

Altruism

Post by “Julia” of October 3, 2024 at 5:01 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's kind of the distinction I see in the Stirner quote. the first part I identify with, but "I have a fellow-feeling with every feeling being, and their torment torments, their refreshment refreshes me too" comes pretty close to total idealism in my book.

Much has been lost in translation, partly due to Stirners quite idiosyncratic use of German even for the time (early 1840s), partly due to shifts in both German and English, which changed connotations since then. As such, my translation to modern English would be:

Max Stirner in *The Unique and Their Selfownership*: I love humans, too; not just specific ones, but everyone. But I love them with the conscious awareness of an Egoist; I love them, because love itself makes me happy; I love, because loving comes natural to me, because it pleases me. I know no "commandment of love." I have empathy with every feeling being, and their agony torments, their recreation refreshes me.

Stirner knew about the Epicureans, but had various misconceptions, some of which are common to this day.[1]. In my mind, Stirner - by chance - partially reinvented the wheel, albeit from a different framing and with new vocabulary, and in doing so did something loosely akin to[2] expanding upon Classical Epicureanism by applying it to modern economy, the state and law. Engels (Marx's companion) was his adversary, mischaracterised him at every chance and slandered him in a poem (rhymes lost in translation):

Look at Stirner, see him, the thoughtful hater of barriers
For now he drinks beer, soon he'll drink blood like water
Like others wildly yell: "Get rid of the king!"
He swiftly adds: "And get rid of laws, as well!"

To me, Stirner and Epicurus parallel each other even in the lengths their adversaries went to in suppressing their ideas 😞 Anyhow. I digress! All I meant to say was: [Cassius](#) , I disagree, because Stirner was very outspokenly against ideology, and what he really wanted to say with that passage is, if I may paraphrase: "Just because I embrace my own *egoism*, just because I am *unapologetic and transparent about doing what gives me pleasure*, doesn't mean I'm any less empathic or compassionate than you are; the opposite might well be true!" I dare say, that could just as well be proclaimed by an Epicurean like yourself 😊

[1] Stirner once referred to an article by Feuerbach, which in turn contains the figurative(!) passage "[the ideas] move around in the empty space of his own self like Epicurean atoms [...]". From this, I assume that Epicureans were well-known amongst The Free Ones, the informal group Stirner was part of. As far as I remember this was before Stirner's *The Unique* was published. Also five years prior to Stirner's *The Unique* is published, Feuerbach passes a fleeting remark about Epicureans in section 29 of his treatise *On Criticism Of Hegel's Philosophy*; I would expect Stirner to have read that. Later, Kropotkin explicitly notes the similarity between Epicurean thought and Stirner in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1910. Stirner himself mentioned Epicureans, including some nomenclature like "Ataraxia" a few times in *The Unique*. Therein, he both bundles Epicureans with Stoics and delineates them from each other, but does not appear to fully grasp Epicureans: He relates the descriptive state of Ataraxia to the prescriptive action of Stoic bravery/imperturbability, and seems to think Epicureans consider the world and it's people as much their mortal enemy as Stoics do, except that Epicureans also want to have a good time by tricking the very thing they reject into giving them pleasure. That is a rather wild mischaracterisation of wanting to, for example, stay out of politics, live a calm life, prepare for eventualities, and so forth. I think he fell prey to the "Epicureans are just hedonistic Stoics" narrative. Stirner died 20 years prior to DeWitt being born.

[2] "loosely akin to", because he didn't do this on purpose, and – as said in [1] – seems to have somewhat misunderstood Epicureans, but partially reinvented the wheel with a different focus, thus often coming up with parallel results.