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The Choice of a New Generation

Svein Olav Nyberg

1994

“Knowledge must die, and rise again as Will and create itself anew each day as a free Person.”

The False Principle of Our Education

Those of us who have reached adulthood during the eighties have not avoided noticing all the literature and the ideas about self-love that has been around. Even the nursery-eyed girls with the concerned looks sometimes stutter that they think you should be allowed to love yourself as much as you love your neighbour. Most of this literature and most of these ideas come from psychology. Wayne Dwyer reasons that since loving your neighbour as yourself will not amount to much love of the neighbour unless you love yourself first, you should therefore love yourself. Psychologically, the link is claimed that other-love is impossible without self-love. So we should think we are at a magic time in history; the omni-present Society gives us permission to love ourselves.

But there are those of us who are not such well-bred rats conditioned to do whatever we are told benefits our neighbour.

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We do not love ourselves to please our abstract or concrete neighbours, but just love ourselves, plain and simple. Our kind of people see these trends as nothing other than the old hog-wash in a new disguise. Not only shall you sacrifice yourself to the good of your neighbour, but you shall do so under the illusion that you do it for yourself. We penetrate deeper, we go into philosophy.

Philosophically, also, it has been a decade of praising the self. Why, has not the notorious Ayn Rand sold more books and increased her organized following more than ever? Has not the libertarian community accepted selfishness as a rule? Again, ever more illusion! Randian self-love is the love of Man your Essence within you, and the hate of the Evil un-Man in you, lurking at the boundaries of the Omni-Good Rational Thought. Libertarian ideas, furthermore, are in this respect nothing more than the ghost of departed Objectivists.

It is amidst all this confusion that a young man of today will find himself as he picks up his first copy of *The Ego and Its Own*. Usually, as in my case, he will have a background in libertarian thought, and smile at the thought that “Here we have the guy who is even more consistent than Rand. Wow, these ideas will be useful for my libertarianism!” As the reading of the book proceeds, the young libertarian will look at the pages in amazed horror; is not this Stirner guy just picking libertarianism logically apart before his very eyes? Oh horror! No, this must surely rest on a misunderstanding. Stirner never knew modern libertarianism, did he? So, he is really running loose on something else. Yes? But, no, realisation dawns that libertarianism—after all a very logical and aesthetic system which even works—given a faint “best of society” premise—is without the foundation our young libertarian wants. Rights are spooks, his head is haunted and his pride is hurt.

There are now two possible lessons to learn; either to learn from Stirner to speak to others about selfishness—universalize that we are all (and implicitly *ought to be*) selfish, and to use

this as a new basis for libertarian idealism, or—to delve into oneself to find one's *own* cause.

Now, what is not supposed to be my cause! From society we learn that selfishness consists in filling your wallet and emptying your balls as best as you can. From religion we learn that our *true* interest lies in the contemplation of ideas and renunciation of the body. But these are both very one-sided goals, and do violence to *me*. They are both follies of one and the same type—formal egoism. Formal egoism is what arises when you conceive of yourself as an object, a sum of predicates, and not as beyond predicates—as an *Einzig*e. Modern man hypostatizes—makes objects of—everything, including himself. For a modern man the choice is only *which* object among the objects is to be chosen as the ultimate value. So why not the object he knows as “me”? But when you serve the interests of an object, you need a recipe, a guideline—some rules. These might be explicit, or they might be, as for most people, implicit. The formal egoist then serves the himself-object as best he can according to the predications of what selfishness means—and, mind you, he might even have so much success as to attain some predicated goals that he thinks a selfish man should attain—but he never gets to the bottom of *his* interests. He is formally indistinguishable from the selfish man, but in reality never attains anything more than being a boy-scout at satisfying the himself-object.

Stirner is a good teacher of lessons. In *A Human Life* he shows the dialectical development towards a full understanding of one's own cause. One starts out as a child who thinks that all that matters is—matter. Thereafter the procession goes to the realm of the Mind—ideas—where all importance and values are to be found in the relation to the idea. Only thereafter does it dawn that there is something beyond all the material and spiritual objects, yet more immediate, namely *I*, myself.

It is easy to come to the protest “Now *what* is the I?” As Stirner answers, I am not a “what” but a “who”. Grasping this

distinction, and why Stirner emphasises it, is essential to understanding Stirner, and is why *The Ego and Its Own* is so different from any other book about selfishness.

A question that seems to have puzzled both the older and the younger generation is “If Stirner was such a self-loving man, why did he bother to write a book that gave him so much trouble and so little reward?” I do not propose to answer this question in specifics, but instead look at how he has developed his theory of relations to other people.

Stirner has been described as a man who has taken the full consequence of being-alone in the world, and sometimes even a solipsist. I take these descriptions as coming from people not fully knowledgeable about Stirner. Stirner does not advocate the life of the Sole Ego on the hill, out of contact with other people. Rather, he seems to derive much enjoyment from the company of his peers, and even babies with their competent smiles. But it is easy to be intoxicated by a book such as Stirner’s, and fail to read what is written. What Stirner actually writes about, is that there are basically two (opposite) forms of interaction, namely that of standing as an *I* against a *You*, versus meeting one another qua predicate-filled objects. The understanding of this demands that one understands the difference between the *Einzig* that one is, and the objects we are conditioned by culture to see ourselves as.

The meeting of the *I* against the *You* actually comprises more than half of Stirner’s book. This, I propose, is the key to why he wrote the book. All around him he saw, and met, people whose only mode of interaction was qua object-to-object. He met “good citizens”, “Christians” and even “Humans”, all playing out a social role according to the predicate of the day. But meeting one another with that veil of predicates removed was a scarcity, as it is today.

Meeting *Einzig* to *Einzig* is scary. The you stand there all for and by yourself with no predicate to hide behind. That is why people continually choose to interact via predicates—object-

to-object. But this is nothing different from the mad-man at the asylum who is unable to face the world as anyone but “Napoleon”. We live, as Stirner put it, in a mad-house among mad-men.

This is why Stirner wrote his book: It is a therapy for all of us who out of the fear of seeing ourselves as pure and nakedly ourselves. A therapy so that he might speak and otherwise interact with us as the *Einzig* we are, and not as a thousand “Napoleon”s.

Do you dare accept the therapy offered by Stirner?