Anarchy, from the Greek *an* (without) *arche* (authority), is, in one respect, a theory of society antagonistic toward, or emerging from the absence of, authority — archy. That is, it can be best understood as a *consequence* of authority’s absence or of resistance against it, while being an anarchist entails, in some part, exploring what those consequences are.

For those hoping to establish *anarchy* as a kind of moral order — a justification for *rule* — this approach to the concept poses immediate problems. Importantly, it denies the basis on which that moral order stands by decentering ‘justification’ and instead focusing on the social reality itself; that is, it denies the kind of justified hierarchy that presupposes moral order. No authority is legitimate, no rule can be maintained in a society *resulting from its absence*. From this vantage, the difference between domination and what we might call the *reality of social living* isn’t morality — ‘correctness’ or ‘proper’ justification — but *archy*, authority. Now, this is a word with many potential meanings, for our sake it might now suffice to be labeled simply as the social ability to command and enforce obedience.

Byas may deny that his presupposed moral validity, say, his aforementioned property titles, take the form of *legal* titles, but in practice, their enforcement by an agency asserting itself as an authority, even if it is in the name of a lofty spirit like morality, make the difference trivial to nonexistent. His moral order is still

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<sup>(4)</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Pg. 82

a structure in which ‘things’ are categorized, explicitly or implicitly, as licit or illicit in relation to a social center. By contrast, a conception of anarchy recentered around *an-archy* brings with it the challenge that we might not actually *have* any center around which to relate.

Let’s return to the toothbrush. Byas claims there is a valid moral title to it on the grounds that a toothbrush is something we all, “even communists”, agree can be owned. In short, returning to his aforementioned appeal to normalcy, toothbrush ownership is something we all already believe in, and we believe in it because that moral title springs out from ourselves just like anarchism should if we were just honestly self-reflective. As usual, ‘people just think like me’ seems to be the recurring, go-to excuse for his moral claims.

But if we were to abandon a presupposed order of right and wrong, licit and illicit, on which a polity-by-another-name might enforce its rule, what are we left with? Two people with two rationales. All in all, two *powers* riddled in concurrence and contradiction. Or perhaps not just two, but a number of forces and reasons interpenetrating one another, a web of reciprocity. From the perspective of *an-archy*, competing claims over *use* would seem less likely to be tied to presupposed universal values and more to the resultant balancing of different values. Any two people may have a myriad of reasons to contest each other’s actions and just as many reasons to reforge those then broken bonds. With no central axis around which to pivot, it seems to make more sense to visualize an anarchic order as that order emerging from what would otherwise be concurring and contradicting forces.

There are many ways to go about doing this and you would not be wrong in seeing overlap between my interpretation of an *own* anarchy and certain ideas of *justice* and *collective-force* going around neo-Proudhonian circles. Although my interpretation is rooted more in a sense of *my*, or in this case *our*, *ownness* and *property*. Again with the toothbrush, it may not be that we all hold

thing. Parampathu, though, is much more explicit. His work, *The Ego and its Cross*, expands on the notion of “ego-death” put forward in Craig’s *Christianity and Egoism* and in it he is *very* clear with his belief that “Stirner’s egoism and Christian teaching are compatible, even complementary.”

What stands out about Parampathu’s work is its heavy-handed use of seemingly Stirnerian terms like “spooks,” the “Unique,” “ego,” or “egoism,” which he uses to demonstrate the connections between Stirner’s thought and Christian teachings. That is, like their moral cousin, the theological egoist has come to “speak to us in our own voice.”<sup>15</sup> This should come as no surprise, but it’s the *way* he goes about doing it which I find really fascinating: Parampathu is bold! Who else would come into *my* house, look me dead in the eyes, and proceed to shovel my own silverware directly into their pockets!

Parampathu hasn’t simply used Stirnerian concepts and come to different conclusions, *every Stirnerian term* that he mobilizes has taken on subtle, unacknowledged shifts in meaning. At first, the way these terms are used gives us the sense that we’re all talking about the same things: Parampathu admits that “Egoism ... does not prescribe a path, so much as reject that an ideal [can] claim precedence over the individual’s authority to invest the ideal with its meaning;” he argues for a similar ‘living’ Unique, who “even being just one man (of many men), he is also himself, an individual” who like “any sheep or [dog] ‘realizes itself in living.’” We even see this “egoism” presented as a conclusion where “all things are subordinate to the Unique.” But quickly we encounter some major inconsistencies: “spooks,” for example, he defines not as fixed-ideas, but as “self-deceptions like rationality, spirituality, or legality” which allows him to later set them up as things not to be dissolved, but avoided; or in the case of his “Unique”, while defined similarly to what we see in the Stirnerian tradition, he goes on to treat it as

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<sup>15</sup> Against Moral Cannibalism, Jason Lee Byas

Onward then! The raging fire of the Unique is set to burn the whole Ivory Tower of Thought to the ground. Never again will my thinking appear alien to me; never again can my thoughts be presented against me; never will I be the property of thought, but thought the property of me! Any concept I am told I am is something less than me; any description or abstraction is a tool for me to enjoy. Let's see, then, how the "critics" of the Stirnerian stand up to the Unique in all its naked horror!

### **Saint Max**

His effort and care to get away from himself are nothing but the misunderstood drive for self-dissolution ... This is why, beyond each moment of your existence, a fresh moment of the future beckons to you, and developing yourself, you get away "from yourself," i.e., from your current self.<sup>14</sup>

In a symposium featuring Stirner, the hiss and roar of moralism should really come as no surprise. But the addition of two Christian authors – Alexander Craig and Joseph Parampathu – drawing out what I can only describe as a kind of *theological* egoism? Or better yet, linking this theology to Stirner? Now *that* is a little more brow-raising. It isn't anything to be afraid of, though. After all, the notion of a religious egoist tends to flutter around Stirnerian circles now and again (and really, the idea seems to put more pressure on the *theology* than the *egoism*). But we should be careful not to overlook the subtleties in a case like this. The critics of Stirner seem to like attributing to him the very alienation he critiqued and nowhere is this more pertinent than in the work of the Christians.

In Craig's defense, he never specifically mentions Stirner, only an unspecified "egoism" which could really mean just about any-

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<sup>14</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 35

within ourselves a fixed moral reality, but rather that something like a toothbrush might just be so insignificant as to never occur to us to be *worth contesting*. Should such a contest erupt, anarchic order would be those equally eruptive relations which work to *resolve the contradiction*.

This view of society, one perhaps lacking the simple, atomistic subjects we may be comfortable with, brings with it a few other problems for moralism, too. It implies that *an anarchy* would be, funnily enough, quite similar to *an egoist*. Someone who acknowledges that there is no presupposed reason and only their own reason, far from lacking any reason to act, is actually presented with a *plurality of reasons* to choose. They are, simply put, *more than* any concept can encompass. The veritable chaos that results from *an-archy* may present us with a similar conundrum: Far from lacking means to commune with one another, those finding themselves in an anarchy may be more presented with a *plurality of means*, a vast diversity of avenues through which to associate and dissociate. Not a society without references, but a society without *one point of reference*, a society without a center.

What we might traditionally call *insurrection* or even *revolution*, then, is the active, reciprocal rearrangement of peoples. Punctures and tears in the fabric of *archic* society, spaces where the social relations of authority seem to first bend, then snap. Here, we're presented with a sense of anarchy as itself a balancing of a variety of *anarchies* between a variety of *anarchists*, a balancing which exists in contradiction to its surrounding archy.

This all seems horribly abstract, so let's concretize this view a little more. This view asks us to focus on moments or instances of rupture, slow or sudden breaks in hierarchical daily life. What is it that happens in the absence of archy, or conversely, what does it mean to resist it? What *are* relations that we *own*?

There are a few ways anarchists have historically thought of this: Informal or formal organization, illegality or conspiracy, attentat or insurrection, the strike, the riot, the affinity group, the

committee and countless other examples. In each of these we see potential instances of anarchy, its ‘anarchistic’ character defined by the active equilibrium of different reciprocal forces between people, or at the same time, its antagonism toward *archy*. *Anarchism* here is made to mean both an analysis of what it is that’s really happening, how it comes about, why we might want it to come about, and what might become of it all.

Thus far I’ve tried to open the conversation to a much richer anarchy than we may have previously thought worth discussing; it is an understanding of anarchy not as a single order, but as a shifting order, the order emerging from a balance of reciprocal forces. In this sense, anarchy also cannot be seen as a thing which happens once, say, the day of the revolution, but rather as a continuous, consistent process. Not an *eternal union*, as Byas described, but an *actually egoistic* one. We simply can’t rely on a ruling principle, the theoretical equivalent of training wheels, to explore something which seems to be quite unprincipled. At the end of it all, there seems to be something eerily similar about the actual union of egoists and a *constitutionless* anarchy.

## Black Flag Burning

The revolution is aimed at new *arrangements*, while the insurrection leads us to no longer *let* ourselves be arranged ... the entire political period is bubbling with constitutional fights ... the insurrectionist strives to become constitutionless.<sup>(5)</sup>

If we are to continue with a view of a *consequential* anarchy, we need to do away with anarchy the ideal, and, by consequence, the virtue. What we’re left with is not *one* social relation but many *particular* relations, relations between people which cannot really

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<sup>(5)</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. Pg. 201

given rationalist puts forward as the new criteria for rationality). It’s just that in subjecting myself to absolute reason, I degrade my *own* reason, because in any way that it differs from the absolute, it is *unreason*, i.e. false, lesser. Alienated thinking is only ever an act of self-hatred. But in my nothing? Everything I have (am) and everything I am (do) I can finally see as mine to enjoy and squander; in it, I appear as the content of myself; in it, I include as me *all* parts of me, my *property*, myself in my widest meaning.<sup>13</sup> But nothing has changed apart from how I view myself; I no longer despise myself as there is no fixed or defining part of me to despise. I am no longer *possessed* by the absolute but instead I am that which *possesses* it.

The “Nothing,” the “Unique” – even other terms such as the “Owner” or the “I” – are all words that point toward this final, ferocious roar. Daring to look it in the eye, the actual **Stirnerian Challenge against alienation** is a far more radical, more *vicious* proposition than the domesticated “amoralism” we left Jason Byas with. Radical, because it challenges the most basic aspects of alienated thinking, and vicious, because it, in response to the violence of language, asserts its own violence *against* language – i.e., against description, phrase-making. It does not abide by the civility of the philosophical debate, is not a challenge seen only on the pages of *The Unique and its Property*, but rather appears in its monstrous, vibrant ferocity in every conscious or unconscious assertion of one’s own uniqueness. The Stirnerian Challenge attacks the very core of alienation: the assumed fixity of everything absolute, from morality or religion, to love or right. Not even truth is spared! All dissolve into objects for my free and endless play, my enjoyment and self-interest.

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<sup>13</sup> What would this *atomistic* individual that the critics fear actually be other than my assumed *separation* from the world, from my *property* (my material)? That too is a concept to be broken, dissolved in my living embeddedness, my nothingness. Without me to animate it, that mere *idea* is powerless, dead. The *individual* is my *corpse!*

and my *property* (the all that I have, the everything that I am). I am what realizes them, what creates and consumes them, what they are particular (unique) to. In me, all things dissolve; ie, become particular to me. Not *the* Human Being but *this* human being, not *the* World but *my* world — it is *my* world, *my* experience, a world and experience *particular to me*. I too, dissolve in me. I am always particular to myself just as I particularize all things to myself, i.e., I always see myself as whoever I am in that moment, always am presenting my *self* for the first time.

So what *is* the Unique? Whatever the Unique is! I am without definition, essence, or ideal type; I never measure myself according to any concept. All that *I am* — the (*my*) world, the (*my*) spirit — dissolves *in me*. I am not *something*, some fixed, understandable thing; I am *no* thing, *nothing*, nothing but myself! This “nothing”, this inability to be defined or to give definition, but to always dissolve — to use and so *recreate* — is the denial of assumed thought-content. Here, all things particularize around me in each new moment. Must a hammer always hit the heads of nails? In hitting something else, in dissolving the hammer, I assert myself as its *content* — I “recreate” it. In this way, I am nothing not “in the sense of emptiness, but [the] creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.” I am the material — the nothing — out of which I am constantly remade; I am my material and all materials are me (mine). That is, I am what defines them, what *creates* them for myself — i.e., what brings them into my world, consumes them in my experience. I am not just the *creative* Nothing, but the *all-consuming* Nothing, the *self-destroying* Nothing. I am *all in all* and so **all things are nothing to me!**

Even if I were to never say the word “Unique” again this terrifying conclusion would not change. The word “Unique” is empty, i.e., it only makes room for me. The word does not give me my capability, it simply does nothing to resist it. I have never been truly subject, say, to rationality. I have *always* had my unique reason and the capability to ignore absolute reason (i.e., whatever any

be seen as means of *governing them* but which rather emerge from them and are destroyed by them, relations which are thoroughly *their own*. It’s the terrifying prospect of an anarchism presenting itself as an expression of our ownness, not an authority *over* ourselves — anarchism as *self-restraint* — one where your “own authority is the one to which you must bow,” but a power *through* ourselves — anarchism as *self-expansion*. Not a permanent *life-path* but an immediate *life-consumption*.

This, of course, leaves us in the quite awkward position of acknowledging that what anarchism might look like may be very foreign to us, if not even a bit scary. The kind of *consequential anarchism* we’re looking at may not at all resemble the grand project Byas envisions. It also has consequences not just for our understanding of the ‘end goal’ but of the way, the wayfinders, and the map. It may not be good enough to ask whether or not we drive west out of Atlanta. In fact, we may even be left wondering if anarchism can be reduced to a simple destination at all, let alone one from which we can derive an easy, objective distinction between right and wrong. It is just not useful anymore to understand anarchism in a way that can be alienated into a virtue in the first place.

Indeed, anarchism may make a variety of objective demands of us, but *we* also make objective demands of anarchism; we exist in relation to it, but it also exists only in relation to us. From our current vantage, anarchism takes on a sense of immediacy, not anarchism but *this* anarchism, the anarchism between *these* people, resulting from their power — their *ownness* — as something *they have*. The conceptual universe that is anarchism now presents itself not as a goal to be achieved, but as a kind of tool, a *material* for my *use*.

From Byas’ perspective, anarchism itself must be a fixed thing that I adopt, but is an adopted anarchism any more *my own* than an external one? My voluntary choosing of a Lord God to submit to makes that Lord God no more *my own* than he would have been had I submitted involuntarily! My Lord is not *my own*, they are thought-content I am hoping to fill my low and empty self with,

I'm not an *owner* but a *tenant*. No! I am the content of *my* anarchism, just as I am the content of my love. My anarchism is my own when I am its definition, its definer; my sociality — my being with others, among others, *through* others — means only that the resulting *anarchy* comes through the synthesis of many anarchisms, many anarchists, their history and reality.

All of this presents us with a view where the “right thing to do” is unsettlingly fluid, nestled less in expectations or moral constitutions and more in the resulting *anarchies* which present themselves. Reasons for action, and action themselves, can be seen as something which are immanent to the actors meant to enact them. The reasons are self-reasons, the reason emerging from our reciprocal self-interests. Not ‘what is right’ but ‘what I find right’ and how I combine or contend that right with the rights of others. At this point we might as well ask how different the egoist and anarchist methods really are?

The anarchy we are left with and the anarchy we have now to explore sets us up to radically break from a traditional view of politics, one which asks how best to govern or how best to order. Endless variations of authority, countless governmentalisms, replaced with a view where people cease to be governed, where police gangs cease to command and cannibalize, where the only black flag waving overhead is the smoke rising out of the burning rubble.

– like a phantom image or sensation of a missing limb; but is the dent a hammer leaves in sheet metal the hammer itself?

“The Unique,” in being a word meant for me, cannot – and is not meant to – capture me. The word differs from a phrase in that it lacks “thought-content;”<sup>10</sup> like a name, it is thoroughly *empty*. The word “Max” doesn’t refer to the *general idea* of “Maxness,” but rather a *specific person* who is the content of that word “Max;” this *person* is not a *thought*. If you were to take “Max” in their forties and expect they be as they were in their twenties, you would not understand “Max” as they really are, you would only have the *idea* of “Max” that you treat as real. This “Max” *now* is not the same as that “Max” before. We often assume that “everyone should always be able to think something when they use a word,” but the word “Unique” lacks thought-content – isn’t a fixed description – and so *itself* “cannot be thought or said.”<sup>11</sup> You say I am a “person?” Then I am only *this* person, my personhood is incomparable to any other person because I am *not* that other person.<sup>12</sup> What we share, hands or legs perhaps, are always *our* hands or legs that *we* are the content of. To say we have the same hands is to put up a mere phrase, to give the word “hand” only thought-content. But *I* am the content of myself! I may be similar to others, but all that we are *comparably* are abstractions of what we have *actually*.

As I am the Unique, I am never assumed by ideas, ideas assume me – when I realize this, I see only myself as their content. I am their reality and in their alienation from me – in their abstraction above me – only they are lost. I am the content my love, *am* my unique love, my unique anarchism, or any of my own, unique thoughts. I am my *own!* I am my *power* (my capability, my doing)

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<sup>10</sup> Stirner’s Critics, Stirner. P. 8

<sup>11</sup> Stirner’s Critics, Stirner. P. 8

<sup>12</sup> The rule of thought applies only to other thoughts; to be subject to humaneness I must first see myself as human (degrade myself to thought-content); but without this necessary step, in seeing myself as *unique*, humaneness has no connection to me, I cannot be made a subject of.



ferent lifeforms.” My self-interest is surely “expansive,” *expanding* over anything I’m interested in, so why does Pierce oppose it to an interest in lifeforms apart from myself?

The reason is that Pierce has assumed that in Stirner’s “egoism” we see a phrase describing an “ego” that I *ought* to be interested in as opposed to anything else — and he’s not alone. Each of these authors have their own *idea* of what the Unique is and does, i.e., how they think Stirner believes a person like myself might/should be. Each has, in line with “a long history of surprisingly similar critiques,” lost their way in the *indescribable*.<sup>8</sup> In them we only find *conceptions* of the Unique, actually attributing to Stirner the very alienation he sought to uproot!

Where do these conceptions of my *self* — self-conceptions — come from other than descriptions of *myself* — descriptions that attempt to describe me in my entirety and then predict (declare) what I ‘ought’ to do and be like? But these self-conceptions are only phrases *describing* something, something which exists before it is described, which exists *outside of its description* (which doesn’t correlate 1:1 with how it’s described). I am not the words I speak or the ideas others have of me.<sup>9</sup> Literally! Those are ideas and words and I — while full of them — am not, and neither can they represent me in my *fullness* (I am always *more* than them). In demanding I fulfill them, obey them, or even think of them at all they are alienated from me. Each is only an impression — what I impress on others

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terms and phrases, before immediately denying any of his creations validity outside of his own personal *enjoyment* of them; hardly a *normative* philosophy, that which problematizes all normativity?

<sup>8</sup> Bloody Rule and a Cannibal Order! Pt. I: The Egoist. P. 1

<sup>9</sup> A demand to be who one “really” is — one’s essence, one’s spirit, one’s true-self, i.e. the idea (assumption) of one’s *self* — is exactly what essentialists try to enforce. It’s the ultimate trick of the hierarchy of thought: the *transient* reality is seen as mere appearance to the *absolute* idea. But ideas are powerless, created by and subordinate to power (capability). While appearing absolute, ideas are *incapable*, they need to appropriate someone who *is* capable to make them real, to bring them to life (thoughts require a thinker).

## Part III: The Nothing

Written originally as notes for *the Egoist* and *the Anarchist*, consider this final essay as a kind of postscript where I hope to challenge what I see as a problematic line of thinking present throughout this symposium: a tendency I’ll call phrase-making. Countless modes of thought, from metaphysics to political discourse, rely on “phrases,” i.e., on fixed, totalizing descriptions.<sup>1</sup> So, in an environment saturated with phrases — littered with “Zoon Politikon” and “Human Beings,” with “Truths”, “Orders”, “Rights” and “Goods” — it might seem only natural to assume that Stirner’s use of “Unique” means that he is doing the same. Grasping that he *hasn’t*, that he has contested the very practice of phrase-making, forces us to confront one of his most important — and therefore most difficult — challenges: the problem of language.

The first point of contention so many detractors put forward is against Stirner’s “ego,” whatever they happen to think it is. That is, there’s a certain image that comes to mind when we say a word like “egoism.”<sup>2</sup> Stretching across differing definitions, varying contexts, and with components of the word itself baking assumptions into its meaning — whether it’s some muscular Randian Individual or proud Nietzschean Übermensch — the word “egoism” seems to

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<sup>1</sup> Stirner’s Critics, Stirner. P. 8

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this piece I differentiate between **Stirner’s thought**, the concepts and terms Stirner himself created; the **Stirnerian**, the tradition ensuing from that thought (as well as those who engage with it); as well as **Egoism**, the act of being consciously egoistic, which need not necessarily involve Stirner’s conceptual universe at all. With that in mind, I see myself as a Stirnerian and write from that position, while occasionally clarifying for my reader Stirner’s Thought (or at least my interpretation of it).

conceive for us an “ego” we ought to be and an “ism” we ought to do. Perhaps this starts to explain why, at gatherings like these, Stirner as the *subject* of conversation always seems a bit *absent* from it.<sup>3</sup> This problem presents itself when we realize that Stirner’s point doesn’t rest in the words he’s saying or abstract concepts he’s presenting, but rather in something *nonconceptual*, something outside its descriptions.<sup>4</sup> The topic of this essay, then, is not a phrase. Instead, see the words I’m describing as markers “pointing” to a phenomenon that is wholly indescribable. The critics here have attempted to capture it in the word “Ego;” I, rather, know it as the Unique – as *Nothing*.

## ***The Indescribable***

When Fichte says, “the *I* is all,” this seems to harmonize perfectly with my statements. But it’s not that the *I* is all, but the *I* destroys all, and only the self-dissolving *I*, the never-being *I*, the—finite *I* is actually *I*. Fichte speaks of the “absolute” *I*, but I speak of me, the transient *I*.<sup>5</sup>

In order to approach a critique of Stirner, his critics and commentators have all hoped to understand his “ego,” to find its definition and so understand what it is that Stirner thought we ought to do or be. But in doing so those very critics and commentators have lost any sight of what it is that Stirner *actually argued for*. The Unique, that grinning figure in the mist, eludes simple description. Like a shadow or impression, we seem to get most of our under-

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<sup>3</sup> And in this absence we realize that the “Amoralist Challenge” first tackled by Byas *isn’t actually the challenge Stirnerians have brought to the table* – Byas has barely managed to look the Stirnerian in the eye, let alone fight it on its own turf.

<sup>4</sup> Stirner’s Critics, Stirner. P. 7 “what he says is not the meaning, and what he means cannot be said.”

<sup>5</sup> The Unique and its Property, Stirner. P. 120

standing of one less by who they *are* and more by what they’ve *left behind*; perhaps how they’re remembered or talked about. The inconceptual is easily obscured by the violence of language.

Throughout this symposium we see a tendency toward shadow-chasing appear as a kind of ego-hunting. Evan Pierce’s *The Eco-and our Home* critiques “discrete, individual egos” as “fragile phantasm[s] utterly dependent” to their ecosystem; Andrew Kemle’s *Egoism, Morality, and Anarchism Under Complexity* tackles a similar egoistic “metaphysical groundwork ... that the ‘self’ in ‘self-interest’ is cleanly delimited from *other* selves;” at the same time, Alexander Craig and Joseph Parampathu – in *Christianity and Egoism* and *The Ego and his Cross* respectively – discuss the “egoism” of a belief which, as Craig puts it, entails a clear “theme of ‘death to self;” while Parampathu follows up, arguing that the very logic of the phrase “egoism” entails “ego-death ... [the] search for transcendence is this same ‘living’ of the Unique.”<sup>6</sup>

Quite a lot ends up being said in these short statements – quite a lot more than their authors intended – but not all that much about their intended subject matter. Let’s take Pierce as an example: from the perspective of a Stirnerian defense, *The Eco- and our Home* is difficult to approach. Despite the author’s reference to “uniqueness [as] something egoists apparently value,” or his essay title’s play on the Byington translation of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, I’m not sure if the piece is even critiquing Stirner at all. I find few connections between the “[normative] egoism” he presents, with its “expansive or enlightened self-interest,” and the ideas we see in Stirner.<sup>7</sup> All the less do I see Stirnerian ideas being counter to his own “value in identifying with and empathizing with radically dif-

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<sup>6</sup> Even Cory Massimino’s opening to this exchange *describes* for us an “egoism” which rejects “illusory abstractions,” grounded in a simple commitment to “the inviolability of the individual, the sacredness of the self, to the ego and its own.” Here, “whether the self is to be discovered or created, it is, most of all, to be upheld.”

<sup>7</sup> Stirner himself outlines a whole conceptual universe, a book’s worth of