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Retrieved 11/09/2021 from https://archive.org/details/EnemiesOfSocietyAnAnthologyOfIndividualistEgoistThought/

First published in *Minus One* #44 (1980)

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Stirner, Marx and Fascism

Sidney E. Parker

John Carroll, in his introduction to his abridged edition of Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*, quotes "the Polish Marxist" Leszek Kolakowski as stating that "Stirner's grounds are irrefutable. Even Nietzsche seems inconsequential to him." It would seem that either Kolakowski has changed his mind, or Carroll has misquoted him, for a glance at the section on Max Stirner in the first volume of Kolakowski's book *Main Currents of Marxism* reveals an all-too-familiar Marxist "critique" of Stirner's philosophy.

In the space of eight pages the reader is treated to several of the usual "interpretations". We are told, for example, that egoism would mean "a return to animality and the unbridled sway of individual passion", and that Stirner condemned "culture in the name of the monadic sovereignty of the individual". Both of these accusations were explicitly denied by Stirner, but this does not deter Mr. Kolakowski. Having made such statements without bothering to document them, he goes on to write the following passage:

> As recent studies by Helms have shown, Stirner's doctrines inspired not only anarchists but various

> German groups who were the immediate precursors of fascism. At first sight, Nazi totalitarianism may seem the opposite of Stirner's radical individualism. But fascism was above all an attempt to dissolve the social ties created by history and replace them by artificial bonds among individuals who were expected to render implicit obedience to the State on grounds of absolute egoism. Fascist education combined the tenets of asocial egoism and unquestioning conformism, the latter being the means by which the individual secured his own niche in the system. Stirner's philosophy has nothing to say against conformism, it only objects to the Ego being subordinated to any higher principle: the egoist is free to adjust to the world if it appears that he will better himself by doing so. His "rebellion" may take the form of utter servility if it will further his interest; what he must not do is be bound by "general" values or myths of humanity. The totalitarian ideal of a barrack-like society from which all real, historical ties have been eliminated is perfectly consistent with Stirner's principles: the egoist, by his very nature, must be prepared to fight under any flag that suits his convenience.

This is a typical piece of Marxist nonsense. No one could be more obsessed with the creation of "social ties" based on "history" than the fascists. Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian fascist, wrote

> we recognize the profound truth of the historic past as well as the historic present…we must be permitted to believe in the continual historical and divine mission of the Nordic people's of the world.

up of the (untrue) self and becoming part of the communities". In what way do Denis and Marx differ in their conception of "the community"? It is clear that both fascist and communist are at one on this point. Both think that the "true self" or the "true human being" can only be achieved when the "true community" has been brought about by means of the proper "historical development". Both, despite their protestations to the contrary, view the individual as the subject of a religion of society whose content and context are decided by them.

Marxism, like fascism, is a philosophy of the herd.

Marxism, like fascism, is an enemy of individualism.

My uniqueness, as a Stirnerian individualist, is a result of my awareness of myself as a specific individual living at a particular time who cannot be defined by the gafflegab of peddlers of social salvation. **I** am here and now-not there and then.

And far from being "asocial" the fascists insisted on the "organic society" as the goal of their effort. Fascism, stated Mussolini, "is always…an organic conception of the world". Like the Marxists, fascists were strident opponents of "atomic individualism" and loved to attribute causal efficacy to abstractions such as "History". As for their "egoism" fascists continually denounced "selfishness" and "individualism". The First Programme of the German Nazi Party proclaimed the principle "the common interest before the self" The Belgian fascist Jean Denis wrote: "The human being thrives not by referring everything to itself in a vain and selfish individualism but, on the contrary, by giving up the self and becoming part of communities". And his colleague Leon Degrelle concurred when he stated:

> This is the true Fascist miracle; this faith, the unspoilt, burning confidence, the complete lack of selfishness and individualism, the tension of the whole being towards the service…of a cause which transcends the individual, demanding all, promising nothing.

What has such insistent altruism got to do with Stirner's conscious egoism? The answer is clear: nothing!

Where Kolakowski gets the idea that "Stirner's philosophy has nothing to say against conformism" is a mystery to me. Conformism rests upon the principle that the ego must subordinate itself to a "higher principle" and on Kolakowski's own admission Stirner's philosophy Opposes that. At one point Kolakowski even summarizes Stirner as saying "My Ego is sovereign, it recognizes no authority or constraints such as humanity, the truth, morality, or the State".

It is certainly true that Stirner thought that a conscious egoist might at times have to **pretend** conformity if he or she does not have enough power to assert him/herself openly against authority. But such strategies are firmly based on a recognition

of the purely prudential nature of such a pretense, as is shown in the following example given by Stirner:

> The fetters of reality cut the sharpest welts in my flesh every moment. But **my own** I remain. Given up as a serf to a master, I think only of myself and my advantage; his blows strike me, indeed I am not free from them; but I endure them only for **my benefit**, perhaps in order to deceive him and make him secure by the semblance of patience, or again, not to draw worse upon myself by contumacy. But, as I keep my eye on myself and my selfishness, I take by the forelock the first good Opportunity to trample the slaveholder into the dust. That I then become **free** from him and his whip is only the consequence of my antecedent egoism.

Thus the only relationship an egoist has with the "totalitarian ideal of a barrack-like society" is that of a prisoner of war waiting for the first chance to escape from his captors.

Kolakowski claims that Marx "seeks to preserve the principle of individuality—not, however, as something antagonistic to the general interest, but as completely coincident with it". This is, no doubt, intended as a contrast to Stirner's view "Let us therefore not aspire to community, but to **one-sidedness**". Marx's "preservation of individuality", however, is highly suspect. According to Kolakowski when communism is achieved "the individual will accept the community as his own interiorized nature." In other words, the conformity of community will be manifested as "conscience" and the individual will be "integrated" into the "community" by virtue of the command of an internalized authority.

Again, "it was Marx's view that under communism men's individual possibilities would display themselves **only in socially constructive ways**" (my emphasis). But who will decide what is "socially constructive" and what criteria will be

used? What happens if an individual persists in behaving in socially unconstructive ways? Marx may have advanced "the outlines of a theory in which true individuality…is enabled to find a place in the community without sacrificing the uniqueness of its own essence", but fine words like these are cheap and are apt to evaporate when confronted with what is construed as "asocial egoism". The trouble with Marx's "outline", like all outlines of this sort, is that what is "true individuality" is decided by those who do the outlining, and those whose individuality is "untrue" stand a good chance of finding themselves at the wrong end of a gun—or its "therapeutic" equivalent.

Kolakowski claims that Marx believed that under communism "there is no question of uniformity being either imposed or voluntarily accepted". Nonetheless, despite the promise that "in a communist society the universal development of individuals is no empty phase", this could not take place by means of "the assertion of his rights against the community". Community, community, community —always the "community"! But if I cannot assert "my right" "against the community" then my "unique essence" must be identical with the communal "essence" and **my** "essence" will be nothing but an expression of the "community". No wonder that Stirner's one reference to Marx pointedly remarks that "To identify me now entirely with Man the demand has been invented, and stated, that I must become a real generic being". Marx may have abandoned his talk about the spook "Man", but he did so only to replace it with the spook "community".

Preceding the quotation from the fascist Jean Denis that I gave above are the words "The concept of the **individual** which forms the erroneous philosophical foundation of the present regime…must be replaced with the concept of the **human being** which corresponds exactly to the reality of Man — a social being endowed with a fundamental dignity, which society can help develop and with which it has no right to interfere". That is, of course, conditional upon "the giving