

The Stirner Affair

Against Normative Morality

If amoralists are gathered in the history of philosophy, the initial catalog exhibits two: Stirner and Nietzsche. The former arrived first, a factor in the speculative claims of plagiarism by the latter. However, it is far more appropriate to leave Stirner in the company of the individualists and hedonists, before and during his time, than with Nietzsche. Especially given his incipient analysis, a disruptive break, in the amoralist position.

A rejection of normative morality. Not solely the Christian religiousness, also the secular morality of the Enlightenment that suffused the European cultural climate. Amoralism isn't driving Stirner's discourse, it is freedom.

First, the Freedom-from. From God, State, Community - Morality. He sees the obvious, the -from is only a part of the act, the negative one. A replacement is necessary from the other part, the positive act. He critiques the secular liberals, who have apparently found the non-pious ground for said positivity, as still chained to an unconscious freedom-from.

A fact evident to the few, the comparable character of Christianity and Liberalism. In the image of God, the Christian is made. For Liberalism, a substitution is made. Ideal-Man for God, Christian for the Liberal. In platonic fashion, the images don't reflect the ideal. Therefore, a lifetime is spent in the pursuit of a perfect reflection, a closing of distance, a repeated inspection of the reflection, the God (Ideal-Man). Even a resigned acceptance of the impossibility of closing in, nonetheless an acknowledgement of the Ideal's existence.

Therefore the liberal too revolves in the same circle as the Christian. Because the spirit of mankind, man, dwells in you, you are a man, as when the spirit of Christ dwells in you you are a Christian; but, because it dwells in you only as a second ego, even though it be as your proper or 'better' ego, it remains other-worldly to you, and you have to strive to become wholly man. A striving just as fruitless as the Christian's to become wholly a blessed spirit!¹

Thus, Stirner's critique of secular morals: a structural resemblance of Christianity, the Ideal-Man, an implicit freedom-from. Note that while it may resemble the Kantian-Lacanian line of ethical action, this differs from the former - for it allows for the implicit to become explicit, the Imaginary addressed through the Symbolic. For the Liberal, there is only the obvious, the Imaginary, and nothing else.

Ownness

What follows the contexture after the negative freedom-from, the positive project of the act? Ownness. Not an exact substitution, the positive for the negative, rather a concatenation to the freedom-from. There is seldom any exposition of what Ownness is, apart from circular assertions of the act of Ownness, bordering on tautology.

I am my own only when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered either by sensuality or by anything else (God, man, authority, law, state, church); what is of use to me, this self-owned or self-appertaining one, my selfishness pursues.²

But am I not still unrestrained from declaring myself the entitler, the mediator, and the own self? Then it runs thus: My power is my property. My power gives me property. My power am I myself, and through it am I my property³

I decide whether it is the right thing in life; there is no right outside me. If it is right for me, it is right.⁴

A simpler interpretation is Ownness as hedonism. Even Stirner provides enough signposts to travel in that direction.

A vast interval separates the two views. In the old I go toward myself, in the new I start from myself; in the former I long for myself, in the latter I have myself and do with myself as one does with any other property - I enjoy myself at my pleasure. I am no longer afraid for my life, but 'squander' it.⁵

However, due to its simplicity, let alone the lack of charity, it is an uninteresting interpretation. As much as there are signs to the road taken, there exist ones against it.

Driven by the thirst for money, the avaricious man renounces all admonitions of conscience, all feeling of honour, all gentleness and all compassion; he puts all considerations out of sight; the appetite drags him along.⁶

Or the ambitious man, who offers up all his desires, wishes, and satisfactions to the single passion, or the avaricious man who denies himself everything to gather treasures, or the pleasure-seeker? He is ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices.⁷

So an avaricious man is not a self-owned man, but a servant; and he can do nothing for his own sake without at the same time doing it for his lord's sake - precisely like the godly man.⁸

Perhaps he wants to assert Egoism-in-itself, a self-determination of the act itself, that hesitating moment before the act, instead of being possessed by the particular act taken upon.

Criticism offers me this occasion by the teaching that, if anything plants itself firmly in me, and becomes indissoluble, I become its prisoner and servant, a possessed man⁹

Now, more questions emerge. What is the criteria for indissolubility? For one could accuse Stirner of indissolubility, as for the relatively predictable way he lived his life. With the ambiguity of the indissolubility criteria in mind, consider an instance of the criteria of Ownness made clear.

Now I know what is expected of me, and the new catechism can be written. The subject is again subjected to the predicate, the individual to something general; the dominion is again secured to an idea, and the foundation laid for a new religion. This is a step forward in the domain of religion, and in particular of Christianity; not a step out beyond it.

To step out beyond it leads into the unspeakable. For me paltry language has no word, and 'the Word', the Logos, is to me a 'mere word'.¹⁰

A non-linguistic affirmation, a phenomenal one, that drives Ownness. Although there are cases where Stirner rejects phenomenally driven acts, asserting them

to acts of false-Ownness, still rooted in implicit freedom-froms. For example, the case of the pliable girl, the Anti-Juliet.

But now sometimes a wish glimmers in a less passionate and wilful heart than Juliet's. The pliable girl brings herself as a sacrifice to the peace of the family. One might say that here too selfishness prevailed, for the decision came from the feeling that the pliable girl felt herself more satisfied by the unity of the family than by the fulfillment of her wish. That might be; but what if there remained a sure sign that egoism had been sacrificed to piety? What if, even after the wish that had been directed against the peace of the family was sacrificed, it remained at least as a recollection of a 'sacrifice' brought to a sacred tie? What if the pliable girl were conscious of having left her self-will unsatisfied and humbly subjected herself to a higher power? Subjected and sacrificed, because the superstition of piety exercised its dominion over her!¹¹

The girl chose her family over romantic love. Note that the love itself, in all probability, is a concealed version of familial love as *repetition automatism* (repetition compulsion). Furthermore, if one questioned her choice - Why have you forsaken love for family? Why can't you sacrifice familial relations? There are no linguistic answers for Anti-Juliet anymore. As analytical experience teaches us, the response is likely a signification towards an "unthinkable", too "painful" to even consider, a phenomenal negativity as motive. Thus, she makes the sacrifice.

A similar argument can be made for the avaricious man. Moreover, phenomenal feelings are productions of the Symbolic. As Žižek mentioned, ball crushers, the torturing devices used in Nazi concentration camps, are now used for sado-masochistic pleasure. Note the lack of any moral judgment, rather an allusion at the production of phenomenal feelings, its inescapable relation with the Symbolic.

Perhaps Stirner responds, the case of phenomenal affirmation instead of negation. However, it still hasn't been conceptualized, certainly not by Stirner. It would be irresponsible to reject possibilities, a conception of phenomenal acts not driven by the Imaginary. Yet, Stirner - perhaps the lack of the tools of the time - is incomplete in his pursuit. A problem arises with Egoists taking halt in this

incomplete conception and moving forward with it. Thus, still living in the Imaginary, misconstrued as Ownness.

The Landstreicher Controversy

David Leopold had the only well-acknowledged English translation of Stirner's *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, translated: *The Ego and Its Own*. Until the independent anarchist, Wolfi Landstreicher - hereafter referred to as L - published *The Unique and Its Property*. While having read both, mostly Leopold, if a case was made for the Landstreicher translation as the superior one, I wouldn't mind. That is to say, L is a competent resource for Stirner.

It also serves well to analyze the halted egoist. In the controversial essay, *Child Molestation vs Child Love*, Landstreicher asserts an inversal: Normative love of children as molestation, Normative acts of molestation as love.

A child is scolded, restricted, forced to conform to schedules and social norms, limited, bribed with rewards and threatened with punishments. This is called love. A child is kissed, caressed, played with, gently fondled and given erotic pleasure. This is called molestation. Something is obviously twisted here.¹²

Many anarchists have critiqued the essay, accusing it to be authoritarian and exploitative, all arrows drawn from the moral quiver. What can we say about the essay, with indifference to the moral register? I hope to reveal the immanent contradictions in his claim, also demonstrating the method of immanent ethical analysis.

Immediately, the false dichotomy stands out. Both normative acts of love and normative acts of molestation can be condemned, in light of their mutual exclusivity. Observe that the analysis at hand is uninterested on whether to condemn the practice(s), rather to indicate that the condemnation of the first can extend to the second.

Next, L claims the child-adult dichotomy as "fallacious" on natural grounds.

One of the main dichotomies of this society is the child/adult dichotomy. It has no basis in any real needs or natural ways. It is a totally arbitrary conception which only serves to reinforce authority.¹³

If he implies natural-as-science, as I presume, unless he explicates a new and creative modality of scientific analysis, a child-adult dichotomy does exist. Moreover, he proceeds to impose an inverted dichotomy of child and adult.

The child-lover encourages the free expression of the child's sensuality and so undermines the entire education process. And the child, who has not yet been as repressed as her/his adult lover, helps to break down the repression within the adult.¹⁴

First, to contextualize the word “Love”, as in the Symbolic, which coincides with L’s usage. L is responding to the consent argument, that a child can’t freely consent to sexual intercourse, in this inversal. It overtakes the consent argument, the children as the truly free and the adults as the repressed. Now, there is no objection to the problem itself, rather an inversal that resolves it. L isn’t concerned with mere sex, rather “Love”. What does L implicitly accept? Freedom as a precursor to Love, for it to be Love, it must be “Free”. Whatever that “Freedom” is, at the moment I am unconcerned about the broader imminent contradiction of the signification - Love and Freedom.

A possible joke emerges, immanently, of the case of reverse rape. The repressed adult as a victim of the child. Nonetheless, if L uses “Freedom”, in the Symbolic sense, Freedom in Love allows for the possibility of negation, that a child lacks in their natural susceptibility to persuasion. It also extends to adult relationships, however, that is another conversation. L has no response for it, as the problem of Stirnerian freedom leaves him in limbo.

Finally, as the critical annotators rightfully show, L seeks a return.

For Landstreicher, “child love – molestation – is a ritual with which he can become feral and return to an Adamic state of “beauty and ecstasy”.¹⁵

Is not the return comparable to the image of God, the Ideal-Man? Is not the only difference in the particularity of the conception? The myth of a primitive instinctual essence, the primitive Adamic instinctual as a freedom - a fact even Stirner would oppose.

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The Genius of Nietzsche

Nietzsche, like Stirner, understood the problem of the Free-from. What is the positive proposal of Nietzsche? Radical ontological creation, a creation of values, that which has not existed hitherto. Such an act of creation is juxtaposed against the free-froms that haunt us.

Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? The man who breaks their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker; yet he is the creator.¹⁶

Even posing a God rhetoric, similar to Stirner, more fleshed out.

Now it is clear, God cares only for what is his, busies himself only with himself, thinks only of himself, and has only himself before his eyes; woe to all that is not well-pleasing to him! He serves no higher person, and satisfies only himself. His cause is - a purely egoistic cause.¹⁷

Lonely one, you are going the way of the creator: you would create a god for yourself out of you seven devils.¹⁸

God to be differentiated by creation, not mere egoism, rather creation and adherence to that creation. That is the completion of the contexture for Nietzsche. A destruction of ideas, old tables of values and laws, allowing a Free-from all that has existed hitherto. Then, the creation of the Radical New, a free-for the Radical New. A perpetual (eternal return) repetition of the cycle - the Übermensch.

Free from what? As if that mattered to Zarathusbal! But your eyes should tell me brightly: free for what?¹⁹

It overtakes the problem of Stirner, the problem of any non-theistic action, moral or amoral. How can one know that the act isn't pious? Either normatively or subjectively. Creation of new values overtakes the standstill, for the creator could never be pious. What existed hitherto - that composed the pious. However, the new value, that which had not existed hitherto, can only be non-pious. Certainly, the radical creative act has more to be analyzed, structurally and historically - has it been done before? Even by Nietzsche.

Nonetheless, a possibility has emerged. Atheists no longer have to be pious(?).²⁰

References

1. Stirner M. Stirner: *The Ego and Its Own*. Leopold D, ed. Cambridge University Press; 1995. p. 157. Hereafter referred to as *Ego*.
2. *Ego*, p. 153
3. *Ego*, p. 166
4. *Ego*, p. 170
5. *Ego*, p. 283
6. *Ego*, p. 56
7. *Ego*, p. 70
8. *Ego*, p. 266
9. *Ego*, p. 127
10. *Ego*, p. 164
11. *Ego*, p. 197
12. W. Landstreicher. *Child Molestation vs. Child Love*. p. 1. Hereafter referred to as *Child*.
13. *Child*, p. 1
14. *Child*, p. 2
15. Anarchistnews.org *Molestation vs. Child Love: A Critical Annotation*, p. 7
[Wolfi Landstreicher: Child molestation apologist | anarchistnews.org](http://anarchistnews.org)
16. F. Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. from *The Portable Nietzsche*. W. Kauffman. Hereafter referred to as *TSZ*. p. 135
17. *Ego*, p. 5
18. *TSZ*, p. 177
19. *TSZ*, p. 175
20. A play on the original quote. Our atheists are pious people. *Ego*, p. 166