

A New Mutualist Manifesto

Blazing Truth

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This essay seeks to accomplish multiple tasks, although its focus remains one. In its many modalities, which range from critiquing the vulgar theories of Self-ownership to fermenting a mutualist theory of the subject, this analysis wishes to – above all else – remain faithful to the life, work, and spirit of Pierre Joseph Proudhon. In his memory, this analysis takes its motivation from the wide-scale negligence of the question of the subject, just as he brought into the lime-light the question of property as theft. The subject today is far too often sequestered beneath the ebb and flow of modern political discourse, and loses its voice in the noise. As such, this paper addresses the marginalized subject which becomes entangled in the polarization of political ideology, and hopes to give it the strength to break from the coercive elements of dogma. Here, the mutualist attempts to speak, through the creation of concepts, what otherwise would be unspoken. Let us be careful so as to not lose sight of the subject in our pursuit of a free society.

I. Toward a Theory of the Subject:

The question of political action is marked by rivaling subjectivities. Put otherwise, world-pictures which are continually at war with one another concerning how society ought to function both produce and require certain conceptions of the subject. The importance behind outlining a theory of the subject is therefore born out of the necessity of making an attempt at justifying certain political persuasions as opposed to others – of exhibiting a coat of arms, of crafting a certain ambiance, or of forging an aegis as a safeguard in this ideological battle.

Furthermore, this question of subjectivity is inexorably tied up with a question of the subject's place in history – since it is only due to the subject speaking from a certain spatio-temporal locality that possible justifications of these various narratives may emerge. These fragile ornaments mirror the subject in all of its strengths and weaknesses, depending upon variables such as era, terrain, intellect, or strategy. In other words, without logically investigating a theory of the subject (which is itself an ontology), a given 'political' ideology cannot coherently come together, or effectively present itself to the adversary. It would be akin to running from the trenches into the center of no-mans-land completely unarmed.

From this insight, it may be deduced in the most simplest of terms that the subject is simultaneously – intentionally or not – influencing and being influenced by its social surroundings. Let us call this delicate process of twofold influence subjectification. Hence, the antinomy of the active and properly 'political' events which might result from the process of subjectification emerge only due to the fact that political ideologies themselves form an abstraction. They revolt against the lump sum of present political subjectivities – which form the historical and contingent background in which the subject is found.

It is for this reason that the subject is possibly a 'political' subject, for it remains that even the actions of the subject potentially disrupt the present social conditions in some way or another. To be more specific, this aforementioned setting of the activated 'political' subject in history consists of certain physical, biological, linguistic, psychological, sociological, anthropological, economic, and cultural limitations which inform the process of subjectification throughout its becoming. That is to say, the process of subjectification is objective inasmuch as it is subjective, insofar as it situates the subject in what may be called a social environment. While the task of formulating a theory of the subject may appear difficult provided these obstacles, it is known from the onset that such a project is not a priori doomed to failure.

To proceed, attention to these conditions is required. The ‘political’ subject therefore straddles the border and always occupies the status of a foreigner – just as it is situated in the present-time between both past and future – announcing itself only in the last instance as an inter-subjective agent.

To summarize, three essential points have been professed so far:

- that any given subject is possibly a political subject,
- that the subject is situated in a specific historical and contingent background, and
- and that the subject is an inter-subjective agent.

II. Toward a Mutualist Theory of the Self:

To orient a mutualist theory of the Self, the previously established three premises need to be incorporated. In addition, one must take into account all dimensions of the process of subjectification so as to avoid inconsistencies in thought. From there, one must determine the definition of the Self in relation to the subject. Let us take as our operative definition the one that is commonly understood in political discourse: the Self is the subject taken as a whole. Whatever the properties and situation of the subject, the Self is a comprehensive term which is used as a means of applying the theory of the subject to political questions. Thus, should the subject be unified in itself, then the Self and the subject are identical in their ideological and political forms.

To determine a mutualist theory of the Self, let us reflect again for a moment on the twofold nature of the subject as one which simultaneously influences and is influenced by the world. Is there another way that the process of subjectification can be described? Beholding our ‘object’ from a different angle, the process of subjectification appears as none other than our lived experience in the world. From this new phenomenological insight, it can be discovered that such a process can never be completed – at least not until death. The notion of lived experience, those first-hand impressions and concrete day-to-day sensations, introduces a qualitative aspect into the equation.

Thus, it is this malleability of our theory of the subject that would allow for its decidedly mutualistic character. However, if the process of subjectification doesn’t come to an end, and remains continual in the becoming-subject of the subject, then it is valid that that any ultimate attempt at justification ultimately fails. Technically speaking, there is no subject and therefore no Self. The process of subjectification is an infinite endeavor. Affirmatively, that precisely because the process of subjectification is never finished, the subject is never fully complete-in-itself. Simply, the subject is always becoming-subject because there is also an asymmetrical void in the subject. While this appears to conflict with our starting conclusion that such a project is not originally doomed to failure, this hurdle can be cleared if it is possible to theorize the subject in a decidedly indeterminate while still communicable homogeneous solution of form and content: its ornament.

The practice of this specific articulation is a difficult one, because of its indeterminacy. These analysis on the process of subjectification, however, do point to and lead one to a particular ornamentation and orientation that is decidedly mutualistic in kind. Concretely, it indicates that any theory of the subject must incorporate a certain flexibility to the ever-changing material

conditions in the world. This knowledge is also supported by the context of the general use of the term lived experience, which is often used to denote the testimony of those who are traumatized. As such, this indeterminate flexibility is not a normative insertion, but a necessary structural component of any theory of the subject as a result of subjective limitations, finitude, and place in history – which taken together may be appropriately understood as traumatic epicenters in the subject which generate this void.

We can thus, in finally scaling our previous obstacle, build in a specific indeterminacy into our co-ordinates of the subject to allow a positive claim to be made. The mutualist may here take up its coat of arms in the claim that the Self is positioned in such a way that it is subject-to-change; or more pointedly, the Self is the subject which always seen as work-in-progress. It is a fascinating and reassuring feature of the Mutualist Theory of the Self that these three claims parallel our first three premises. The reasons for this will be investigated in Section V.

To recap, the Mutualist Theory of the Self includes three claims:

- that the process of subjectification is an infinite unfolding,
- that the subject is always becoming-subject, = and that the Self is the subject that is always a work-in-progress.

III. Toward a Mutualist Theory of Property:

What, if any, is the relationship between a theory of the Self and a theory of Property? The standard discourse on property has for long been dominated by a Lockean sentiment of the individual coming to have “property in one’s person” through a process called “homesteading” – which is the “admixture of labour” with land and natural resources. The reasoning behind this process is most often known by the name “Self-ownership”, whereby labour is taken in an abstract sense and becomes mixed in such a way with land and resources that these objects become considered as an extension of the Self.

It is by this very mechanism where the link between a theory of the Self and a theory of Property solidifies. In the same fashion that the Self is the subject taken as a whole, the conjoined conception of “Self-ownership” likewise follows this same structure. Self-ownership defines the state of affairs such that the Self and its labour abstractly taken together as a whole, under the ornament called “ownership”. Rather than fighting back against the Lockean move, the repetition or iteration of the count-as-one maneuver creates an opening for a Mutualist Theory of Property. What is at stake, then, are differing interpretations of the concept Self-ownership; or, specifically, the possibility of different ornaments of different strengths and weaknesses which happen to go by the same name.

In not ceding this ground to the adversary, by wielding this herald, the Mutualist Theory of the Self seeks to homestead a presently open conceptual space by demarcating what is understood by the Self in any notion of Self-ownership. Provided that the mutualist Self locates a subject which is a continual work-in-progress, then any Mutualist Theory of Property must not abandon this first ornament and instead seek incorporate the mutualist theory of Self into a conception of Self-ownership without contradiction. The mutualist thereby faces a fork in the road, with two dominant possibilities available. That is, the mutualist must choose, as informed by their theory of the Self, their ultimate goals, their historical conditions, and their overall knowledge of the

world, to either (1) reject or (2) affirm the internal consistency of the concept of Self-ownership. This move is, at root, a strategic one, whose outcomes must be weighed against each other for their various pros and cons.

The first conclusion of rejecting the consistency of self-ownership comes where the placement of emphasis falls heavily on the latter term, ownership. In proceeding to understand what is meant by that term, it becomes evident that the concept in the dominant discourse of today implies an “exclusivity of control”, and therefore an unlimited liability or responsibility when it pertains to Property. The material results of selecting this option denote a rigid social institution of property whereby claims to ownership are made on the absolute basis of the primacy of ownership, and enforced as Law. This conclusion has as its strength the fixing of intransigent boundaries and of establishing certainty. However, in order for this complete exclusivity, or unlimited liability to take hold, one must sacrifice the Mutualist Theory of the Self. This is due to the fact that this kind of ownership implies a unified subject which is fixed in its nature, complete in its subjectification, and transcendent in such a way that it holds across all periods of space and time. For the mutualist, this solution is therefore untenable and contradictory.

The second conclusion of accepting the consistency of self-ownership comes where the placement of emphasis falls heavily on the former term, Self. In proceeding to understand what is meant by that term, the Mutualist Theory of the Self may pave the path for clarification. Considering the Self as a subject in its becoming, the mutualist must now come to terms with the concept of ownership. Once again, one appears to meet an impasse or aporia insofar as ownership is understood as a kind of exclusivity of control. Notwithstanding, and much to our surprise, it remains possible to adopt another understanding of ownership that revises the present implications. The reasons for this remain the primacy of the subject, for without which no theory – especially theories of Property – may proceed. If it is possible to morph the concept of ownership into a more suitable use by thinking on the border – that is, one from the perspective of the foreigner that is also the subject (as mentioned in the first section) – then the affirmation of a new theory of mutualist Self-ownership may emerge to salvage its internal consistency.

Etymologically speaking, the various traces of the word ownership may reveal a valid meaning of the word which has been suppressed by dominant discourses of today. In particular, it is not ownership itself which is at fault, but it’s insistence upon exclusivity and unlimited liability which generate problems. From this basic understanding, liability is derivative of the word ligament, which adds a decidedly material and human element to the problem at hand. It is, after all, the ornaments and armor which actively protect the body and its ligaments during periods of warfare. Appropriately, then, it is the shifting of the exclusivity between multiple subjects that transforms the concept of Self-ownership. Provided a Mutualist Theory of the Self, it follows therefore that Self-ownership be comprehended instead on the grounds of ex-clusivity. That is to say, that which is not-clusive (i.e. not closed) to outsiders, or whose exclusivity is otherwise shared in its societal environment. Responsibility, then, translates to response-ability, indicating the greatest strength of the Mutualist Theory of Property. Far from challenging or abandoning the Lockean method, the mutualist saves its consistency and re-instates it as a mechanism for articulating a Mutualist Theory of Property.

The links between the Mutualist Theory of Self and this new conception of ownership represent and reflect identically the spirit of the three innovations:

- that ownership cannot categorically be determined a priori,

- that mutualist ownership is a matter of ex-clusivity in a particular social horizon, and
- that mutualist ownership therefore entails response-ability.

IV. Articulating a Mutualist Theory of Property

The dash between Self and ownership therefore serves as a constant reminder of the need to think of the subject from the place of those whose voices are silenced by popular discourse. It is the bridge which joins the two concepts together, and a monument which marks the mutualist territory. It is the fundamental insight that the subject in its becoming finds itself neither fully individual nor fully collective in nature. Instead the neo-Proudhonian affirms the individual as a collective force. As such, the rejection of any a priori conception leads the mutualist to a new understanding of ownership. It is summarized in the formulation that all ownership is implicitly use-based ownership, whose conditions are determined a posteriori through the guise of its local and decentralized medium found in the subject's experience and constant formation.

From here, the question must be posed: What, precisely, does a mutualistic system of property look like in practice? Here represents the culminating point of all the training, forging, and preparation for battle. Again, while the ever-present difficulty of articulation is present due to the prerequisites of a specific indeterminacy, some brave possibilities emerge as warriors for the mutualist cause. With the mutualistic ornaments now sported, and the proper knowledge available, the conceptual space may be secured from its enemies with the advent of the answer of this question.

Ornaments, composed of both form and content, reveal the concept of possession as a new name applied to the combination of use-based ownership with the continual occupation of this geographical space. The form of mutualistic ownership is usufruct, or not-sticky while its content is fostered strategically in response to the material conditions of the battlegrounds. What qualifies under the mantra of "occupancy and use" is then variable such that it fulfills the criteria of response-ability on one hand, and ex-clusivity on the other. This is a base-line declaration that it cannot be known theoretically in advance what is to be done in a hegemonic battle that has not yet taken place. It is an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each situation and of the complexity of the task.

In taking homage to its humble beginnings, the mutualist subject as a work-in-progress thus avoids the dogma and ideology of most political conceptions, including those on either side. This often results in the subject, as a foreigner on the border, who is sometimes trapped in the cross-fire between two opposing camps, but who recognizes that hubris will be their ultimate downfall. The ornaments carried in the mutualist spirit allow for the protection and stability of this territory, and prepare the mutualist subject for a non-violent resurgence as a necessary condition for a mutualistic state of affairs.

It is in this reciprocal phenomenon of mutual aid where the ethics of ornamentation allows for the respect for the dignity of all who find themselves to be, in some way or another, refugees from the violence. Above all else, these configurations of property must accommodate the condition of the subject. Any arrangement, whether private or public, which effaces the subject in its capacity as a free absolute, is to be rejected by the mutualist.

The parameters of what qualify as occupancy and use therefore oscillate between many closed extremes. The worst of which holds use to be a one-time determinant of ownership, thus yield-

ing the conclusion of extreme exclusivity which has been avoided previously. Another, a second, holds ownership on the basis of radical inclusivity, which is likewise problematic in its potential for coercion. Therefore, the mutualist's criteria of what counts as occupancy and use, in adhering to that which is not-clusive must fundamentally be neither exclusive nor inclusive in its initial design. That is, these decisions are to remain dis-closed to all subjects, and they ought to become manifest in a free society and open to easy revision. The result is a mediated balance which is sensitive to the changing conditions, and a learned optimization over time based on past experiences.

In the same way, we find three affirmations emerge:

- that mutualist property is usufruct on the basis of possession,
- that possession is determined by occupancy and use, and
- that occupancy and use are established on the basis of mutual reciprocity.

V. Conclusion: The Mutualist Spirits

Mutualism, then, is at its heart, a traveling sanctuary for all – one which enjoins the power of the powerless. It endures as the spectral coeur of those who aim at freed society. Its political representation is thus one of coeur-age; that is, one of courage in our day and age to combat the horrors of both physical and ideological warfare. The new mutualist spirit is from here on a development whose future is bright, whose history is still being discovered, and whose spirit is manifesting in all directions from its source. One must proceed with the sentiment of the infamous “Property is theft!”, weaving into the cry for liberty a strain of equality, to see the bountiful mutualist tradition finally coming to surface at a time where it is arguably most needed.

1. The first spirit of mutualism, as we have repeatedly seen, is one of an openness to (im)possibility, and a suspension of the border-logic that creates boundaries and hierarchies which lead to dominance by one party over another. It includes a creativity and an anarchic experimentation, taking advantage of every opportunity for improvement and self-critique in the place of Liberty.
2. The second spirit of mutualism persists as a structural plasticity, of a framework which is morphing to meet the needs of society. It is influenced by the infinite demands of multiple subjects, while simultaneously influencing those involved, but always open to revision in the name of Equality.
3. The third spirit of mutualism takes the image of a positive affirmation of a shared phenomenological experience, giving direction to future journeys. It is the escape of negativity and hostility of pure critique, and represents an attempt to take a stand for Justice.

Taken together, in what should by now seem a familiar tactic, these mutualistic spirits sketch the new cooperative ethos that is to replace those of competition, cynicism, and belligerence. The mutualist spirit is a call to change the political discourse in such a way which gives voice to the subject as a free absolute. This manifesto concludes by challenging its enemies, whether right

or left, to fend off their own respective ideological ornaments, whose metallic weight makes the subject collapse, to come to embrace the uncertainty and complexity of the future without killing the subject in the process.

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