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Nameless

An Egoist Critique of Identity by Apio Ludd

*Only when **nothing** is said about you and you are merely **named**, are you recognized as you. As soon as **something** is said about you, you are only recognized as that thing... – Max Stirner*

It's amusing how often people confuse identity with individuality. Identity traces back to a Latin word meaning "sameness." And sameness implies the existence of something with which I can be the same.

It is certainly possible to conceive of individuals as identical atoms bashing into each other—marxists like to assume that this is what individualists are talking about—but even atoms only become identical when you or I conceive of them as atoms, giving them an identity. Atomization is a process that has its basis in the denial of my unique individuality, and identification plays a part in this process.

Stirner referred to you and I, i.e., to any individual in the flesh at this moment, as "the unique" (*der Einzige*). In *Stirner's Critics*, he explains that this is merely a name, nothing more. To speak, to write, he had to use a name. But, he wrote, "The unique ... has no content; it is indeterminacy in itself..." To give it

content before I live it out in my world, before you live it out in your world, is to give it an identity, a sameness, to destroy it as unique. To give a conceptual content to the unique is to make it an absurdity.

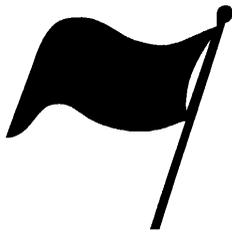
But even as unique, I am forced to contend with identity. There are the banalities of having to identify myself, for example, when entering a tavern, or when cashing a check, or when stopped by the cops. In every one of these instances, someone has been delegated a certain legal authority to make sure that I am the same as something required by



their rules. Am I the same as someone old enough to drink? Am I the same as the one authorized to cash the check? Am I the same as a person with no outstanding warrants? Each of these identities are concepts that I am supposed to live up to. And if I fail, I suffer the consequences. But, in fact, no one is ever the same as any of these things. Even if I can meet each of these challenges to get what I want (some drinks, some needed cash, some distance from the pigs), I am not any of those things. And those who impose these tests on me are my enemies in that they impose abstractions onto my unique self, forcing a conformity to their rules and to a social requirement for personal

consistency. They seek to undermine my ownness and with it my uniqueness.

In addition, every ruling social order is set up only to process individuals in terms of categorical identities: race, gender, nationality, sexuality, etc. Though these are all fictions, they affect people physically and mentally. These categories have served as justifications for enslaving individuals, excluding individuals, placing restrictions on individuals, beating and killing individuals, etc, *ad nauseum*. It makes sense that those who have experienced abuse based on such categorical identities would unite to fight against this abuse and those who carried it out. What doesn't make sense to me is that most of those who unite for this purpose don't base their unity on their shared desire to eradicate the abuse, but rather on the categorical identity that has served to justify this abuse. In other words, they choose to unite not as enemies of an order they aim to destroy, but as victims of an order from which they want recognition and justice. A social order can only recognize categories, not unique individuals. Justice can only deal with what can be measured and weighed, i.e., what can be compared and equated. Identity, sameness, belonging to a group, different ways of expressing the requirement for social recognition and justice. I, as an egoist aware of my uniqueness, respond differently, as an enemy, aiming to destroy categorical identity and those who benefit from it immediately as I experience them here



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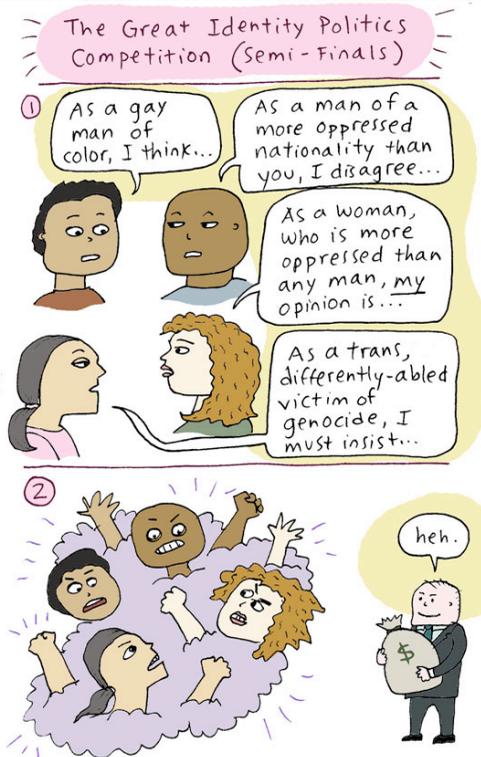
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and now. If I unite with others, they will be those whose aims and powers enhance my own. Not identity politics, but the destruction of identity and politics, in favor of myself and my associations.

But I am not a moralist. I may well find uses for identity in some sense, even while recognizing that it is always a lie. In fact, I use identity whenever I say "I." In this word, I identify myself here and now, my immediate concrete self, with my concept of myself in the past. As unique (i.e., as I exist concretely here and now), I am not the same as that, but I choose to unite myself with that, even to the extent of identifying with it, because it gives me a significant power in relating to my world and in interacting with others, just as identifying others with the past forms of these others that I have encountered enhances that power. So here, identity can become my tool. However, here as well, I am not talking about categorical identity, but about personal identity, equations that I make for myself, knowing full well that they are nothing more than conceptual tools for my use, for enhancing my self-enjoyment. If I take them to be myself, I am deluding myself.

Recently, I have come across communiqués from individuals (apparently acting in small groups) who describe themselves as individualist-nihilists and egoist-nihilists, laying claim to various attacks against the ruling order. Anyone who rebels and attacks the ruler order for themselves is certainly my comrade. I feel a kinship with her even if I



don't agree with all of his decisions about how he goes about her action. But I wonder why someone who's acting for himself, from his own life, feels the need to lay claim to her action at all, let alone by using a group name, creating a group identity. If I choose to attack the ruling order or to act against the law in any other way, this choice springs from the immediacy of my life here and now, and I owe no one an explanation. Nor do I need the inspiration of other actions to move me. It is my own life and my own opportunities that move me. It's true that a rebellious act may move the rebel with passion so she wants to express her rage and joy. Then he might write to claim his

act, but there is no need to do so and a great deal of wisdom in not doing so. But what I question most in this is that individuals who claim an act in this way are taking on an identity. This is why they have to name themselves (and as beautiful and poetic as some of these names are, they remain labels for an identity). The signed communiqué replaces the immediate fleeting meaning of the action for the unique individuals who carried it out with a permanent meaning intended to explain the action to an audience. With permanent meanings come permanent identities and the unique individuals disappear into this crystallized form. A unique individual, acting for herself, is nameless. She is nameless, because her existence is too immediate and fleeting for any name that is not completely empty of meaning or thought to express him. If he chooses to act, it makes sense for him to act anonymously, without an identity. If she chooses to talk about her act, to make it a matter for conversation or debate, or to let others know that they are not alone in their rebellion, it makes sense for her to do this anonymously as well. It isn't difficult to figure out how. The individual, acting from his uniqueness, has no need to identify with his action, she was completely in that action at the moment that she did it. In any case, the full implications of claiming one's acts should be a matter for ongoing debate without taking away from the solidarity and kinship one feels with those who in their rebellion make different choices.

Identity is about defining what you are. As I said, there are moments when playing with such definitions may make sense (or give pleasure). But these definitions, these identities can never be me. They can, however, become prisons locking me into the cell of a role or a set of roles. And if I am not to be a slave, I have to reject these roles, except as occasional masks I may don when it serves my interests. Of course, when I don't conform to roles, I become unpredictable, I become fleeting, I become unintelligible to the institutions and to those with institutional ways of viewing their worlds. Stirner says, in *Stirner's Critics*, that he "names the unique and says at the same time that 'names don't name it'..." Precisely as a unique individual I am nameless, precisely as such I have no identity. I am simply myself here and now.



Anarchy, Neither Capitalist nor Communist

Jason's article on Stirner and capitalism later in this issue serves to clarify an important point which too many anarchists fail to recognize; that opposition to collectivist economic and social arrangements does not make one a supporter of capitalism. Stirner and most other egoists and individualists have been at least as critical of capitalist economic relations as they have been of capitalism's socialist and communist critics. But this very consistent and clear individualist opposition to capitalism throughout the history of the movement, from Stirner through Tucker and Warren to the Mackay Society and Bad Press seems to have been missed by some of our critics on the left of the anarchist movement.

Partly this is because at least some of us write and talk about markets, money and prices as viable devices to guide economic and social relationships in a stateless world. We defend private property and tenure of land and living quarters based on use and occupancy. We believe individuals do not owe anything to anyone else unless they freely entered into an agreement with other folks to cooperate in some project or exchange some goods or services. Apparently, since we use some of the same words as do supporters of capitalism, there are those in the libertarian movement who would group us with them.

But we also condemn profit, rent, interest, and intellectual property. And

we believe that none of these methods of extorting wealth from productive people and transferring it to the rich would be possible without the existence of the band of armed thugs who defend economic inequity, ie, government in its various forms, and we therefore oppose the state and all forms of authority as well. We support workers' control and ownership of their workplaces and what they produce. We support squatting of unused living spaces. And we support any form of social interaction, whether cooperative or competitive, which is freely chosen and from which one is free to walk away when they so choose. This sounds like no form of capitalism with which I am familiar.



What's in a Name?

While much of the anarchist movement defines itself by its opposition to capitalism, it fails to show a similar level of contempt for socialism and

communism. In fact, many anarchists continue to identify themselves as anarchist communists or libertarian socialists. By doing so they demonstrate a belief that the real-world examples of socialist and communist societies with which we are all familiar, so-called “actually existing socialism,” are not the only kind of socialist societies that are possible. And this is despite the fact that the socialist societies created since the russian revolution have been at least as tyrannical, murderous and exploitative as any capitalist society could ever hope to be. Yet, they find it acceptable to label their movement and their ideas with the same words used by Stalin and Mao to describe the abattoirs they ruled.

african socialism, whether in Nkrumah’s ghana or Nyerere’s tanzania were all authoritarian as well, even if less brutal than those in europe and asia.

Furthermore, in the few instances where supposedly anarchist communists were in a position to help build libertarian societies, as in spain in the thirties and the ukraine around 1920, the anarchists acted like authoritarians. While they were quick to dismantle capitalist economic structures, they were far less interested in destroying the state and other authoritarian institutions. They had armies with command structures, conscription and even the death penalty. There were leaders and followers. These were not anarchist societies.

A Curse on Both Your Houses

Capitalism as we know it is loathsome. But so is socialism as we know it. Anarchist communists say that the socialist countries were and are examples of authoritarian socialism, while they work towards a libertarian socialism which will look entirely different. But they are deaf to the arguments of individualists who say that the free markets, free exchange, and free trade we advocate have nothing in common with authoritarian capitalism. Anything that resembles, in their minds, capitalism is not acceptable.

Reading the anarchist press one often finds far more criticism of capitalism than of the state. And such antigovernment sentiment often seems an afterthought.



There has never been a real world socialist/communist society that could be mistaken for anything approaching an anarchy. And I am not speaking here just of the marxist-leninist states like the ussr, china, or korea. The various flavors of

Such a focus on opposing capitalism, and prioritizing that over a critique of government and authority itself, is what leads so many anarchists to applaud authoritarian leftist militias like the *zapatistas* and the *sandinistas* before them, to wear (and sell) t-shirts bearing the image of Che, and to talk approvingly of Mondragón which is riddled with authority and inequity and often acts like any traditional capitalist enterprise. I fail to see how support for authoritarian means will produce libertarian ends.

The State and Revolution

Although I favor individualist arrangements over collectivist ones, I believe that people should be free to partner with others in any sort of social or economic activity they choose, as long as no coercion is involved. And the only way to rid the world of coercion is to eliminate the state and other authoritarian institutions. Anarchists, whether socialist or individualist, need to be promoting this message.

We all oppose the various flavors of authoritarian government around the world, whether capitalist or (at least nominally) socialist. But when the government of the united states is criticized by anarchists it is often as an agent of capitalists, while the soviet government would never have been attacked by libertarians as a representative of communists, despite the fact that that is what its rulers called themselves. In both the old ussr and today's usa, quite

different authoritarian societies and economies were/are imposed on unwilling victims. Such subjugation is not a function of any particular economic system, it is a result of a political system, of a state.

That is the message that anarchists should be sending out. The anarchists of europe long ago separated themselves from the rest of the socialist movement because they believed that the state was at the root of the problems experienced by working people. Their critique of government and authority—at least on paper—was what distinguished them from the authoritarians in the movement of their day. Unfortunately, today's anarchist left seems far more interested in being part of the anti-capitalist opposition than in offering an anarchist critique of both that movement and the state. That does not bode well for the future of freedom.



Stirner and Capitalism

by Jason Rodgers

There is a curious statement in Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's novel *Illuminatus!*:

"Most anarchists hoped Joachim-like, to redistribute the wealth, but Rebecca had once told him about a classic of anarchist literature, Max Stirner's The Ego and His Own, which has been called 'the Billionaire's Bible' because it stressed the advantages the rugged individualist would gain in a stateless society." (53)

For those of us who have read Stirner, this is an odd statement. It might be assumed that this was purposeful, one of Wilson's guerrilla ontology tactics, and that it was put forward in such a manner only to later deconstruct its underlying assumptions. Of course, equally possible it was meant at face value, particularly considering Wilson's soft spot for free-market libertarianism and capitalism. This sort of view of Stirner, and egoism in general, is an all too common assumption. Stirner is often viewed as a proponent of an extreme form of anarcho-capitalism. This view, however, is unfounded.

There is a common misconception that Stirner was some sort of rogue capitalist. Certainly some of his disciples have contributed to this notion. In his writings, Stirner rarely ventured into the realm of economics. When he did so it was to dispel the spooks of economics. He argued that people by nature are egoists,

and that ideologies to the contrary merely serve as rationalization and justification for egoism. It would be better to be honest about motivation. It has been common for some to equate this viewpoint with capitalism. The underlying assumption made by many is that capitalism is individualist, thus Stirner supported capitalism. This is not what Stirner said.



Most of Stirner's concepts and projects were negative, that is they were intended to break down structures and ideologies. One of the few positive projects he proposed is the "Union of Egoists"⁽⁷⁹⁾, which he did not really define. By nature this union could not be strictly defined, as it is fluid, open and dynamical. It was a proposal for

individuals to come together with others, in a fashion that does not compromise the self, but rather amplifies it. He never proposed that individuals should not work together or share. On the contrary, friendship may be one of the most powerful egoist tools. The egoist can give up many things for friendship, as Stirner argued:

“I can with joy sacrifice to him numberless enjoyments, I can deny myself numberless things for the enhancement of his pleasure, and I can hazard for him what without him was the dearest to me, my life, my welfare, my freedom. Why, it constitutes my pleasure and my happiness to refresh myself with his happiness and his pleasure. But myself, my own self, I do not sacrifice to him, but remain an egoist and - enjoy him” (290).

Some might mistake his skepticism and criticism of alternatives, such as communism, as a defense of capitalism. I don't think that it is. When he said “If you know a better medium of exchange, go ahead; yet it will be a ‘money’ again” (274), it seems to be a criticism that communism is merely a new form of capitalism. Really, the egoist wants autonomy and liberty for themselves, and the autonomy and liberty of others enhances this. The problems of capitalism, such as division of labor, were dealt with by Stirner, such as when he argued that “if I do not trouble myself about my affair, I must be content with what pleases others to vouchsafe me. To

have bread is my affair, my wish and desire, and yet people leave that to the bakers” (275).



The structure of capitalism is not a reflection of individualism or egoism. It isn't even necessary to refer to Stirner to come to this conclusion. Capitalism relies on a massive structure of manufacturing and social control. It has division of labor at its root. Division of labor is not the same as specialization. Specialization means that a person may have a particular set of skills that they are most adept at, or most enjoy. Division of labor means that each task is broken down into repetitive blocks in order to improve efficiency. A person cannot build a car themselves, they are reliant on a massive megamachine of manufacturing. Even if a person has all the mechanical skills to assemble the pieces, they do not have the capability to manufacture the pieces or to forge the necessary tools or to mine the raw materials for its production. This always relies on a collective form, and of the worst sort. This is a form that has

alienation, boredom and even slavery as its component parts.

It may be beneficial to look towards Raoul Vaneigem for some ideas as to how to get out of this position. Vaneigem was one of the primary theorists of the Situationist International, and might have his philosophy defined as egoist communism. He criticized masters not on moral grounds, but because “masters, and God himself, are weak because of the shortcomings of those whom they govern. The master knows the positive role of alienation, the slave its negative one, but both are denied full mastery”(204). Capitalism eliminates the masters, leaving “just slaves-who-consume-power, distinguishable from one another only by reference to the relative quantity of power they consume”(207). Vaneigem proposed a solution to this problem, the coming of “masters without slaves”(207). In his view,

the proletariat should adopt an egoist position and become “the bearer of the end of class distinctions and of hierarchy”(213).

In the end, the egoist is no friend of capitalism. It is another spook to be destroyed. The writing of Stirner reflects this. Yet one doesn't need Stirner to come to this conclusion, it is obvious when considering the nature of capitalism, the megamachine that turns individuals into components of an artificial system. *Petit bourgeois* tactics, such as becoming an independent craftsman, may be useful survival strategies on a temporary basis, but make terrible ideologies. The individual is never free under capitalism, even if they get a bigger cubicle. I want to destroy the walls of the cubicle, escape from work and production altogether. I don't want to do this alone, though. I want a union of egoists to join me. At

first a limited union may feel like enough but soon the mere possibility of having to encounter slavery in any form will feel disgusting enough that it will have to be destroyed, just out of fear that it might spread its infection.

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Do you really want to spend so many pages of the book on Max Stirner? I mean, he is not considered that relevant now anyway, so years from now people will be even less interested in a critique of Stirner.

HE IS AN IDIOT AND THE WORLD MUST KNOW IT. I want my epitaph to say "Here lies Karl Marx, destroyer of Max Stirner"



Goddamnit, Karl...

Property

by Emile Armand

In present society property is only the privilege of a small minority, compared to the multitude of the working classes. Whatever may be the nature of the object possessed—a field, a house, plant for production, cash, etc, its owner has acquired it either by exploiting others, or by inheritance, and in the latter case the origin of the wealth is the same as in the former.

Moreover, what do the owners of this wealth do with it? Some use it to obtain, in exchange, a life of leisure, to taste all sorts of pleasures to which money gives sole access. These are the idlers, the parasites who excuse themselves from all personal effort and merely rely on that of others. To develop their estates, for example, or their farms, they employ a labor force which they pay inadequately and which, while it provides all the toil, does not reap any real gain, does not receive the full wage for its work. If it is a question of personal estate, the capital is used for statist ends, or for undertakings of capitalist exploitation. Whoever owns more than he needs for his own consumption, or more than he can develop by himself—such a man, either directly, by developing his properties, or organizing industrial concerns, or indirectly, by entrusting his capital to industry or the State, is an exploiter of others' work.

Then again, it happened in the course of history, that the size of certain estates prevented their full and rational development, and that, while there were workers without jobs and families with nowhere to live, vast areas lay fallow through lack of good organization.

It is against this bourgeois property, recognized by the State, and jealously guarded by it, that all revolutionaries rise up, all those who propagate liberating ideas, and whose ambition it is to improve the living condition of the mass. It is this that socialists, communists, and anti-Statists of every shade attack and wish to destroy. It is this which, on the other hand, breeds illegalism—theft, instinctive and brutal in some cases, conscious and calculated in others.

Communism has solved the problem by taking away capital and the means of production from the State in order to restore it to the collectivity which has become sovereign in its turn, and which distributes the proceeds to each, according to his effort.

But, whether property be in the hands of the State, of the collectivity, or of the communist milieu, or of a few capitalists, as at the present time, it makes the individual dependent upon the community, it breeds the master and the slave, the leaders and the led. Kept in economic submission, the worker retains a mentality in keeping with his conditions of dependence. He is, strictly speaking, the tool, the instrument, the productive machine of his exploiter—individual or social—it is difficult, in such conditions, to be a fully developed and aware individual.

Let us come now to the individualist viewpoint, which wants the free expansion of the individual ego. Individualism looks at the matter in a different light and brings a solution which does not intend that the individual should be sacrificed to a machine. It claims, above all, for every worker the

inalienable possession of his means of production, of whatever kind it may be—tools, land, books etc. These means of production can belong to an association or to an individual—that depends on what agreements are made.

The great thing is that the tools, whatever they may be, should be the property of the producer or producers, and not of the State, big firms, or the milieu in which circumstances have caused the individual to be born.

Moreover, it is essential that the worker should dispose freely, according to his will and necessities, of the product of his labor. He should not have to suffer any outside interference in the use which he means to make of it. The individual or association ought to be able, without having to take into consideration anybody else whatsoever, to consume its own output, or exchange it either *gratis* or for something else, and furthermore, it should be open to it to choose those with whom it will exchange its products and what it will receive in their stead.

Once the individual owns his own tools and his product, capitalism ceases to exist. And from this transformation of the conditions of work, the individual will get something besides economic betterment; he will derive a benefit from the ethical point of view. Instead of being the wage-earners, the exploited victim of employers, endowed in consequence with a “couldn’t care less” attitude toward the making of the product because he does not enjoy it, and wanting to spare his efforts because another will profit by it, the individualist producer will take an interest in his work, will seek unceasingly to perfect it, to make new improvements and use his initiative. He will gain self respect from

the work he does, a healthy personal satisfaction and such a lively interest that his work will no longer be drudgery but a source of exhilaration. The same taste for work, the same struggle against routine and monotony will be found in all trades and activities — a taste which at the present time is only the privilege of a minority, more often than not intellectuals, artists, scholars, writers: all those who work under the impulse of a vocation of a definite choice.

Property thus understood and applied, no longer has anything in common with “property is theft”; it marks a stage of evolution and it seemingly must be at the bottom of complete emancipation, of liberation from all authorities. It will be a restoration of creative power to the individual according to his abilities, properly understood.

It stands to reason that agreements can be made between consumer-producers to avoid overproduction, by which would be meant (speculation having disappeared) the surplus of production after the needs of the producer had been covered or once, through the play of exchange, those needs had been satisfied. Speculation and exploitation having disappeared, there is no evidence that accumulation holds out more dangers than under communism. To tell the truth, whether it be a question of communism or of individualism, their economic realization in practical terms cannot be separated from a new mentality, from a self-consciousness removing the need for archist control by whatever name it is called.

Anti-authoritarian individualism, in whichever sphere one can imagine it, is a function of the entire absence of control or supervision, both of which lead back to the practice of authority.