

Enlightened Selfishness

The world justly condemns stupid selfishness, but when the world concludes that all sorts of selfishness are wrong and debasing, then the world itself is stupid. Enlightened selfishness leads a man not to wrong his neighbor or him self, while stupid or ignorant selfishness induces one to harm both himself and others. We have all been taught that to be selfish is to be base. We have learned to abhor the word selfishness, and it seems at first sight, that anyone who will try to make out that even enlightened selfishness is the real guiding power of human life, is attempting to corrupt us with error.

Most people cannot see how selfishness can take the place of morality, duty, and religion. In the first place a large part of the race does not rise high enough in the scale of intelligence to see that very many of the most familiar words are without meaning. They are worse than a mouldy chestnut; for even it has some sort of substance within, but the words God, heaven, morality, duty, are not words that have anything inside. They are absolutely empty, and void as a burst bubble, but the stupidly selfish are receiving them for face value. They are the bank paper of banks that never had anything more than an imaginary existence.

It is plain that blind selfishness seeks for immediate pleasure – it riots in overdoing the pleasure act, while intelligent selfishness takes a broad survey of life, and aims to secure the more elevating and lasting pleasures. Intelligent selfishness does not induce one to conform to justice and equal freedom from any sense of duty, but because it pays best to do so. There is no such thing as “duty.” It is a figment of the brain, a fancy, a word-ghost. When the phantom-god is dissolved in the crucible

of science, there are no grounds on which duty can rest. After the phantom-god has left the mind, man rationally turns to find his greatest happiness. Duty implies obligation, but to whom are you obliged? Echo answers "to whom?"

The Christian will say "you are in duty bound to tell the truth." But there is no duty at all in the matter. It is a question of expediency. The intelligent individual holds truth in high esteem because it contributes to human happiness. It does not pay to lie. The experience of mankind has established a consensus on truthfulness, but as a "virtue," or "duty," the consensus has fixed no definite standard respecting it. There is no standard of truth. You are responsible concerning truth, for yourself and only to yourself. You owe no obligation to any other human being, but your intelligent selfishness will lead you to pay due regard to the so-called cardinal virtues, as they lie close to the path that leads to the greatest happiness. The ray of light that falls on the path of every mortal is happiness.

Some people drink so little from the cup of joy, that in their despair hope points them to another and better world beyond this life, where happiness is supreme and constant; there are others who are content with the consolations of this basement world. But all alike, saint and sinner, are moved by the selfish desire of happiness. The minister has a call from Georgetown with an increase of \$500 in his salary. He leaves Jamestown, and goes to Georgetown. Like Moses, he has "respect unto the recompense of the reward." He still retains his title to mansions in the skies. Just a little selfish. Ministers and laymen are conscious of a genuine thrill of joy when you hold up before their possible grasp of the "Almighty Dollar."

If one clearly comprehends the nature intelligent selfishness he will not find it difficult to understand Anarchism, but until he can

clearly see that the spur-wheel in the machinery of human life is selfishness, he has not yet learned the “a b c” of Anarchism. If he admits selfishness to be the constant motive, but decries it, he has yet to fix his attention upon the nature of selfishness seeking the highest happiness of the individual through the recognition of equal freedom.

W. S. BELL in June 1890 issue of “Egoism”