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A part from Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism
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Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation

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Marsden grappled with the political meaning of egoism during these years and had an ongoing philosophic confrontation with Benjamin Tucker over the question of whether Stirner's egoism leads to individualist anarchism, or to a position that Marsden called "archism," a rejection of the limitations on thought and behavior set by Tucker's notion of "equal liberty." In her view, Stirner's dialectical egoism is more of a justification for a will to power and property, rather than a forerunner of Tucker's concept of equal liberty.

The basic questions this section addresses include, how did Marsden view Stirner and how did she use Stirner's concepts and arguments in her analyses of feminism, culture, and politics, particularly from 1911 to 1914? To what extent is her egoism and "archism," based on or compatible with Stirner's concept of "ownness?" Marsden does not u se Stirner's term, but it is clear that she retains an idea of ownness as she works out a concept of egoism appropriate to the circumstances she analyzed. While Stirner ‘s Hegelianism

was absent in Tucker's work, it reappears in Marsden's writings and theorizing.

Marsden retains a form of the dialectic as she frequently counterposes conflicting ideas and social forces, identifying the "higher presuppositions" resulting from their conflict. In fact, in her political writings, "egoism" and "archism" may be understood as the outcome of the conflict between statism and anarchism, and as the outcome of the conflict between female bondage and feminism .

The first time Marsden comments on Stirner and The Ego and Its Own is in an article entitled, "The Growing Ego," that appeared on August 8, 1912, in The Freewoman. Marsden says that she wants to modify Stirner's concept of god and religion and, by implication, his theory of alienation and reification. In response to a contributor, Marsden promises to subject Stirner's philosophy to a thorough test in a future issue, but argues that the journal needs to gain control over the " penetrative influence" that The Ego and lts Own has on The Freewoman .

The profound truth of Stirner's book must be "put aside" and she must expose the " abrupt and impossible termination of its thesis." She suggests that Stirner destroyed the concepts of ethics, religion, god, and humanity as external powers that dominate the ego. In itself, this was not a particularly profound accomplishment since these concepts were phantoms anyway. If the ego needs the "realization of itself in morality, or religion, or God, then by virtue of its own supremacy, the realization will be forthcoming." The source of the construction of these ghosts or phantoms is the ego. If alienated thoughts are a problem, then the source of the problem is within the ego. There are positive elements, or personalities, in the ego that are realized in the external world and experienced by others. The idea of god is the external reflection of the positive elements in persons.

The idea of god originates from the ego without external mediation and has nothing to do with external authority. She concludes, " [Let us agree with Stirner that God neither postulates nor con-

trols the ego. But the ego does postulate God."l O In this early effort Marsden appears to reject Stirner's multilayered approach to understanding alienation and reification, in favor of a highly nominalistic conception of knowledge. Stirner, the student of Hegel, would never agree that any form of alienation, including the idea of god, has nothing to do with external forces.

Neither does The Ego and Its Own argue that the problems of alienation and reification can be solved just by individuals getting their thinking straight. It is quite clear from Stirner's discussion of antiquity and modernity that socio historical forces have quite a bit to do with concepts of god. Ideas or concepts of god vary greatly with different sociohistorical circumstances, and so does the nature of knowledge and alienation. Marsden initiated an intellectual campaign that was intended to attack all ideas that keep women in a servile position, including the notion that ideas are rooted in external phenomena.

Over time, Marsden modified her own position, however, acknowledging that knowledge i s the result of interaction between the individual and external forces. She soon makes very direct statements about Stirner that demonstrate her intellectual debt to him. In her "Views and Comments" section in the first issue of The Egoist, Marsden objects to a reader's fairly innocent compliment that her journal s have a " Stirnerian" editorial slant. Marsden responds that her "egoistic temper" prevents her from accepting pleasant compliments without a protest when they are undeserved . She says,

> If our beer bears a resemblance in flavor to other brands, it is due to the
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> similarity of taste in the makers . "Stimerian" therefore is not the adjective
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> fittingly to be applied to the egoism of The Egoist. What the appropriate term

> would be we can omit to state. Having said this, we do not seek to minimize
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> the amount of Stirner which may be traced herein. The contrary rather, since
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> having no fear that creative genius folded its wings when Stirner laid d own
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> his pen, we would gladly credit to him – unlike so many of the individualists
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> who have enriched themselves somewhat at his hands- the full measure of
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> his astounding creativeness. For it is not the smallness in measure of what
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> one takes away from genius one admires which is creditable.

She rejects the identification of her journals as Stirnerian based on an objection to "the comedy of discipleship," which places the disciple in a docile, uncritical role of servitude to the wisdom already constructed by the teacher. In Marsden's view, the reduction of her egoist thought to "Stirnerian" was something of a contradiction since it repudiates the new directions and new contributions that unique individuals develop. The form of egoist thought Stirner initiated is not a fully developed, fixed body of know ledge, but more like a stream that The Egoist draws from as appropriate to the topic or to the development of an idea . The Egoist draws from Stirner, not in "thimblefuls ," but in "great pots," because "we recognize his value."

The measure of The Egoist's relationship to Stirner's egoism is found in the critical application of his concepts to cultural and political events, not in an uncritical recitation of quotes and principles .

ideological horizon of solutions to the problems of modernity, especially those associated with urbanism, industrialization, and the concentration and centralization of property. The culture of modernity is the triumph of the logic of embargoism and the spirit of ragamuffinism . The proponents of dispossession wield power and authority, suppressing independence, otherness, and the human drive toward appropriation. Modernity is the generalization and enforcement of dispossession. It is the contradictory philosophy of modernist political ideologies, including socialism and feminism : all persons must be dispossessed of property and power to ensure that all participate in the possession of property and power. It is the systematic reduction of all individuals to ragamuffinhood. "Thus shal l we be when all of us must have nothing so that all may have."

Marsden's reintroduction of Stirner's concept of the ragamuffin illuminates the parallel between the socialist intention to monopolize labor power through the statist appropriation of property and the feminist intention to collectivize the struggles of women. Modernity is the theory and practice of ragamuffinism.

Marsden never produced the test of Stirner's ideas that she promised .

There is ample evidence in her analytical articles of the influence Stirner had on her thought and how she used his concepts in her writings on suffragism, culture, and politics. The examples of articles and cultural topics in which Marsden applies concepts taken from Stirner are legion.

There is a structure to her writing and thinking about culture that reflects a definite Stirnerite approach. First, she writes about many examples of fixed ideas or prevailing cultural values, demonstrating that they present cultu re as an absolute that cannot be questioned and that fixes human relationships into permanent patterns, with individuals subordinate to social institutions. She attacks societal sacred cows such as "duty," "equality," "democracy," "honor," "chastity," " fidelity," "the ten commandments," "morality," "good will," and "humanitarianism." Second, she demonstrates that the prevailing cultural values, or fixed ideas, are oriented toward promoting or elevating collective identities and interests above the autonomy and uniqueness of individuals. The promotion of humanitarianism, goodwill toward others, culture, subordination to social causes, and the state are important examples.

Third, she demonstrates that the promotion of collectivist cultural constructs has an impact on social relationships and individuals. Most significantly, collectivist cultural ideas encourage and legitimate the formation of behavioral monopolies which exclude and punish outsiders and nonconformists . Fourth, the two basic processes in modernity that affect individuals in everyday life are "embargoism" and "ragamuffinism."

Embargoism creates social boundaries that enhance the solidarity and collective identity of an in-group and punishes others. It also places limits on what individuals can and cannot think and do. Ragamuffinism emphasizes the dispossession of property and power from individuals, and the diminution of their independence and self-reliance.For Marsden, culture is (a) society's amalgam of

fixed ideas that function to (b) homogenize behavior and thought by subordinating individuals to external causes, and (c) level persons downward by dispossessing them of property and power. Egoism is the enemy of culture and the state because it challenges "embargoism" and " ragamuffinism" in everyday life.

Fixed ideas become elevated as cultural absolutes because modernity is characterized by alienated thought or the "gadding mind." The thought of individuals in the "normal order" is oriented toward "alien causes" that typically condemn the self to a very limited set of aspirations and expectations. But minds are restless and seek a home in the great causes of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, women's rights, or ethnic purity.

Modernity cultivates a personality archetype Marsden calls the "lean kind" which denies the possession of a self that has desires and aspirations, and gravitates toward causes and movements to fill the void left by the diminutive self. " Leanness" in self, self-interest, and intent to appropriate the world is the preferred quality of individuals in the modern world. In modernity, the assertion of the self with desires is an "embarrassing notion ." Modern individuals have a proclivity to ally, define, and commit themselves to religious, political, and social causes in order to meet a cultural value that enforces servitude to an external force and self sacrifice to an ideal. "Great is the cause and small are men." The greater the cause, and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the cultural approbation.

The greater the cause, the greater the shame in resistance; hence, the greater the punishment.

Marsden uses many examples in her writings that demonstrate how fixed ideas function to subordinate persons to causes and social institutions.

One example that reappears in her writing is clearly derived from Stirner: property and the dispossession of individuals. Like Stirner and Tucker, Marsden is extremely concerned about the d ivide between rich and poor, the possessors and the dispossessed. She is particularly interested in understanding how the dispos-

The cultural elite of modernity promotes ragamuffinism as " the right thing" because it hates the thought of its alternative: the independence of the labor power of individuals and its corollary, responsibility for one's own life. The last thing the leadership of the unions, the guilds, the socialist political parties, and the feminist organizations want is "widespread individual ownership." The problems of labor cannot be solved by the "monopolization of labor power" by the unions and the state, but the trend toward monopolization and ragamuffinism has deep historical roots . Marsden argues that there is an inherent difficulty in the culture of modernity, or in modern civilization. Culture, modernity; and civilization take the "pugnacious energy" out of people, men and women alike.

Faced with the rigors of nature, they have not the audacious pertinacity of more primitive peoples. The great mass of men are only too glad to creep under the sheltering arm of the few who prove relatively daring, no matter on what ignominious terms of dependence, rather than face the task of justifying their existence by maintaining it. They feel safer, herded together, all mutually responsible, and none wholly responsible.

The culture of modernity is comprised of the "logic of embargoism" and the "spirit of ragamuffinism." Embargoism is the intentional exclusion and punishment of nonconformity, independence, and autonomy.

Ragamuffinism is the gleeful self-dispossession of property and power.

Both embargoism and ragamuffinism elevate what Marsden calls "humanitarianism" and what Stirner calls "humanism." It is the idea that human collectives are inviolable facts, not concepts, and should be revered and served. "Timid hearts and feeble minds have made common cause to raise up false gods."

Socialism, suffragism, and feminism are expressions of humanitarianism because they all enforce the notion that the "cause is great and the person is small." The logic of embargoism and the spirit of ragamuffinism characterize the cultural values and the

Labor power is fundamentally the power of one's own mind and body, which individuals have a monopoly over in a presocial and prepolitical environment. No one else can use an individual's labor power except through coercion or the individual's submission to external directives.

The evolving problem with capitalism is the concentration and centralization of productive property, leaving the mass of workers with nothing but their labor power to earn a living. Socialism has a simplistic appeal to the dispossessed and those fearing dispossession. The practical meaning of a "monopoly of labor power," the vision of the socialist alternative, is the forcible imposition of an embargo on free labor, or labor that exists outside the control of unions or labor guilds.

What then does this acquiring of a monopoly of labor power, which is to be carried through by the guilds, mean? If it cannot be a war of defense, it must be a war of aggression. This is exactly what it turns out to be. It is an attempt to lay an embargo upon the exercising of the labor power possessed by those outside the guild, a very frank attempt to establish a tyranny.

The origin of this collectivist tyranny is in the attack on free labor and the advocacy by socialist unions and political parties for "vesting all properties, land, mines, railways and the like in the hands of the state." Socialist ideology also promotes limiting access to the use of these properties through a "partnership between workmen and the state," ensuring that workers are "into the union or starve." The goal of socialist ideology is to create an environment in which the state guarantees that nothing stands between the "monopoly of labor power " and the ability of the individual to survive physically. The objective of the unions, the guilds, and the social ist movement is to redu ce people to ragamuffins by dispossessing them of the "labor power" they inherently possess and transferring it to the state. The wage-slavery of capital ism is replaced by the wage-slavery of socialism.

sessed are so easily pacified. She argues that cultural values such as "honesty" have a social control function that is especially directed at the poor since it encourages a "righteous frenzy for the maintenance of the status quo in regard to property." The distribution of property and power is always in flux in the social process, or the war of each against all .

By elevating and inculcating the value of honesty in the hearts and minds of persons modernist culture pacifies anger and resentment as individuals are dispossessed of property and power. Honesty becomes a fixed and absolute guide for the behavior of the rich and poor a like, but it deprives the poor of alternative or insurrectionary means to assert their interests and appropriate property and power. The cultural value of honesty is a weapon that the possessors use against the dispossessed to protect the existing class structure. It is an element of ideological warfare that protects the supremacy of the possessors.

Once property is seized in the war of each against all, the possessors work to make the divide permanent and legitimate. The state is an important actor in this process since it threatens and employs physical force to keep the dispossessed at bay. Culture is also important since it creates the internal police to keep the dispossessed from asserting their self-interests.

What was once in flux, becomes fixed, static, and permanent.

Culture instills the "great principles" of a society as the state and the possessors intend; it "inculcates the properly submissive state of mind" which the dispossessed are req ired to "carry into effect." The resources available for individual self-assertion in modernity are extremely limited . It is the role of cultu re to protect and defend the limits placed on the egoism of persons. It says, "this far and no farther." Culture, like the state, functions on the "embargo principle" by defining what persons can and cannot do, say, and think. It imposes an embargo on behaviors that test the limits of action and speech. It punishes the persons who defy the embargo.

Culture differs from the state in that its demarcation of acceptable from unacceptable behaviors is reinforced by "thou ought" and "thou ought not" prescriptions that are beyond examination and critique. Culture imposes morality on persons whose proclivities are toward egoism and resistance.

Culture's function is to compose paeans of praise to the great gods, and build a system of embargos the codes of behavior for the small persons whose gods are of such trifling proportions as to confer on their creators nothing more than the status of weeds.

The purpose of culture is to fix behavior. It is the accumulation of thought and artifact that is no longer vibrant, virile, or creative. It serves the extant, ancient, and decrepit. Culture is opposed, not by static thought, but by thinking, which is the process of destroying or replacing thought.

All that is vibrant, virile, and creative is at war with culture and its synonym, thought. Thinking is the initial means by which persons fight the war with culture and thought. Culture is contested terrain. Its goal is to fix human behavior, but it is also continually challenged by persons who are not happy about their dispossession.

In modernity, culture has little to say about "individual fighting," one of its most descriptive and depressing features. Discourse and behavior are "fitted to social custom" and place the premium on commonality, safety, and compliance, not autonomy, challenge, and struggle. Marsden frequently begins her discussions by introducing a concept or quote from Stirner and relating it to events or controversies in Great Britain. She provides an in-depth discussion of Stirner in the "Views and Comments" section of the September 1, 1913, issue of The New Freewoman which offers a critique of the influence of socialist ideology on the feminist movement in Great Britain. This essay develops her concept of "embargoism" and reintroduces Stirner's concept of the "ragam u ffin." Marsden describes The Ego and Its Own in this essay as "the most powerful work that has ever emerged from a single human mind .

She says that Stirner's work has contemporary relevance to socialism and feminism in part because his notion of the " ragamuffin" aptly describes the type of person that these movements were attempting to create in the early twentieth century. In Stirner's critique of social liberalism and humanism, the ragamuffin is the person who is propertyless and powerless, and who embraces the status of dispossession. Marsden summarizes the ragamuffin:

> He is the ideal citizen, the pattern in whose presence the defective property owning ones feel themselves rightly under reproach. The nobler among these latter are merely hesitating in their choice of the best means of divesting themselves of their property that they may become ragamuffins too, when they will have become good citizens – no longer a menace to the equal authority of the state.

Marsden argues that socialism and the labor movement collude to make ragamuffinhood the normal circumstance in democratic, industrial societies. Their collusion with suffragism and feminism has devastating implications for individual autonomy from the state and collectivist constructs of culture. In opposition to socialist and labor arguments that the path to overcoming wage-slavery under capitalism is the consolidation of a productive property into a monopoly owned by the state, Marsden argues that deprivation is still deprivation regard less of whether it is the state or the capitalist who deprives labor of power, property, and its rightfu learnings.

The true spirit of the ragamuffin is espoused by labor, socialist, and feminist advocates alike who make property lessness the " foundation-stone of their new Utopia." The promise by socialists and labor advocates is that the new "property" of the ragamuffins is the "monopoly of their own labor power" which, ultimately, is to be appropriated and allocated by the state in the interest so f all. The promise is not matched by the fact that the state appropriates and allocates in its own interests.