

# THE EGOIST

## NOTES AND NOTIONS

Race and Ego - S. E. Parker

In his recent work *The Utopia of Instincts* Dr Richard Swartzbaugh considers race to be a development of egoism. He considers that the idea of race is not properly a question of the classification of biological, psychological and cultural differences, but is a recent phenomenon. It is, he contends, a reaction to the "impersonality" generated by the growth of technics in industrial societies. Since the white race is the most technologically developed of all the races it is among its members that true racial awareness has first arisen. The origin of "racism" is to be found in egoism. He writes:

"Self-effacement is the fundamental contradiction in human life and the one which, extended from technics and narrowly technical social relations to social relations in general, becomes morality. The original technological impulse develops directly into the moral impulse, which is the terminal phase of human self-alienation.

"The history of the human species is not complete, however, without the consideration that there develops, slowly at first but then with ascending intensity, a resistance to this self-effacement, which is here called egoism.

"The ego is not limited to the individual but can possess whole groups, from the tiny family, the primary ego group, to the tribe and finally the race."

Swartzbaugh's concept of race is a Hegelian one and seems oddly at variance with his profession of anthropologist. He states, for example, that "race is a step... in the movement of nature towards defined form" and it is "more than an alliance, it is a phase in the movement of nature towards self-consciousness or perfectly focussed egoism."

This is metaphysical mumbo-jumbo. To attribute to "nature", which is merely an abstract noun, the potentialities of "self-consciousness" is nothing more than an invocation of the "ghost of God" dressed up in a new shroud. There is not one scrap of evidence that can be produced in its favour, nor does Swartzbaugh attempt to offer any. Consciousness is a characteristic of only certain animal species and in its conceptual form, as a formulated awareness of the distinction between me and not-me, is confined to human beings.

Swartzbaugh maintains that it is "a common mistake by philosophers... to equate the ego with the solitary person... This is far from the truth. Where the ego must pass from one human lifespan to the succeeding one, it necessarily creates in the process the primary ego group, the parental or nuclear family... but more than this, where provoked... the ego may break out of the confines of the original family to form a greater ego group... the race."

Swartzbaugh does not show how this mysterious migration of my particular ego from one lifespan to another takes place. However, long before modern research established the biochemical uniqueness of individuals, Dr. James L. Walker effectively disposed of the belief that one can transmit one's ego to one's offspring. In *The Philosophy of Egoism* he writes:

"Men flatter themselves that they can perpetuate themselves and not merely the race; a simple error, for if we allow half the effect to each parent the result is that A's offspring is half A; his grandchild is one-fourth A; his great grandchild is one-eighth A; the next generation is one-sixteenth A, and thus (ultimately) his descendants will have nothing more in common with him than any of the individuals of his race."

And this is to consider the question only at the biological level! The mind boggles when considering how the "Stirnerian ego" (Swartzbaugh claims to have been heavily influenced by Stirner), the "who" of me, can be passed into the "who" of another, for that which is uniquely mine cannot be transferred to anyone else. When I die I die.

I do not deny that racial differences exist, nor that being of the Caucasian race is one of my qualities. These are facts which have to be taken into account if I want to see things clearly. The cult of ethno-masochism whose adherents ask for punishment because of the colour of their skins, or because of misdeeds allegedly committed in the past by others of the same racial stock, is not my scene. Race as a neo-Hegelian and purposive category, however, is a different matter. I no more accept its existence than I do race elevated into some kind of mystical soul, or race as a source of pseudo-identity for those who seek to gain a power that is not their own. Having rid myself of the delusion of equality I am not about to take on other delusions in its place.

## The Sin of Selfishness

Selfishness, the putting of one's own interests before those of others, is a stock subject for denunciation by Christian preachers, as anyone who listens to religious broadcasts on the radio can testify. But even those who have ostensibly discarded the supernaturalism of Christianity and other traditional religions still shudder at the idea that I could deliberately place myself at the centre of my life.

Humanists are prominent among these. They lay such emphasis on "the human" as a normative concept that it comes as no surprise to find that they are opposed to selfishness and urge that, as one of their leaflets puts it, we must live "considerately and unselfishly". Wherever a moral code exists – and humanists are, par excellence, moralists – there is always included a command to deny oneself in order to benefit others. Selfishness is a sin and altruism must take precedence over egoism in our motives.

This attitude is exemplified in the works of the well-known humanist writer, the late Margaret Knight. In her book *Morals Without Religion* she states that "it is natural for us to be to a large extent self-centred and to be hostile towards people who obstruct us in getting what we want", but it is "also natural for us to co-operate with other people, and to feel affection and sympathy for them. In more technical terms, we have both egoist and social instincts which may pull us in different ways."

Note that she assumes that egoists can neither feel affection or sympathy for others, nor cooperate with them. She gives no reason as to why she thinks this way, but is content to echo the usual Judeo-Christian prejudice against egoism.

Now, if I feel affection or sympathy for someone because it pleases me to do so, or if I co-operate with others because I see in it an expedient way of serving my interests, how am I being less of an egoist – less "selfish" – than if I am hostile to someone who is a threat to me, or enter into conflict with those whose interests are contrary to mine? Whether I love or hate, co-operate or conflict, I am serving myself, seeking my satisfaction. Whether I behave one way or the other I do so out of conscious egoism.

Knight writes "the essence of humanist morality is *disinterestedness* – not letting our own claims and interests blind us to other people's". Why my "own claims and interest" must necessarily blind me to other people's she, again, does not say. Once more she assumes that I can only favour my own interests at the expense of others' interests. Not only this, but her statement logically leads to the conclusion that I ought not to have any personal interest in anyone else. According to the Oxford Dictionary to be "disinterested" means to be "without interest; not interested; unconcerned... free from self-seeking". Thus, according to Margaret Knight, it would be immoral for me to take an interest in another individual for I would thereby cease to be "disinterested" and become "self-seeking". I would be guilty of the terrible sin of selfishness! Well might Max Stirner ironically observe that "the hard fist of morality treats the noble nature of egoism altogether without compassion".

Egoism, in the guise of self-interest, is subjected to a similar misrepresentation in her later book *Honest to Man*. Here she claims that "the Christian religion has been led through most of its history to proclaim... a code of morality that is in its essence completely self-interested. It has encouraged a self-centred pre-occupation with one's own salvation".

This is a fundamental misconception of what Christians believe. The "self" with which they are concerned is not the self who I am here and now, but a "redeemed" self, a remade self, made over in the image of what they think I ought to be. Christian teaching is not egocentric, as even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows. It is allocentric as the words attributed to Jesus in Luke 9, 23, clearly show: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Here is the quintessence of unselfishness – the demand to deny one's self in the service of "the other". In their opposition to selfishness humanists and Christians are at one. To serve "Humanity" is as unselfish as to serve "God".

## Rights and Rights

"Rights" are very much to the fore in the political clamour of today. "Women's rights", "black rights", "gay rights", "trade union rights", the "rights" of X, Y and Z – all have vociferous groups busily engaged in demanding, defending or inventing them.

What the bases for these "rights" are, however, is seldom spelled out. Indeed, I doubt if the vast majority of those who shout for them would react with more than a blank look if they were asked such a question. There is one view, which a few may know, which holds that "rights" are bestowed upon us by "nature" and are therefore "inalienable". Rights, it appears, are objective things, and if there are some nasty people who do not acknowledge this, who, indeed, "them underfoot", this does not alter their "essence".

This belief in "natural" or "inalienable" rights is no more than an act akin to the old belief that the moon was made of green cheese. An "inalienable right to life" does not save me from drowning if I cannot swim. An "inalienable right to free speech" will not save me from a

dictator's prison or firing squad if I try to exercise it against his decree. Such "rights" are delusions which crumble at the first contact with reality.

In fact, of course, that "right" prevails which has the most might behind it. As it was succinctly put by Ragnar Redbeard: "'Man has the right to subsistence', wrote Thomas Paine. 'Yes', replied an observant reader, 'he has a right to live 1000 years, if he can'. It is not a question of right, but of ability."

If I do not have the *competence* to obtain or do something then, no matter how I might huff and puff, I have no "right" to have or do that thing. Thomas Carlyle once observed that what are called "the rights of man" are really the "mights of men". How right he was about "rights"!

### Lucifer's Lexicon

The use of wit to puncture presence is an age-old part of the intellectual weaponry of scepticism, but it must be used sparingly if it is to retain its effectiveness. To collect into one volume a series of satirical definitions is, therefore, to run the risk of producing something of a hit or miss production. Ambrose Bierce's famous *Devil's Dictionary* probably owes its success to having enough hits to outweigh its misses, but it is a work to sample briefly from time to time rather than to read through.

The same can be said about L.A.Rollin's *Lucifer's Lexicon* recently published by Loompanics Unlimited (PO Box 1197, Port Townsend, IVA 98368, USA). Sparkling entries like "Racist: n, One who calls a spade a spade..." or "Objectivist: n, A person of unborrowed vision, who never places any consideration above his own perception of reality, who never does violence to his own rational judgement, and who, as a result, agrees completely with Ayn Rand in everything," contrast with rather boring examples of juvenile humour such as a long list of excruciating puns on film titles. Rollin's book, however, has enough of the former to more than counterbalance the latter to make it worth getting.

### EXTRACTS ON EGOISM

Max Stirner

(In *Wigand's Quarterly*, Vol 3, 1845, Stirner replied to three critics of *The Ego And His Own* – Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, and "Szeliga". The following extracts on egoism are taken from a translation of part of this reply by Frederick M. Gordon that appeared in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol VIII, Nos 2-4, published by the Dept of Philosophy, Boston University, USA. They complement my remarks on selfishness that appear on pages 3-5 of this issue. It should be noted that Stirner refers to himself in the third person. S.E.P.)

The reviewers show still more anger at the "egoist" than at the "unique". Instead of trying to get close to the meaning of egoism as Stirner understands it, they stick with the customary conception of it that they have had since childhood, and read off the list of sins familiar to all. See here egoism, the ghastly sin – that's what Stirner "commends"!

Stirner ventures to say that Feuerbach, Hess and Szeliga are egoists. With that, Stirner of course makes the identical judgement as when he says that Feuerbach does absolutely nothing but what is Feuerbachian, that Hess does nothing but what is Hessian, and that Szeliga does nothing save what is Szeliganlan. Nonetheless, only Stirner has given them the completely notorious title.

Does Feuerbach live in some other than his own world? Does he live perhaps in Hess's, in Szeliga's, in Stirner's world? Isn't the world, just because Feuerbach lives in it, the world that surrounds him, the world that is thought, experienced, contemplated by Feuerbach? He lives not merely in the centre of it, but is its centre himself, he is the centre of his world. And as with Feuerbach, so no-one lives in another than his own world; as with Feuerbach, so is everyone the centre of his world. World is really only what one is not oneself, but what belongs to one, what stands in a relationship to one, what is for one. Around you everything turns: you are the centre of the the outer world and the centre of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your power of conception, and what you grasp is your own by your mere grasping. You, unique one, are unique only together with "your property".

Meanwhile you do not avoid the fact that what is your own is at the same time its own or has its own being, a unique being like you. In this you lose yourself in sweet self-forgetfulness.

But if you forget yourself, do you then completely disappear? If you do not think of yourself do you altogether cease to be? When you look into the eyes of your friend, or contemplate some happiness which you might cause him, when you gaze at the stars, ponder their laws, or when you send affectionate greetings to someone who has the same feeling for you, when you lose yourself in the microscopic movements of some tiny form of life, when you without any thought of danger rush to save someone from fire or drowning: In such cases you do not, of course, "think" of yourself, you "forget" yourself. But are you only when you think of yourself,

and do you pass away when you forget yourself? Do you only exist through self-consciousness? Who doesn't forget himself every minute; who doesn't lose sight of himself a thousand times an hour?

This self-forgetfulness, this losing of oneself, is indeed only a mode of our gratification, is only the enjoyment of our world, our property, our worldly enjoyment.

Not in this self-forgetting, but in the forgetting of this, that the world is our world, does unselfishness, i.e. false egoism, have its basis. Before an absolute, a "higher" world, you throw yourself down and throw yourself away. Unselfishness is not self-forgetting in the sense that one does not think of oneself and is not engaged with oneself, but in another sense, that one forgets the "our" of the world, that one forgets that one is the centre or owner of this world, that it is our property. The fear and timidity shown towards the world as a "higher" world is the most disheartened, "submissive" egoism, egoism in the form of the slave, who does not dare to grumble, who remains still and "denies himself" – it is self-denial.

Our world and the holy world – in that lies the difference between affirmative egoism and self-denying, unconfessed, incognito, sneaking egoism.

Fraudulent egoism consists therefore of the belief in an absolute interest, an interest that does not spring from the egoist, i.e. from one who is self-interested, but from an "eternal interest" which is imperious against the interest of the egoist and which firmly maintains itself. This egoism is "fraudulent" because the egoist's interests, "private interests", are not just ignored, they are damned. It remains nonetheless "egoism" because he takes up this alien or absolute interest only in the hope that it will make him happy.

This absolute interest which would be interesting though disinterested, which thus, instead of being a concern of a unique individual, is rather looking just for a "vessel for its glory", or for men who would be its "tools and instruments", Stirner simply calls "the holy". The holy is in fact the absolutely uninteresting for it lays claim to the interesting only if no one has an interest in it. It is also the "general", i.e. subjectless interest, because it is not a unique interest, the interest of a unique individual. In other words, this "general interest" is more than you – is something "higher". It also exists independent of you – it is something absolute. It is an interest for itself – something alien to you. The demand is put to you to serve it, and it finds you fully willing if you let yourself be infatuated.

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The word *wrong* is a variation upon the past participle of the verb to *wring*, to twist. Victor and vanquished are two, and the moralist simply looks away from the facts of life when he preaches a universal natural right and ignores individuals with their various wants and powers and the probability that what is good to one may entail some ill upon another.

James L. Walker

## **INDIVIDUALITY**

Pio Baroja

The individual is the only real thing in nature and in life.

Neither the species, the genus, nor the race, actually exists; they are abstractions, terminologies, scientific devices, useful as syntheses but not entirely exact. By means of these devices we can discuss and compare; they constitute a measure for our minds to use, but have no external reality.

Only the individual exists through himself and for himself. I am, I live, is the sole thing a man can affirm.

The categories and divisions arranged for classification are like a series of squares an artist places over a drawing to copy it by. The lines of the square may cut the lines of the sketch; but they will cut them not in reality but only in the artist's eye.

In humanity, as in all of nature, the individual is the one thing. Only individuality exists in the realm of life and in the realm of spirit.

Individuality is not to be grouped or classified. Individuality simply cannot fit into a pigeon-hole, and it all the further from fitting if the pigeon-hole is shaped according to an ethical principle. Ethics is a poor tailor to clothe the body of reality.

The individual is not logical, or good, or just; nor is he any other distinct thing; and this through the force of his own fatal actions, through the influence of the deviation in the earth's axis, or for whatsoever other equally amusing cause. Every thing individual is always found mixed, full of absurdities of perspective and picturesque contradictions – contradictions

and absurdities that shock us, because we insist on submitting individuals to principles which are not applicable to them.

If instead of wearing a cravat and a bowler hat, we wore feathers and a ring in our nose, all our moral notions would change.

People of today, remote from nature and nasal rings, live in an artificial moral harmony which does not exist except in the imagination of those ridiculous priests of optimism who preach from the columns of the newspapers. This imaginary harmony makes us abhor the contradictions, the incongruities of individuality; at least it forces us not to understand them.

Only when individual discord ceases, when the attributes of an exceptional being are lost, when the mould is spoiled and becomes vulgarized and takes on a common character, does it obtain the appreciation of the multitude.

This is logical; the dull must sympathize with the dull; the vulgar and usual have to identify themselves with the vulgar and usual.

From *Caesar or Nothing*, 1919

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## ENDPIECES

The Bishop of Liverpool has received a gas bill for £500...

If you haven't got any power you have to resort to principles.

Two social workers came upon an old lady lying in the gutter having been mugged. Said one to the other: How dreadful! I wonder what we can do to help whoever did this...

The Reverend Lord Soper became an atheist when at Cambridge University. At the same time he developed boils. These disappeared when his faith returned. (Atheists of the world regain your faith! You have nothing to lose but your boils!)

### The Bishop of Birmingham

Of course, people have always been selfish, but at least at one time they used to be more hypocritical about it (and it was easier for us to make them feel guilty about it – but, woe is me, since Margaret Thatcher has got into power she has gone and given the game away...)

"Hello this is Radio Rattleon, broadcasting on 284 meters, mediocre wave. This morning's religious reflections are by delightful Delia Do-a-lot."

Delia Do-a-lot: "And a very Gawd-filled morning to you. My friends, isn't it very clear that humanity earnestly, sincerely, from the bottom of its heart, desires peace?... chatter, blah, Gawd, chatter, blah, Gawd, chatter..."

Announcer: "Thank you, Ms Do-a-lot. Now here is the latest news with details of violence, rapes, hi-jacks, military coups, civil wars, etc., etc..."

A majority decision is a vindication of democracy if we happen to agree with it. It is an expression of mass stupidity if we don't...

Endpieces ended

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There's always an easy solution to every human problem, neat, plausible – and wrong.

H.L. Mencken