

My Union Based on Nothing

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“My affair is neither the divine nor the human;
it is not the good, the true, the just, the free, etc.,
but only my own,
and it is not general, but is unique, as I am unique.
For me, there is nothing greater than me!”
– Max Stirner

The worst thing I could do in a piece about Egoism, in my view, would be to frame my own position solely through the ideas of a long-dead German edgelord. If you’re looking for a book report on *The Unique and Its Property*, this piece is not that. I’d recommend “Stirner’s Critics” if you want a brief intro to his Egoism.

All Collectives Are Nothing to Me

Yes, I am literally saying that my “Unions” — friendships, political alliances, romantic partnerships (or lack thereof), and all free associations — exist on the basis of “nothing” other than my own will. Does this mean I have fewer friends or that I’m more distant as a person? Does my lack of commitment to a cause like “the revolution” or “full communism” reduce me to nothing but a grifter? As far as I’m aware, I’m no more of a recluse than anyone else (at time of publication), and the friendships I have are relatively healthy, I think. This is because my relationships don’t govern me; no higher bond ties me to anyone and no shared feature inherently aligns me with any other individual. Because of this, I see Unions as stable yet chaotic associations with people I can rely on for material needs, emotional support, mutual aid, or just good company. My contribution to my Union comes not from coercion or external pressure, but from my own appreciation of the people within it and my desire to make them happy, safe, and free.

Fixed Unions, by which I mean rigid collectives I’m unconsciously drafted into (e.g. American, White, Woman, Man, etc.) aren’t so much a Union as they are a denial of my personhood, confinements that assign certain behaviors and traits to me in an attempt to strip me of my uniqueness. Whether I share anything with members of a given collective is completely irrelevant, ultimately achieving nothing towards the end of describing who I am or how I behave. I might have a lot in common with other non-binary queer anarchists with moderate household incomes, but I and this hypothetical individual are still irrefutably unique, separate entities. If I choose not to associate with a given collective identity, then the collective is outside of my Union and irrelevant to me; in rejecting the Fixed Union, it provides me nothing and I give it nothing in return. Our interests do not intersect, so we do not associate.

As strange as it may sound, my Union based on “nothing” is infinitely stronger than Fixed Unions based on “something.” To illustrate what I mean, let’s examine “the nation,” a perfect example of a Fixed Union. Its interest is its own preservation at any cost. Within “the nation,” acting totally for one’s own cause isn’t possible, as it’s always necessary to consider what “*the nation*” would suffer under your autonomy. Violence for yourself — defensive or otherwise — is at best discouraged if not outright punished, but violence for the sake of the nation is incentivized (qualified immunity, enlistment benefits, privileging of fascist street gangs, etc.). In such a Union, there’s no intersection of egoistic interests or a shared desire to coexist, but rather an evangelical faith in the Fixed Union’s legitimacy. We ignore our uniqueness, allowing ourselves to be

governed by the Fixed Union as if it were a real entity with genuine power over its constituents; in reality, it's another rigid abstraction that needs to be dismantled from within.

My Union

In a previous article, I wrote that “Queerness is fundamentally a declaration of uniqueness.” For my purposes here, I want to highlight the last few points:

“A core foundation of any legitimate individualist perspective is that every human being is unique to the extent that static labels can never describe a person to a sufficient extent, hence the opposition to “collectivist” attempts to put people into boxes that will never fit them.

Queerness is fundamentally a declaration of uniqueness. Who we're attracted to, how we want to present, what we do with our bodies, and many other aspects of our identities are defined on our own terms, subject to no one's input but our own.”

Shortly after this piece went live, I began referring to myself as a “queer anarchist without adjectives,” not only to indicate my own relentless queerness, but because the concept of queerness has become increasingly significant to my perspective. In a general sense, we are all strange, queer, a diversion from fixed ideas of what a “person” is supposed to be. The notion of “social order,” therefore, necessarily requires a suppression of individual uniqueness – “edge cases” that need to be guided towards the “normal.” Anthropology, psychology, and most legitimate social science contends, at least to some extent, that the organization of the world is an act of projection; aside from perhaps the most liberal essentialists within any field, there is a recognition that the heuristics and mental shortcuts we use to categorize individuals are acts of deliberate insistence, necessary dismissals of outliers for the sake of efficient dialogue rather than discoveries of objective truth.

Let's consider individuals who identify with the label “trans lesbians of color.” Trans lesbians of color aren't all the same, and within the trans, lesbian, and POC communities respectively, there is an infinite degree of deviation and uniqueness that can't be fully captured by these terms. People are unique, no matter how many labels they share with one another, and there's no experience that can truly, in any meaningful sense, be completely “shared.” In recognizing this, we can use such terminology as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*; it's possible to recognize the individuality of people who could be described by certain terms without reinforcing the image of an ideal “person.” Sticking with our example, it's not hard to argue that an individual who identifies as a trans lesbian of color has likely experienced queerphobia and racism, but to claim that they necessarily must share certain experiences with others in order to be “valid” is exclusionary, a rejection of the Unique in the pursuit of an essence that doesn't exist.

This, unfortunately, is the direction many self-described allies and abolitionists take with their analysis. In a hopeless attempt to gain the support of centrists and authoritarians, the Unique is discarded in the pursuit of a reformed normalcy. Rather than embrace the total freedom of individuals to identify with and present as whatever identity they choose, queerness (in the general sense of nonconformity) is reduced to an aspect “beyond our control,” dismissing the genocidal bigotry of the evangelical right not primarily as an infringement of liberty, but as an ineffective

means of enforcing the wrong social order. To these text-bank liberationists, assimilation into a society of tolerance, defined by a *better* status quo, is the best we can realistically do; any more radical suggestion, in this framework, can only be the work of malicious infiltrators threatening “the community.”

While a marginal improvement over white supremacist police statism, this progressive utopia is ultimately a poor substitute for total liberation, as its premises are still defined by fixed ideas (humanism, rationalism, social contract theory, etc.). To be blunt, any self-proclaimed “radicalism” that shudders at the idea of abolishing normalcy itself is insufficient in the total embrace of queerness and the Unique. So long as a fixed idea of normal, value-neutral personhood exists, the experience of deviants will be codified in relation to a nonexistent personification of a social average, rather than a unique mode of being.

My Union’s Affair

In the process of participating in my Union, am I thereby giving it power over me? Could I be tricked by malicious actors into thinking selflessness is in my self-interest? Fixed Unions are also susceptible to violations of trust, infiltration, and other harmful behaviors to a much greater extent than my or any other Union. This isn’t necessarily because my Union and those like it contain better people, but instead the result of a difference in our affairs – our primary motives as entities.

My Union’s “affair” is, strictly speaking, nothing. It’s not a real entity governing over the individuals involved, but a recognition of the intersection of our self-interests. I never make friends with someone because we both have a vested interest in “preserving our bond”; my friendships exist because I and another person *want* to be around each other for some reason. If our time spent together becomes emotionally draining, toxic, or otherwise undesirable, that friendship (i.e. My Union) dissolves, either passively or spontaneously, permanently or temporarily. There’s no point at which we both sacrifice our uniqueness to maintain the Union, since its affair isn’t self-preservation. My Union’s affair is, as I said earlier, nothing. Its existence is governed by our shared interest in one another, not the other way around.

To some extent, this runs counter to class theory, particularly its most essentialist manifestations. As I said earlier, there’s a practical justification for categorizations such as class analysis as a descriptive framework, as it enables more directed action against dominant state capitalist entities. The problem, of course, is when such systems claim to uncover an essence to one’s identity on the basis of their relationship to the state, means of production, and existing institutions. In addition to being a complete lie, this essentialist approach leads to a philosophical dependence on fixed ideas (the legitimacy of the state, an inherent need for hierarchy, the unambiguous benefit of increased scale, “rights” to national self-determination, etc.) which ultimately prevent many theories from becoming totally liberatory and, in practice, reduce their efforts to reformist gestures towards “real change.”

In the pursuit of “legitimacy” in the eyes of a broadly defined public, we distance ourselves from the Unique in an attempt to build a “mass movement,” rallying a conscious collective of laborers around the notion that their action as part of a larger whole is where true power lies.

The “Nothing”

By uncovering the emptiness of the Union, fixed or otherwise, I don't want to gesture towards an arbitrary template for organization in response to our existing enemies or the material struggles that will persist in the absence of the state, nor do I necessarily want to totally dismiss any specific model. In revealing the emptiness of the Union, we're able to expand our associations far beyond the boundaries of class, culture, and fixed identities, unburdened by the lofty commitments that distract us from our own cause. The “nothing” liberates us from each other, our ideas, and the compromises we are compelled to make for the sake of fixed ideas.

My goal here is to suggest that my Union, despite what some may claim, is not formed on the basis of any greater cause. My Union is an egoistic one, formed between me and others as a result of mutual, intersecting interest in one another. I don't serve the self at the expense of others, and I don't serve others at the expense of the self; I and other unique individuals, together, form a Union through our combined egoistic affairs. No narrative, metaphysical framework, or determinism can adequately describe my Union. After all, claiming there is something where nothing exists requires lying by omission, usually at the expense of uniqueness.

In our attempts to achieve “universal dignity and autonomy for all,” it's absolutely necessary to recognize the unique, the egoistic union, and the voids therein. The moment we start suggesting rigid, fixed frameworks under which individuals “should” associate, we cease to be anarchists.

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