

History of Egoist Anarchism

Faruk Pak

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The term “egoist” has appeared often in the history of philosophy and social thought, as well as in political ideologies. However, while there are several variations and explanations of what egoism means, its usage has been quite inconsistent. Therefore, when reading about the subject, it is important to distinguish which type of egoism we are talking about. Egoist philosophy generally refers to any school of thought that considers the self (i.e. one’s own personal interests) to be the primary source of ethical standards and action, superseding external factors such as social norms or other-regarding principles. As a result, egoist anarchist schools of thought tend to emphasize personal liberation and non-subordination so that individuals may pursue their own ends without sacrificing them for others or vice versa.

Egoism is the philosophical idea that each human being is an ends-in-themselves and the sole source of moral authority. Therefore, all individuals have the right to promote their own interests and self-fulfillment above all else. And since each person’s desires and interests are unique, egoism is often conflated with individualism. However, unlike individualism, egoism does not promote the primacy of the collective over the individual. (As I take egoism into account in a broader sense than I do for individualism, which may be considered a set of principles that believe society will get better only if people focus on themselves; when we surpass this border, it is egoism at that point.) In fact, it opposes this idea since the collective is made up of individuals and each person’s freedom and self-determination is essential for a just and equitable society. However, egoism is not synonymous with selfishness or self-centeredness, nor is it a moral philosophy that advocates doing whatever one wants at the expense of others. Rather, egoism is a descriptive term that identifies the fact that each person acts solely in accordance with their interests and that each person’s actions are incommensurable with those of other individuals. It is a major departure from the traditional view of the self as defined by society, or even a starting point for understanding how to approach the growth of one’s self.

While egoism has existed since the ancient Greco-Roman period. In antiquity, the Cynics and Stoics, who were known for their antinomianism and materialist philosophy, often exhibited egoistic tendencies. For example, Diogenes the Cynic and Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, both rejected social conventions in favor of a minimalist, ascetic lifestyle. Diogenes even chastised Alexander the Great for not doing away with social hierarchies to lead a more “human” life.

German philosopher Max Stirner's book *The Ego and His Own* is considered the most notable work in the history of egoist philosophy. Stirner's egoism is largely influenced by German Idealism, especially Immanuel Kant's view that morality is an inherent part of human nature. Kant believed that we are all endowed with a "moral compass" that guides our actions. According to him, the "categorical imperative" is an inherent part of human nature and is a rational principle that guides our actions. Stirner, however, believed that Kant's moral philosophy misrepresents human nature and is ultimately a form of "spooks" (i.e. a non-existent thing or concept) that prevents people from living their lives freely. Kant's categorical imperative, according to Stirner, is nothing but a prescription to live our lives according to social and moral codes. Therefore, Stirner rejected Kant's moral philosophy as well as any other theory that suggests human beings must act according to a standard that is not inherent in their nature. He proposed instead that each person must act according to their own interests and that each individual's actions have no bearing on the interests of others. Since I need to say a little more about Stirner and human nature, I can say, Stirner, who we see from an egoistic point of view understanding the Self as the individual himself, his concrete being, adds another concept to the concept of the Self: The Unique. The distinction to be made here will be as follows: With the process of "Human>Self>Unique", it can be said that the transition from human to non-human is completed for Stirner. While the concept of the Self is taken as a concept corresponding to human nature in Stirnerite philosophy, the Unique emphasizes the sociality, relations and singularity of the Self. Thus, the I and the Unique constitute the two dimensions of the non-human. The 'one', which Stirner defined as 'egoistic' and 'unique', realized itself in conflict with other ones, with society, with collectivity, and rejected common humanity. For Stirner, general concepts such as man and humanity had no validity. The only being about whom we had concrete and valid knowledge was the individual human being. Each individual was unique and one-of-a-kind. Apart from this essential and valid self, this uniqueness, we had no obligation to any law, any understanding, any belief. If I become myself, he said, I will be free from many things that oppress me. Stirner, who drew a distinction between the 'one' who is the self and the 'individual' who constitutes the collectivity, rejected the state as well as society. He said that the existence of the state, which always privileges the 'collective man' and society over the 'one, the egoist, the unique', inevitably depends on the suppression of the 'one', the egoist. Therefore, he said, the struggle between the egoist and the state is inevitable, just as the struggle for freedom between the anarchist and the state is inevitable. However, he pointed out that if the idea of freedom is glorified and mastered – like any other idea – one can become a missionary, a soldier of freedom.

Stirner's egoist anarchism was very influential throughout the 19th century. While not strictly anarchist, Stirner is often regarded as the first major thinker to articulate many of the core principles of contemporary anarchism: both the rejection of institutions such as the state and capitalism, and the advocacy of a non-hierarchical form of social organization. His most famous work is *The Ego and His Own*, which explores the nature of egoism and individualism, offering a critique of what he sees as the underlying collectivism of traditional market economies. In this way, Stirner's critique can be seen as an important precursor to contemporary forms of post-left anarchy. There were several notable individualist anarchists who also espoused egoist philosophies. For example, American individualist anarchist Benjamin Tucker's philosophy is a form of egoist anarchism. Tucker rejects the idea of a "Greater Self" that is external to the self. Instead, he argues that the "Greater Self" is the self in its entirety. He also rejects the idea of self-sacrifice and explicitly states that each person should act in accordance with their own interests. Tucker

extends this idea to anarchism, arguing that anarchism is an “attempt to expand the boundaries of the Greater Self”. Like Stirner, Tucker believed that the actualization of one’s own interests is the only real source of happiness. He also believed that anarchism would enable individuals to more freely pursue their interests.

While egoist philosophies have existed for many years, the first anarchist movement emerged in the 19th century. At this time, many anarchist thinkers, including Mikhail Bakunin, had a socio-political theory known as “collectivism”, which is the opposite of egoism. While there is no set definition for collectivism, it generally refers to any school of thought that promotes the collective ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. Thus, it is an anti-capitalist theory. In the aftermath of the First International, collectivist schools of thought gained prominence in the anarchist movement and were championed by Mikhail Bakunin, one of the first people to use the term “anarchist” to describe their philosophy. Bakunin’s collectivism is a socio-political theory that advocates for the abolition of all forms of hierarchical organization, including the state. In contrast, the main proponents of egoist anarchism in the 19th century were Americans like Benjamin Tucker and his comrades, who espoused a form of “associationism”, which is the idea of freely joining together with others to create an organization.

Some contemporary theorists have revisited the idea of egoist anarchism to form a new theoretical school of thought. For example, some contemporary thinkers proposed a form of “schizo-anarchism” according to the works of French theorist Gilles Deleuze, that draws from the works of Stirner and the French Individualist Anarchists. Schizo-anarchism is a form of “anti-ethno-linguistic” anarchy that rejects the idea of a pre-established organization and calls for a “nomad” society where people live in a way that allows for a constant mobility. Like the egoist anarchists, he reduces all social phenomena to the actions of individuals.

Many historical and contemporary schools of thought can be placed under the broad category of egoist anarchism. This type of anarchism is somehow individualistic in nature but not in the sense of the belief that society will get better only if people focus on themselves, insofar as it places the emphasis on the individual as the main source of morality and action, while paying little attention to social codes. The state and society, which political philosophy up to Stirner saw as an external element of oppression, dominates the human being with an internal guidance without the need for oppression. In the Stirnerite sense, the Self needs to get rid of the human being and the human essence, which has become an element of oppression. In this context, according to Stirner, the modern definition of man turns man into an element of oppression for himself as a new field in the traditional understanding of power in political philosophy. As a result, Stirner moves away from the definition of man of the modern period and determines the Self, which is the basic concept of his philosophy, as the fulcrum for the non-human, which is put forward as a new definition of man in the field of human philosophy and political philosophy, where Uniqueness will be completed with the transition from human to non-human.

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