

Drawing First Blood

Meme, Myself and I

2011

I have no ancestors! For me the creation of the world dates from the day of my birth; for me the end of the world will be accomplished on the day when I shall restore to the elementary mass the apparatus and the afflatus which constitute my individuality. I am the first man, I shall be the last. My history is the complete result of humanity; I know no other, I care to know no other. When I suffer, what good do I get from another's enjoyment? When I enjoy, in what do those who suffer detract from my pleasures? Of what consequence to me is that which happened before me? How am I concerned in what will happen after me? It is not for me to serve as a sacrifice to respect for extinct generations, or as an example to posterity. I confine myself within the circle of my existence, and the only problem that I have to solve is that of my welfare. I have but one doctrine, that doctrine has but one formula, that formula has but one word: ENJOY! Sincere is he who confesses it; an imposter is he who denies it.

This is bare individualism, native egoism; I do not deny it, I confess it, I verify it, I boast of it. Show me, that I may question him, the man who would reproach and blame me. Does my egoism do you any harm? If you say no, you have no reason to object to it, for I am free in all that does not injure you. If you say yes, you are a thief, for, my egoism being only the simple appropriation of myself by myself, an appeal to my identity, an affirmation of my individuality, a protest against all supremacy, if you admit that you are damaged by my act in taking possession of myself, by my retention of my own person — that is, the least disputable of my properties — you will declare thereby that I belong to you, or, at least, that you have designs on me; you are an owner of men, either established as such or intending to be, a monopolist, a coveter of another's person, a thief. There is no middle ground; either right lies with egoism, or it lies with theft; either I belong to myself, or I become the possession of someone else. It cannot be said that I should sacrifice myself for the good of all, since, all having to similarly sacrifice themselves, no one would gain more by this stupid game than he had lost, and consequently each would remain destitute — that is, without profit, which clearly would make such sacrifice absurd. If, then, the abnegation of all cannot be profitable to all, it must of necessity be profitable to a few; these few, then, are the possessors of all, and are probably the very ones who

will complain of my egoism.

Every man is an egoist; whoever ceases to be one becomes a thing. He who pretends it is not necessary to be one is a sly thief.

Oh, yes, I know, the word has an ugly sound; so far you have applied it to those who are not satisfied with what belongs to them, to those who take to themselves what belongs to others; but such people are in accord with human impulse; you are not. In complaining of their rapacity, do you know what you do? You establish your own imbecility. Hitherto you have believed there were tyrants. Well, you are mistaken: there are only slaves.

Where nobody obeys nobody commands.

—Anselme Bellegarigue, 1850

The history of civilization is the search for Utopia, the pursuit of a static, idealized social form where all individuality and variation is melted into the crucible of one unifying belief system. It has been a millennia-long military campaign to contain all within a single structure, where constant sameness is the ideal, to absorb and convert the outsiders who venture within the charmed circle, and to flatten and standardize life by entangling all of us in the spiderweb of an abstract social contract. The civilizing process itself — that is, domestication — is part and parcel of the utopian project, as it attempts to perfect and re-engineer the vital forces of the self-exalting individual, to turn humans — who are a self-centered mixture of hate and gentleness, violence and peace, greed and generosity — into masked animals who feel shame for all that is biological and natural, to render them internally fragmented, divided, and broken (and hence, more amenable to control). To accomplish this, society invents ideas and images to cover those instincts it considers in need of taming; it formulates various ideologies to convince its subjects that selfishness is wrong and should be suppressed, and that the healthy egoistic impulses of a free man or woman must be denied expression in the interests of group-stability. From the ideal republic of Plato to the ideal republic of Lenin, civilization has produced unquantifiable, competing visions of Utopia that each vie for mastery, and that each bear identifiable similarities: They are routinely masked under philanthropic guises, and they all advocate the absorption of the individual into the social body — often (and almost satirically) in the name of “collective freedom”.

The sole utopian current that explicitly asserts the sovereignty of the individual is anarchism, certainly the most paradoxical of the “isms” because it insists on absolute individual and collective freedom. From these shared propositions have emerged the unavoidable dilemmas: how to synthesize complete individual freedom with social identification and a strong sense of social responsibility? Is self-determination compatible with any kind of social contract? And more pointedly, do most people even want the unconditional freedom that anarchism, in its more glorious and inspired moments, postulates? These are the questions that have always checkmated anarchists who engage in large-scale social planning. They start out talking about anarchy and end up advocating some particularly weak version of direct democracy.

But how could it be otherwise? Every attempt to free humanity en masse is bound to fail because collective self-determination is a contradiction in terms. There is no such thing as the common good, for there is no good that is common to all. Society, collective, and public are only convenient terms to designate individuals in the aggregate; they are not entities — they have no bodies, minds, interests, or real existence: A collective has no self, and is but a collection

of selves who have waived their individual powers and will to self-determination, for what is claimed to be the interests of the majority. The price paid for collective unity is always the subordination of the member units, which is the antithesis of anarchy (as we understand it). The ideal Free Society of autonomous but federated collectives that Social Anarchists envision (The AK Press version of anarchy) differs very little from the state capitalist reality of autonomous but interlocking corporations: in both cases individual sovereignty is fettered and repressed so that collective mediocrity may flourish. Beyond the fact that this federation-model constitutes one of the most boring and narrow images of what liberation might mean that it's possible for the human mind to conceive, the very desire for individual difference — or uniqueness — is destined to be held competitive and dangerous to the egalitarian (or inevitably, hierarchical) solidarity of these federations and communes, and the anarchist Mass utopia, if it were ever implemented (which it won't be), would inescapably become a reign of stagnancy, servility, and conformity. It's difficult to regard collectivist anarchists as anarchists at all, since they simply want to turn over what amounts to State power to their communes and federations and to promote party lines and group think in the interest of a fraudulent solidarity — And woe betide anyone who dissents from the collective plan or decision!

That this concern is not mere boogey-man scaremongering is borne out by a critical examination of what many consider the pivotal moment in anarchist history, the Spanish Civil War (and specifically the practices of the falsely titled *anarcho-syndicalist* CNT, which has been outrageously glorified in innumerable studies, and which actually had a brief opportunity to try to implement their utopia). Regarding syndicalist federalism, in "What is the CNT?," Jose Peirats ominously records that "Federation always implies freedom and self-government of the federated bodies, but this does not mean their independence." And this is spelt out even more clearly in the *Rule Book of the CNT*, in which its constitution is described. Here we are told that in the CNT "We recognize the sovereignty of the individual, but we accept and agree to carry out the collective mandate taken by majority decision". This clause is reinforced by others, which state that "anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism recognize the validity of majority decisions" and that "the militant... is obliged to comply with majority decisions even when they are against his own feelings"! This constitution was operative when the CNT was a minority organization in opposition. What its application would have meant when the CNT had taken "over the tasks of production and distribution after the revolution" is not hard to guess — at best, a theoretically democratic federalism; at worst, an economic totalitarianism. In either case it would not be anarchy.

It only remains to add that the Spanish syndicalist de Santillan saw one of the roles of the syndicalist federal economic council as the distribution of Labor from one region to another, which gives us a picture of the syndicalist new order that is rather different from an anarchist vision of a liberated world. Needless to say, we're not told by these social saviors what would happen to Labor that refused to be distributed according to the orders of de Santillan's "directed and planned socialized economy," but it becomes pretty apparent that the syndicalists just wanted to replace the State with an industrial organization every bit as opposed to self sovereignty — and this observation applies equally to the utopian schemes of the so-called libertarian socialists and anarcho-communists, with their mechanized, efficient picture of social perfection (essentially just another form of the Leftist workers paradise).

If history and the record of every collectivist experiment large and small prove anything it is the staggering — in fact insurmountable — difficulties and complexities of such a proposed mass organization. What happens to those individuals who don't wish to be planned, who don't like

the Jobs assigned to them by their fellow workers, and who wish to exist outside the purview of the absolute power of these workers councils? Or how about those who don't wish to be citizens but to be free of citizen-hood, to escape from statehood (regardless of what it's called), those who desire to secede from this fancied, singular entity called society? What happens when an absolutely total unanimity doesn't reign in the federated pyramid of workers councils, when separations don't magically disappear, and some individuals find the plans and democratic decisions of others not to their liking? The common ownership ideal of these left-anarchists would make Society or Humanity the new proprietor, the new lord-god. And if Society is the owner, then everyone is owned by Society and must suffer its dictation.

Anarchy is freedom, and this most assuredly includes the freedom not to be a socialist or to live like one, and the freedom not to limit one's identity to any social role — especially that of worker. It's the freedom not to participate in communal activities or to share communal goals, or to pray before the idol of Solidarity. It's freedom not only from the rule of the State but also from that of the tribe, village, commune, or production syndicate. It's the freedom to choose one's own path to one's own goals, to map out one's own campaign against Authority, and, if desired, to go it alone.

Of course, anarcho-syndicalism is no longer a credible or even very active force, and only continues to linger around anarchist circles as a type of phantom belief, analogous to the syndrome of phantom limbs — a limb such as an arm or leg that someone no longer possesses, yet which still seems to be there, attached to the body, and continuing to cause pain or distraction. But the social forecasts of the anarcho-communists and anarcho-socialists (who, regrettably, are still with us) are actually not substantially different, in that they all envision something akin to this workers council model — an entirely leftist political structure, about which anarchists ought to be embarrassed. This extended intercourse with decayed leftist thinking is partly why anarchist theory has gone flabby, and helps clarify why so much important anarchist history has remained undocumented.

But anarchism, though a political or *anti-political* philosophy, is not a doctrine, and the anarchist theoretical spectrum, because it does (in the final analysis) stress freedom, has never become an ideology that is pure. Many anarchists have been doctrinaire, even dogmatic, but no single doctrine or school has ever encompassed more than a part of anarchist thought. Consequently, anarchism has also generated radically *individualist* currents that place the majesty of the free individual first, foremost, and above all things — including society. Of course, it has to be admitted that these aren't the voices that generally appear in anarchist history books (which are in the main overshadowed by anarcho-communist perspectives), and when they are given space it's typically in the form of footnotes. Yet these remain some of the more wild, undomesticated, and disreputable voices in anarchist thought, the voices that embody the most radical qualities of the anarchist revolt — the “heart of the blast”, so to speak — and in them we catch gleams of the elemental and barbaric will to sovereignty that characterizes an unconquered individual. These are anarchists who don't confuse self rule with social reform, the dethroning of authority with planning committee meetings, or insurgency with daydreaming. Their revolt springs from self-interest — a conscious egoism — but they're honest enough to admit it, without shame and without justifications.

From an individualist perspective, to speak of an anarchist politics is an absurdity. Politics is the science of how to organize a society, a collectivity (or town — Polis) and anarchism, taken to its furthest conclusions, is anti-collectivist. Anarchism is an individual way of engaging with the

world, a rebellion against what is, a declaration of what should not be, not a prescription for what should be. The hypothesis of an organized collectivist tomorrow presages a ferocious struggle between the New Order and the individuals who are desirous of preserving their autonomy. Even in the most optimistic scenario — ie, an effort to forge a new culture based on anti-authoritarian principles — any post-revolutionary social grouping will inevitably tend to impose one ideological credo on its members and reignite the age-old struggle between the individual and society. Thus, individualist anarchists have no programme for anyone else — and quite often have no programme even for themselves!

Most individualist anarchists also accept that what is known as the State or government is not going to be abolished in some glorious collective revolution and that expecting this to happen is in the same class as expecting the oceans to turn into lemonade. They regard clinging to this eschatological fantasy as a wasteful fixation that renders anarchists not exceptionally different from the Christian who lives for heaven or the Muslim who lives for paradise: a mixing of religion (with its messianic tendencies) with social doctrine to make of anti-political aspirations and social revolt a prophetic affair — with promises of full-measured social salvation at hand, and a millennium around the left corner. Not only is the ideal of abolishing the State a theoretical whimsy under present circumstances, it's also impossible to pursue any ideal with single-minded determination without eventually becoming enslaved to that ideal (and enslavement to ideals is slavery as much as Is bondage to a physical master) — at which point the ideal becomes more of an enflamed hallucination than a critical engagement with the world as it is. If anything, in the dawn of the twenty first century, it seems reasonable to predict that Statism will continue to escalate on a dizzying scale and dimension, as environmental and population pressures intensify dependency on the infrastructure of mass society. It's one thing to see the State exactly for what it is, to at least avoid the disastrous error of mistaking it for a benefactor or mistaking its witless and oppressive orders for divine commands, to demystify and de-sanctify the State in one's own life and creatively out maneuver its attempts at control — but it's another matter entirely to attempt to confront the very real power of the State with vain, meaningless chest-thumping or to underestimate the support the State has among the presumably discontented masses. Ideological anarchists don't like to hear this, but the State continues to exist, not solely by violent conquest or deception, but because there is a demand for its services from the sheep habituated to governance.

Individualist anarchists/conscious egoists preach no holy war against the State because they're reflective enough to admit that they know of no way to get rid of the State — and that the problems of the State and organized society may, in fact, be intrinsically insoluble. If all political rule rests ultimately on the consent of the subject masses — and is cemented upon society by the laziness, cowardice, and stupidity of those same masses — -then when the cataclysmic crises looming on the planetary horizon (such as environmental and economic meltdown) begin to occur, the masses will probably call for a new Caesar or Hitler (as they always do) to rescue them from the system-failure that traditional political forms are no longer capable of addressing. Fear, bolstered by the insidious throes of habit, is the mainspring of the Herd's every thought and action and even in the most opportune historical moments they have failed to establish anything approximating self-determination. This is just one of many flaws in the entire set of assumptions regarding authoritarian culture: Master-slave dynamics are a complex relationship between the governors and the governed, a mutually-reinforcing feedback loop between the legislators and the servile multitudes, inextricably bound together in an ancient and familiar holding pattern.

Taking this all into account, conscious egoists have no firm position on insurrection and retain tactical flexibility in the face of the realities of power, weighing the long and short run benefits of various forms of rebellion against the risks and costs, individually. If they lack the strength in the moment to overthrow those forces that claim authority and/or demand compliance, they will evade them the best way they know how, put up with that part of it which is unavoidable, assert their sovereignty as often as they can, pursue liberation in realms other than the political, continually engage in cultural de-conditioning, and when all else fails take refuge in what James Joyce described as “silence, exile, and cunning”. Their egoistic victories come not in the form of revolutionary martyrdom, but in the successful creation of free lives, and at times, free culture.

All society-oriented versions of anarchism carry within them the ideological virus of utopianism, in that they posit individual liberation as conditional on the liberation of The Masses or The People. But to make my freedom conditional on the freedom of others is to turn me into their servant and to deny my self-ownership in favor of a masochistic, unattainable, altruistic ideal. By changing anarchism into a theoretical conception of an ideal free society — instead of an individualistic rejection of authority — the society-oriented anarchists then become obliged to convince others that Anarchy would work and begin drawing up diagrams for everything from anarchist trash collection to worker-owned sewage treatment plants. Moreover, in their zeal to prove that a stateless society — one without a government as we ordinarily recognize it — is practical, these socially preoccupied anarchists turn into incorrigible moralists obsessed with the desire to fix some objective standard for human behavior that will endure for all time. And, as with all other moralists, social anarchists delude themselves by thinking that what they wish to impose on others is “the will of the people” or “historically inevitable” or anything other than their own personal egoistic desires. This is not a criticism of selfishness at all, but of self-deception — and of self-defeating idealism, not self-serving realism. Moralists — whether religious, political or humanist — are unconscious egoists and they seek converts to their ideal conceptions, ie they seek willing slaves and fellow believers. Individualist anarchists, by contrast, are conscious egoists and seek allies and partners for mutually enjoyable adventures in subversion. They see it as indisputable that no government or ruling class could oppress anybody without the broad support of public opinion, and to imagine that most people are longing for the abolition of the hallowed institutions of authoritarian society is to live in a dream world. (Even the most disgruntled members of the populace are usually far from being anarchists.) History has shown that the sheep who accept the authority of their shepherds have always been the largest class, and so for individualist anarchists anarchy becomes not a future place, but a present state of mind, an individual denial of authority, not a future social practice. Their anarchism is not a matter of faith and rejects the sacrificial politics of social anarchism, which is predicated on pointless optimism, reward-less duty and the Indefinite postponement of freedom: their anarchism is grounded in the clarity that sovereignty is only for those who want it and that one must comprehend and confront their own slavish conditioning before freedom timorously ventures within their reach. Individualist anarchists are more than willing to make use of a social revolution to further their own adventure, but always without any illusions regarding the Herd’s atrocious track record and deep-seated fear of real freedom.

At this point it should be made clear that there’s never been an anarchist individualist movement that has brought under one hat such unique personalities as Josiah Warren, Thoreau, Zo D’Axa, John Henry Mackay, James L. Walker and the countless other idiosyncratic thinkers who all developed wildly varied visions of anarchy. As its very name implies, individualist anarchism

is a philosophy of a “plurality of possibilities” and if it’s inconsistent at times, that very inconsistency allows endless space for growth, diversity, and mutation. Still, no intelligent discussion of individualist anarchism and/or conscious egoism can occur without first grappling with Max Stirner and his inflammatory, ground breaking work, *The Ego and His Own*, which is responsible for not only presenting the fundamentals, but also the implications of individualism. Highly controversial when first presented to the world in 1844, his book became the object of much shock and ridicule, most notably from Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, who revealed more about their own insecurities than anything else in their 300 pages of “repudiation” — a hysterical diatribe comprising more pages than Stirner’s own work. The thick and thorough expressions of Stirner’s writing starts early in the history of the machinations of society, and progresses with palpable passion into the most sublime workings of society over the individual, and by the end frees the individual from this morass. Like a grand dissociator of ideas, or a surgeon of illusions, Stirner makes a sacrilegious broth out of all the materials of human thought (particularly morality) and brews from them Nothing. Your dreams? Stirner skins them alive. Your God(s)? Stirner splits this phantasm into an infinite number of particles and hands you back a hatful of waste. Your cobweb-spinning idealisms? Stirner tears asunder the masks of self-deception and exposes all idealism as worship of the non-existent. To Stirner, belief of any kind is a species of hypnosis and he sloughs off dogma, codes, and ideology like snake-skin. The furious energy of Stirner’s anti-metaphysical assault is both savage and interrogative in its impact: Unsentimental, heretical, and liberatory beyond what his contemporaries could dream of or stomach, Stirner was seemingly forgotten before re-introduction to the Americas by the anarchist Benjamin Tucker in 1907. (Tucker received considerable help in this endeavor from anarchist poet John Henry Mackay, the egoist James L. Walker, and the translator Steven T. Byington.) Nothing more and nothing less is postulated within *The Ego and His Own* than the absolute sovereignty of the individual in the face of all attempts at his/her weakening and suppression: by the “spooks” and the loose screws in the human brain along with all external powers that want to subjugate the unique individual under the guise of law. To the first, negative section of his critique, the criticism of Man, Stirner counters the more positive second section, his “I”. Here he first clears up the falsely understood concept of freedom, which cannot be given, but must be taken and then describes the “unique one”: his power with regard to the State and society, this power that laughs at law as a phantasm; his intercourse with the world, which consists in his using it; and his self-enjoyment, which leads to uniqueness, to which the I as I develops. To Utopians, one of the most threatening qualities of Stirner’s negation is that he has no interest in supplying a substitute structure for that which he seeks to terminate. (It’s difficult for the idealist mind to grasp the concept of negation for negation’s sake, or to appreciate Stirner’s radical negation as at once a splendid affirmation — of free life!) More alarmingly, Stirner divulges the selfish and hollow foundation of all humanitarian movements — the predatory, greedy, power-craving, egoistic motives that hide behind the ideological mask of social service.

Between the publishing of *The Ego and His Own* and Stirner’s re-discovery by John Henry Mackay and Benjamin R. Tucker, fatefully enough, the Russian Nihilist movement began and Nietzsche’s blasphemous proclamations made their earth-shaking appearance in Europe, initiating a new dawn for individualism and setting the stage for Stirner’s return. There is even debate as to Stirner’s possible influence on Nietzsche. Although no conclusion has come of this exploration, it speaks to the power and potency of Stirner’s Luciferean intellect that some consider him a precursor to one of the most pitiless iconoclasts of all time. While socialist and syndi-

calist movements such as the IWW and the Bolsheviks gained traction in the early twentieth century, the momentum and power of individualist anarchist thought found a home most notably within the Italian, French, and Spanish anarchist milieus. They, along with Stirner, are the progenitors of our legacy today and established the first fruitful era of Egoist practice. They are still heretical, since most proclaimed anarchists could not conceive of putting their individual life expression above that of their chosen social causes. The concept of amorality scares average people like a thought virus, and most of those exposed to the more radical strains of Individualist thought react as if the devil himself had tabled a proposition for their own freedom. Yet those in the top echelons of society (finance capitalists, for instance) wield power driven fully by their amoral individual desires, and count on the masses constraining themselves with myriad social regulations and ethics — what Nietzsche referred to as “slave moralities”. These ruthlessly skilled exploiters are certainly conscious egoists and in a sense, more daring than most anarchists, since they effectively put themselves above government, not just verbally like a mass of whining, morally indignant slaves. As the State and the ruling class directly diminish the enjoyment of my existence, my own egoistic desire is to see them put effectively out of my way. But it isn’t my attributes and limited power that are a danger to the State or Society, it’s the multiplication of my attributes should they permeate those of like mind. The revolutionary value of Egoism is that it removes all taboos or selfishness and the acquisition of personal power, and smashes the mental chains of slave morality. The rules and laws of society were made to fetter conquered vassals and fools — but the conscious egoist knows that they are under no obligation to obey anything or anyone. Think of the implications of unbound individual expression and power countering the established authorities! If the masses were to manifest their conscious egoism, and become ungovernable individuals who seize and keep all that their power permits them to take, these established authorities could not handle or control people anymore: a union of bold, determined beings, animated by clear-sighted self interest, who won’t succumb to any master, corporeal or so-called divine, is a force that any governing agency would have a hard time vanquishing. With illusory social obligations laid bare and broken behind us, the question would no longer be whether to embrace Egoism, but what personal fears must we jettison to begin the individualist journey post-haste? To slash the veils of illusion that countless generations of social conditioning have instilled in us, to strike down the spooks (within and without) that promise freedom but deliver yet more quandaries, is the exact antidote needed to the violently enforced Sisyphusian nightmare of culture and civilization that keeps us as in thrall to the delusion of social identification (not to mention the myth of social progress).

Social anarchists have typically decried this type of egoist social analysis as “bourgeois individualism,” confident that their use of the dreaded word “bourgeois” is sufficient to convince the faithful to think no further. Anarchist individualists are not likely to lose any sleep over being labeled so, but the use of the term in such a way is indicative of social anarchist argumentation, which is almost always by way of morality and intimidation rather than independent analysis. Kropotkin, commenting on individualist anarchism in America in his oft-quoted contribution to the Encyclopedia Britannica, wrote:

Those who profess it ...they are chiefly “intellectuals”... soon realize that the individualism they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and either abandon the ranks of the Anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economists, or they retire into a sort of Epicurean a-moralism, or

super-man-theory, similar to that of Stirner or Nietzsche...

Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, Volume i, pp 914-916

In this encyclopedia entry Kropotkin, as usual, defines anarchism as a secular variant of the Christian Heaven and indulges in his classic populist mystifications about the masses. Despite an attempt to be objective in his presentation, he singles out Stirner and even the tepid Benjamin Tucker as villains whose ideas encourage “amoralism” and “super-man-theory”. Somewhat incongruously, he then instances the works of Nietzsche as being among those “full of ideas which show how closely anarchism is interwoven with the work that is going on in modern thought”. But just how close is “closely” to this egalitarian true believer and chronic optimist? It’s not at all surprising that Kropotkin, the humanist, moralist, and communist par excellence, makes Stirner his arch-villain. After all, *The Ego and His Own* is not only the most outspoken exposition of amoralism in the history of philosophy, but also one of the most powerful vindications of individualism ever written — in some ways, the ultimate encouragement to self liberation and one without a suggested social replacement for what is to be overthrown — and none of these things would be to the stunted tastes of Kropotkin and his pious, collectivist followers.

Yet many of Kropotkin’s contemporaries from the “Heroic Age of Anarchism”, like Emma Goldman, never forgot the primacy of the individual and understood the supreme relevance of both Stirner and Nietzsche to anarchist thought, as evidenced by the following passage:

The most disheartening tendency common among readers is to tear out one sentence from a work, as a criterion of the writer’s ideas or personality. Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, is decried as a hater of the weak because he believed in the *Uebermensch*. It does not occur to the shallow interpreters of that giant mind that this vision of the *Uebermensch* also called for a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves.

It is the same narrow attitude which sees in Max Stirner naught but the apostle of the theory “each for himself, the devil take the hind one.” That Stirner’s individualism contains the greatest social possibilities is utterly ignored. Yet, it is nevertheless true that if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society.

(from her preface to *Anarchism and Other Essays*)

Since Emma Goldman wrote these words, it’s been amply demonstrated that both the feeble namby-pambyism of the “save the world” anarchist and the collectivist revolutionary models of social change have failed to deliver the goods. This shows an observant, non-ideological person that this orientation does not work. In the search for the ultimate sacrifice, selflessness for the Common Good has denied the basic truth of human self-interest, and is both hopelessly naive about human nature and hermetically sealed against all realistic feedback regarding the psychology of masses. The Kropotkinist dream of full agreement and peaceful fraternity among people denies the irrefutable fact of differentiation, and is founded on the seductive but malignant politico-ethical principles of socialism (itself an offspring of Christianity). As long as anarchists remain preoccupied with saving The Masses (even in spite of themselves), then anarchists will curtail their own evolution and self-empowerment and be herded into an intellectual

fog. (This morbid, pathological over-identification with large collectives probably helps explain Kropotkin's later appalling support for World War I.)

If all are bound to one another by some imaginary social contract and if the majority elect to jump into the lake (of fire), then I am doomed unless I can emancipate myself from the crazed lemming herd before it's too late to save my own astoundingly precious life. Using swimming as an analogy: the overburdened individual sinks, like the group that, tied to one another, drags each other down, dooming all! The self-owning individual is of the open spaces — intrepid, recalcitrant, nimble, spontaneous, and agile — and able to raise his or her self above the weight and sheer gravity of the Masses and their self-defeating belief systems, precisely because s/he is unencumbered with delusional social theorems.

If anarchists (who claim no gods, no masters) were to look at any social movement and the assumed collectivist orientation with open eyes, we would easily find the inherent duplicity of motives that are veiled and hidden under the most grandiloquent and idealistic principles — and the bombs of egoistic purpose that are carefully hidden in all the fine silks of utopian promises. While many may agree intellectually with this assessment, understanding is not entirely an intellectual process and clearing the spooks of collectivist social responsibility requires a hard edge of criticism — it requires that we give total attention to the structure of our conditioning, to the inherited psychological patterns that encourage us to identify with something outside ourselves — whether it be the State, an ideology, or Society. As Stirner constantly does, we must get behind the nature of these philosophical institutions and assumptions; we must clear the phantom beliefs of what the social being is, and start at the most neglected and maligned truth: I am the only master.

Individualist anarchism in the United States was most notably expounded in the pages of Benjamin R. Tucker's journal *Liberty*, which was published from 1881 to 1908. Tucker and his associates — all capable writers and thinkers — attempted to forge individualist anarchism into a coherent system through an ill-conceived fusion of Proudhon's economic theories and Max Stirner's uncompromising egoism. In the end, Tucker's efforts to reconcile the utopianism of Proudhon and the individualist amorality of Stirner resulted in neither fish nor fowl, but mostly in confusion (for example, Tucker's support for private police and private courts to combat and punish theft) and in unconvincing visions of a future harmonious society held together by the principles of what Tucker called "equal liberty." Still, Tucker did two very important things to help the development of individualist thought: 1) As already stated, he published the first English translation of Stirner's incendiary masterpiece *The Ego and His Own* and 2) he allowed the pages of his widely-read journal *Liberty* to serve as an uncensored forum for the discussion of egoist perspectives on power, politics, and self-determination. Although we have no desire to dwell excessively on Tucker's overly idealistic theories in this anthology, it would be disingenuous to ignore either him or the vibrant milieu that formed around his ideas — a milieu that produced some formidable egoist thinkers like James L. Walker, John Beverley Robinson, and John Badcock, Jr.

The primary focus of this anthology, however, is to explore the development of anarchist individualism in Europe and the multifarious constructions and applications of Stirner's ideas by anarchists in Italy, Spain, France, and England. This collection is by no means comprehensive, owing primarily to the fact that so many core texts have yet to be translated into English. (For example, Enzo Martucci's *The Banner of the Antichrist*; Miguel Gimenez Igualada's extensive treatise on Stirner from 1956; the writings of Biofilo Pandasta — Columbian Stirnerite, adventurer and

vagabond; the Russian anarchist Lev Chernyi's 1907 book *Associational Anarchism*, in which he advocated the "free association of independent individuals.")

Other important individuals unrepresented in this collection for similar reasons; Ixigrec, the French anarchist science-fiction writer, comrade of E. Armand, and radical interpreter of the Marquis de Sade; Rirette Maitrejean, who wrote extensively on anarcho-feminist and free love subjects for the French individualist anarchist magazine *L'Anarchie*, and who went on trial in the 1920s for alleged participation in the illegalist activities of the Bonnot Gang; Domenico Pastorello, the Italian polyglot and popularizer of Esperanto, who advocated an ascetic lifestyle of self-sufficiency as a solution to economic slavery; The Brazilian individualist anarchist Maria Lac-erda de Moura who wrote for the Spanish individualist anarchist magazine *Al Margen* alongside Miguel Gimenez Igualada; Octave Mirbeau, "the Ravachol of modern literature", author of *The Tor-ture Garden* and the timeless abstentionist pamphlet *Voters Strike!*; Federico Urales, an important Spanish individualist anarchist who edited the journal *La Revista Blanca* and was highly critical of the anarcho-syndicalism in his time (he viewed it as plagued by excessive bureaucracy that tended towards reformism), and Adolf Brand, German individualist anarchist writer, comrade of John Henry Mackay, editor of the periodical *Der Eigene* (1896-1931) and pioneering campaigner for the acceptance of male bisexuality and homosexuality. The list just goes on and on.

The individualist anarchist press has also had a fertile life (with points of abandonment fol-lowed by periods of resurgence) and a rich, innovative publishing history — one abounding with variety, local flavor and an emancipatory non conformism towards ready-made anarchist dogma and programs. Some of the more noteworthy examples are Enrico Arrigoni's journal *Erisia*, which unleashed nine issues between 1928-1928 that anarchist historian Paul Avrich describes as "re-markable". Then there are the French individualist papers, which are almost too numerous to catalogue, but loosely start with *Autonomie Individuelle* (1887 to 1888) giving birth to a geneal-ogy that continues to proliferate in our day. The Spanish individualist milieu of the 1920s and 1930s is just as impressive, producing confident, multihued journals like *L'Individualista*, *La Idea Libre*, *La revista blanca*, *Etica*, *Iniciales*, *Al margen*, *Estudios*, *El Unico*, and *Nosotros*. Who knows what illuminating gems lie buried in the yellowing pages of these lively texts, waiting to be un-earthed, translated, and discussed again! Catalan historian Xavier Diez, who recently completed a wide-ranging survey of the Spanish individualist anarchist press before and during the Civil War period, summarized the basic positions of this tendency as follows:

under its iconoclastic, anti-intellectual, antitheist run, which goes against all sacral-ized ideas or values it entailed, a philosophy of life took shape which could be con-sidered a reaction against the sacred gods of capitalist society. Against the idea of the nation, it opposed its internationalism. Against the exaltation of authority em-bodied in the military institution, it opposed its antimilitarism. Against the concept of industrial civilization, it opposed its naturist vision.

Unfortunately, access to this valuable heritage of individualist ideas was not (yet) available to us as we were assembling this anthology, though we did have the lucky break of coming into a windfall of dynamic English-language Individualist and Egoist papers, publications containing a wide range of heretical views operating outside and against orthodox anarchism. The publications that we consumed most ardently were *The Storm! A Journal For Free Spirits*, *Minus One: An Individ-ualist Review Egoist*, and *Ego*, supplemented by a smattering of translated texts that fortuitously

materialized when needed most. All of these journals were driven by an utter disrespect for the alleged unity or sanctity of the anarchist movement. They all articulate an independence from, and refusal of, the altruistic idealisms and socialist ethics (which are really Christian ethics) that have infested anarchist thought. They all introduce new approaches and philosophic concerns and help to move anti-authoritarian consciousness in a dangerous direction again. S.E. Parker, whose writing features prominently in this compilation, was a British individualist anarchist who, from 1963 to 1993, edited three of the journals just cited — *Minus One*, *Egoist*, and *Ego* — all urgent, vehemently individualist periodicals that assail the complacency of anarchist group think and disrupt the placid reliance on morality as a means of justifying anarchy. Parker eventually drove a wedge between egoism proper and anarchism — at least in his own life — repudiating anarchism as a self-renunciating, humanist church. In one of his last published articles, Parker found himself agreeing with Dora Marsden (an important early twentieth-century British egoist, whose writings Parker helped rescue from obscurity), who argued that moralistic anarchism is merely continuing the work of religion under a new guise. Parker describes his “loss of faith” in the article “Archists, Anarchists and Egoists” (which is Appendix A in this volume). He arrived at these conclusions after forty-plus years of wrestling with the implications of anarchism and egoism. Regardless of whether one agrees with Parker’s verdict or not, it shouldn’t be too frightening to look at, and if it is then you probably shouldn’t be reading this book; As a philosophical weapon, anarchist thought has become dull, has lost its once-lethal edge and become encrusted with leftist cliches. One of the purposes in compiling these outsider voices is to help relieve anti-authoritarians of the burden of carrying the impossible load of universal emancipation (this leftist ideal of herd-life that undermines our individual strength) and to help re awaken the slumbering dragon of insurrectionary egoism. These are the voices of uncompromising individualists, to whom no topic is taboo or off-limits, voices that have stayed obscure until now, but for which the myriad complexities of our current era provide an excellent context for a re-appearance.

What ultimately emerges from these writings is a vision of anarchy that is non-utopian, non-idealist, and decidedly non-leftist, a vision of anarchy that could accurately be described as anti-social, or at least, *socially pessimistic*. Those readers who would turn to the writers in this collection for the exact details of a reconstructed society will search in vain, for their concern is the rebirth of the individual as a separate entity — unsmothered by the claims of any nation, State or society. Any sketches of an anarchistic future they offer are apparent only by inference. Their ideas will resonate most strongly with those defiant, unconquered individuals who are only interested in reconstructing themselves — the free spirits who are resolved to live outside the structures of control as far as they possibly can, relying on their own psychic resources and experiencing liberation on a personal level even as the whole world slides in horror down a bottomless pit. Stripped of all fantastic figures of speech and fruitless will-o-the-wisp schemes for social betterment, the assertion of individual sovereignty by word and deed is the only method and only message of these iconoclastic minds who choose to label their personal rejection of all authority as *individualist*.

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Meme, Myself and I
Drawing First Blood
2011

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Meme, Myself and I. "Drawing First Blood". In *Enemies of Society: An Anthology of Individualist & Egoist Thought*. Ardent Press. 2011.

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