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Ken MacLeod

What Sid did

1999

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The luckiest way to stumble across the writings of S. E. Parker is after a long exploration of anarchism and libertarianism. What a breath of fresh air! Especially after exploring the closed room of Objectivism. As far as I know, Parker has written nothing about Rand — which suggests a certain gallantry. A man big enough to criticise Ragnar Redbeard (the mysterious author of *Might Is Right*) as a *moralist* has no need to beat up little old ladies.

What Sid did was to drive a wedge between egoism and anarchism. Dora Marsden — whose writings Parker has helped to rescue from obscurity — did the same decades earlier, but in a context which is now remote, and in a dense and allusive style. Parker writes in the plainest English. Bakunin, Engels once said, created anarchism by combining Stirner and Proudhon. Parker rescued Stirner from that entanglement, in which even Tucker was snared. Nobody any longer has an excuse to combine egoism with a muddle of economic fallacies.

I've heard it said, half in jest, that 'Sid will argue that egoism is compatible with any political philosophy — *except* anarchism.' There's a lot of truth in that, because egoism is not about how the world should be — it is, in part, an explanation of how the world is

as it is. All forms of anarchism, even individualist anarchism, have a moral basis in the rejection of domination. How inconsistent to proclaim 'the war of all against all' and to disdain the use of that war machine, the state, when it acts in *your* interests!

The political applications of this insight are far wider than may be apparent to those whose heads are, as Parker has aptly put it, 'stuck in the anarchist tar-bucket'. And they are not necessarily conservative, or 'right-wing', in their implications. Over the past couple of decades, and partly as a result of libertarian argument, millions upon millions of people have allowed their interests to be sacrificed to 'the free market'. Like a starving man who believes it is immoral to steal (which it is, but the egoist will always ask 'So?') they have put property rights ahead of *their* property.

The spooks of idealistic socialism have been thoroughly exorcised. But a realistic socialism rests not on morals but on might — and the sovereign franchise, as one of Heinlein's characters puts it, is might. No egoist should have the slightest qualm about using it, and encouraging others to use it, if it is in his interest to do so. The spooks of libertarianism still haunt the world, and Parker has exposed them as rags on a stick.

At least, that's what Sid did for me.

— Ken MacLeod