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EGOISM AND SOCIAL SENSE

By GUSTAV THIBON

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I do not intend to moralise here on the notion of egoism, which is particularly imprecise. I am willing to concede that love is but an enlarged egoism and that all men are necessarily egoists: the 'disinterested' are those beings who pursue higher interests.

They are rare. The egoism of most men is terribly narrow: it stops short at the individual and does not, in most cases, bring in even the family or small group. It would be puerile to ask the 'man in the street' to sacrifice his personal and immediate interest, or to temper the pursuit of it, for the increase of the common good or for universal order. This narrow egoism of the mass of individuals, with all that it threatens of anarchy, is at once the stumbling-block and the key-stone of political wisdom.

Social institutions, it may be objected, do not change this egoism in the least; men are the same under all regimes: so all regimes are the same.

The argument is valid if what is meant is that all regimes are imperfect. Let us think this over. Morally, it may be that all egoisms are valid. It remains, however, that, *socially*, certain forms of egoism (in particular that of men whose desire for power shows itself inside the vital framework of family, business or country) are conservative and fruitful, while others prove disorganising and wasteful. The peasant — a type which no longer exists! — whom avarice bends day and night to the soil, a task-master voracious of activity, is an egoist. A cosmopolitan financier, a corrupt demagogue, a parasitic official, a social pensioner whose sole concern is to drain the state cow to the maximum possible, these are egoists. It is not a question of passing a moral verdict on these different egoisms; it is enough to establish that some of them administer to the collective harmony and prosperity while others do the opposite. If that is so, it is easy to understand that institutions which foster and increase anti-social egoism stand self-condemned.

* * *

The vast majority of men are indifferent to the common good: their vision is too short and their hearts too hard for it to be possible to create in them a superior egoism. There is no use to bewail this divorce between private and public interest. What is necessary is to see whether these two interests may not, perhaps, be brought into harmony with one another. The first intent of a *sane* institution is to bend individual egoism to the service of the common good and to bring private interest and social duty to coincide in as great a measure as possible.

How can we make towards this harmony? By such an organisation of the state as will make each individual who

may be wanting in regard to his social mission necessarily the object of *organic* and *immediate* sanctions.

It is clear that even in the most material sphere, the conflict between the personal and the general interests must be only apparent and provisional; in the last analysis the individual cannot serve his own interest without also serving that of the collectivity upon which he depends. Reciprocally, he cannot act against the common good without at the same time injuring himself. . . . Sooner or later, social and economic egoism is penalised. Only, among the many sanctions possible for such egoisms, there are those which are *near*, and to that extent effectual, and those which are *remote*, and correspondingly inoperative. The farmer who neglects to give sufficient care to his crops or to his herds, the monarch who, because of his indifference or tyranny, brings his people to ruin, both receive *personal* and *prompt* correction. But an indolent clerk, on the contrary, an official who, by the aid of deceits more or less conscious, raids the hidden and distant hoard, the irresponsible and impermanent Minister, these are not overtaken by any sanction short of a profound social catastrophe, e.g., the collapse of the currency or of the state, revolution, etc., the consequences of which they may personally be well able to escape. Sanctions so remote, eventual and impersonal, have no power to check effectually the anti-social tendencies of individuals as such. Something more is necessary than the vague and distant threat of a universal deluge in order to keep men to their humble duty.

Unfortunately, the modern organisation of the state tends more and more to leave place only for those sanctions which instead of warning and correcting individuals at the time of their first infraction of the common good can be brought to bear against the individuals responsible only after an irreparable exhaustion of the material and moral resources of the whole state. The rise of statism, the increasing conversion of all citizens into mere functionaries, makes considerably worse this dislocation between the immediate and the collective interests of the individual in proportion as they suppress the vital urge in every social sphere, modern institutions empty sanctions of that close and direct character which alone makes them operative and salutary.

* * *

To say that is not to doubt the existence of a sense of right in the people. The people have a profound sense of right, but of a limited right, carnal, unceasingly incarnated in

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The Mastery of the Event

For ruin and the deeds precluding change,
Fear not great Beasts, nor Eagles when they range;
But dread the crawling worm and pismire mean,
Satan selects them, for they are unseen.

George Meredith: *The Shaving of Shagpat*.

* * *

If we were asked to suggest one sound reason why the English would not, despite their manifest qualifications, fulfil the early promise of their centuries, we might say: "Because of their aversion from Allegory." This two-edged sword of truth in which even the Celtic pit-boy revels, demands continuous concentration. Not even King George's well-merited advertisement could make *The Pilgrim's Progress* popular. Nor was Shagpat popular, as it ought to be with us, since it concerns the Mastery of The Event. Shibli Bagarag (of Shiraz) mastered The Event: he shaved Shagpat.

"The chronicles relate, that no sooner had he mastered the Event, than men on the instant perceived what illusion had beguiled them, and, in the words of the poet,—

The blush with which their folly they confess
Is the first prize of his supreme success.

Even Bootbac, the drum-beater, drummed in homage to him, and the four Kings were they that were loudest in their revilings of the spouse of Kadza, and most obsequious in praises of the Master. The King of the City was fain to propitiate his people by a voluntary resignation of his throne to Shibli Bagarag, and the King took well to heart the wisdom of the sage, when he says:

Power, on Illusion based, o'ertoppeth all;
The more disastrous is its certain fall!

Surely Shibli Bagarag returned the Sword to the Sons of Aldis, flashing it in midnight air, and they, with the others, did reverence to his achievement. They were now released from the toil of sharpening the Sword a half-cycle of years, to wander in delight on the fair surface of the flowery earth, breathing its roses, wooing its brides; for the mastery

of the Event lasteth among men the space of one cycle of years, and after that a fresh Illusion springeth to befool mankind, and the Seven must expend the concluding half-cycle in preparing the edge of the Sword for a new mastery.

As the poet declareth in his scorn:

Some doubt Eternity: from life begun,
Has folly ceased within them, sire to son?
So ever fresh illusions will arise
And lord creation, until men are wise.

He adds:

That is a distant period, so prepare
To fight the false, O youths, and never spare!
For who would live in chronicles renowned
Must combat folly, or as fool be crowned."

And nearby in the text we find the verses:—

"When nations with opposing forces, rash
Shatter each other thou that wouldst have stood
Apart to profit by the monstrous feud,
Thou art the surest victim of the crash.
Take colours of whichever side thou wilt,
And steadfastly thyself in battle range;
Yet, having taken, shouldst thou dare to change,
Suspicion hunts thee as a thing of guilt."

* * *

According to our varied experience and avocations, each of us has his own perfectly understood imagery, and a word of description can bring to light (uncover) the 'matrix' from which our phrases grow, like mushrooms from a hidden thread of mycelium. We, as Social Crediters, are always looking for the 'matrix' of our social and economic phenomena; but we shall not find the correct way for dealing with them unless we come to understand it. Douglas sought it high and he sought it low: he was for ever testing to see whether he had found it. He knew he had not found it; but he showed us how to look for it, and we ought to be doing it. We must not weary in well-doing.

The Two Canadas

The following letter appeared in *The Tablet*, April 20, 1963:

Dear Sir,—With regard to the article with this heading by Denis O'Brien which appeared in your issue of April 6th, has *The Tablet* thrown over the Ten Commandments as well as the Gospel verses about the relative claims of God and Caesar?

With regard to the statement made in paragraph three, column one, page 361, "basically Social Credit believes" nothing at all, any more than geometry or gentility believe anything. Social crediters, mathematicians and gentlemen may do this or that. In any case we do not believe the government should provide unlimited interest-free credit for any purpose, and to say we do is a transgression of the Commandment not to bear false witness.

Yours faithfully,

BASIL L. STEELE
(Deputy Chairman, Social Credit Secretariat).

Penrhyn Lodge,
Gloucester Gate,
London, NW1.

"Sleepwalkers"

" I have been interested, for a long time, in the psychological process of discovery as the most concise manifestation of man's creative faculty—and in that converse process that blinds him towards truths which, once perceived by a seer, become so heartbreakingly obvious. Now this blackout shutter operates not only in the minds of the 'ignorant and superstitious masses' as Galileo called them, but is even more strikingly evident in Galileo's own, and in other geniuses like Aristotle, Ptolemy or Kepler. It looks as if, while part of their spirit was asking for more light, another part had been crying out for more darkness. The History of Science is a relative newcomer on the scene, and the biographers of its Cromwells and Napoleons are as yet little concerned with psychology; their heroes are mostly represented as reasoning-machines on austere marble pedestals, in a manner long outdated in the mellower branches of historiography—probably on the assumption that in the case of a Philosopher of Nature, unlike that of a statesman or a conqueror, character and personality are irrelevant. Yet all cosmological systems, from the Pythagorians to Copernicus, Descartes and Eddington, reflect the unconscious prejudices, the philosophical or even the political bias of their authors; and from physics to physiology, no branch of Science, ancient or modern, can boast freedom from metaphysical bias of one kind or another. The progress of Science is generally regarded as a kind of clean, rational advance along a straight ascending line; in fact it has followed a zig-zag course, at times almost more bewildering than the evolution of political thought. The history of cosmic theories, in particular, may without exaggeration be called a history of collective obsessions and controlled schizophrenias; and the manner in which some of the most important individual discoveries were arrived at reminds one more of a sleep-walker's performance than an electronic brain's."

—Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: a History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*, 1959.

An 'Economists' Bible'?

Dr. David Daiches writing to *The Times* of April 29 from the University of Sussex, says:—

"Mr. Christopher Hollis (April 23) is of course quite right. The precise, literal meaning of the Hebrew words used by the Psalmist is 'the valley of the shadow of death'. Nobody has ever taken them otherwise than metaphorically. The language of both the Psalms and the Hebrew Prophets is radically metaphorical, and one shudders to think what will happen to biblical translation if every translator renders a metaphorical phrase into what he thinks is its prosaic literal 'meaning'. A distinguished American Hebrew scholar recently rendered 'Cast thy bread upon the waters' (Ecclesiastes, 11:1) as 'Send your goods overseas' on the grounds that the original phrase was metaphorical: I do not think that anybody would consider this an improvement."

Jews in America

In its April issue *Intelligence Digest* supplies the following list of Jews holding positions of influence in American public life:

ARTHUR GOLDBERG—former Secretary of Labor, now appointed to U.S. Supreme Court.

DOUGLAS DILLON (family name, Lapowski)—Secretary of the Treasury. Comes from international banking house of Dillion-Read & Co.—chief stockholder, Bernard Baruch.

NEWTON M. MINOW—had been appointed to control all communications, including radio and television.

PIERRE SALINGER—controls all news going in and out of the White House.

MORTIMER CAPLIN—named Commissioner of Internal Revenue.

PAUL ZIFFREN—controls the California machine.

DAVID SARNOFF—heads the N.B.C. network.

WILLIAM PALEY—heads the Columbia network.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER—is considered one of the most influential men in Washington today. He is an instructor in Harvard University. During the lifetime of the late Senator McCarthy he wrote an article in the *New York Post* in which he suggested that McCarthy be liquidated in the way Roosevelt liquidated Huey Long.

PAUL SAMUELSON—is the President's chief adviser involving the spending and handling of government funds.

WILBUR J. COHEN—a University of Michigan professor.

He has been added to the Kennedy brains trust as Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. He will be responsible for 40 per cent. of President Kennedy's domestic programme.

"It would," says *Intelligence Digest*, "be impossible to add to the above a long list of names running into hundreds. Below, we add only a few in order that readers may get some idea of the immense Jewish influence in American public life."

ADAM YARMOLINSKY—Defense Department.

SEYMOUR E. WOLFBEIN—Labor Department.

W. WILLARD WIRTZ—Labour Department.

JON O. NEWMAN—Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

SAMUEL WESTERFIELD—Department of Treasury.

SEYMOUR HARRIS—Department of Treasury.

EDWARD M. BERNSTEIN—Department of Treasury.

EDWARD GUDEMAN—Department of Commerce.

ROWLAND BURNSTAN—Department of Commerce.

MAX ISENBERG—Department of State.

THEODORE TANNENWALD—Department of State.

JAMES LOEB, JR.—Department of State.

WALT W. ROSTOW—Department of State.

MORDECAI EZEKIEL—Department of Agriculture.

ABRAM CHAYES—Department of State.

LOUIS FALK OBERDORFER—Department of Justice.

JACK ROSENTHAL—Department of Justice.

MAURICE ROSENBLATT—Department of Interior.

EDWARD WEINBERG—Department of Interior.

ANDREW OEHMANN—Department of Internal Revenue.

NATHAN FEINSINGER—Labor Fact Finding Commission.

SIMON H. RIFKIND—Railroad Commission.

A. H. ROSENFELD—Civil Rights Commission.

PAUL A. FREUND—Civil Rights Commission.

PHILIP ELMAN—Federal Trade Commission.

RABBI JACOB JOSEPH WEINSTEIN—Equal Employment Commission.
 FRED LAZARUS, JR.—Equal Employment Commission.
 DAVID COLE (COHEN)—Missile Space Labor Commission.
 MRS. CHARLES HYMES—Commission on Status of Women.
 BEN. D. DORFMAN—Tariff Commission.
 ADRIAN S. FISHER—Department Administration.
 HENRY A. KISSINGER—Military and Diplomatic Policies.
 LEE WHITE—U.S. Information Agency.
 MILTON PHILIP SEMER—Federal Housing Home Finance Administration.
 JEROME B. WIESNER—National Planning Association.
 JEROME SPINGARN—National Planning Association.
 BENJAMIN V. COHEN—National Planning Association.
 MARX LEVA—National Planning Association.
 WALTER W. HELLER—Economic Adviser.
 MORRIS ABRAM—Peace Corps.
 RALPH LAZARUS—Peace Corps.
 THOMAS C. SORENSON—U.S. Export-Import Bank.
 HAROLD F. LINDER—U.S. Export-Import Bank.
 HERMAN KAHN—Archives.
 HANS A. ADLER—Adm. Asst. to Pres. Kennedy.
 THEODORE C. SORENSON—Adm. Asst. to Pres. Kennedy.
 SOLOMIN BARKIN—Special Reports.
 M. L. FRANKEL—Special Reports.
 ROBERT S. BENJAMIN—U.S. Committee for U.N.
 SEYMOUR J. RUBEN—International Co-operation Adm.
 D. C. GOLDBERG—Committee on Government Operations.
 LAWRENCE LEVY, JR.—Ambassador to N.A.T.O.
 ADOLPH BERLE, JR.—Ambassador to O.A.S.
 MAURICE M. BERNBAUM—Ambassador to Ecuador.
 RALPH PAIEWONSKY—Governor of Virgin Islands.
 PHILIP M. KLUTZNICK—U.N. Economic-Social Council.
 BERNARD SEGAL—Screening Committee for Judicial Appointments.
 MEYER FELDMAN—Special Counsel.
 HANS A. ADLER—Special Counsel.
 SIDNEY HEIMAN—White House Historian.
 ROBERT MORRIS MORGENTHAU—U.S. Atty., New York.
 DAVID M. SATZ, JR.—U.S. Atty., New Jersey.

"Dull Dogs"

"... British authors are on the whole dull dogs, and keep their pots boiling at a sadly low temperature. Though the best of them lack neither intelligence nor sensitivity, they find less and less to say. This is perhaps a critical rather than a creative age. As a result of universal education, two world war, slum clearance, social security, mass production, the eclipse of high society, the industrialization of agriculture, and the tranquillizing influence of the B.B.C., the British have lost most of their eccentric ebullience."

—Robert Graves in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 15, 1958.

EGOISM AND SOCIAL SENSE (continued from page 1)

an immediate threat or promise. They have not the sense of abstract and universal right. Such a man of the people as will devour the state as he best may and whenever he can will show himself in a light of shining honesty in his relations with his master or his neighbours. He will be willing to dedicate himself to the service of the man before him in

order to assure himself of a good reputation among his following, and so on. Concretely, the moral law is neither one nor indivisible: to be moral without effort on such a plane as is within his range and to be immoral without sin on such a plane as is beyond him is the characteristic of the man of the people.

An intellectual imbued with abstract morality is quite incapable of realising with what good faith and innocency some men of the people—of the peasant class particularly—can lend themselves, if the opportunity is offered to them, to socially disastrous acts. I remember spending a day with a highly honourable old peasant, who beamed with admiration as he told me of the profitable exactions of a magistrate in his neighbourhood. "He's all there," he said: "he knows his job!" It is not difficult to discover the psychological source of this absurd flattery. For this old peasant, to be "all there", to "know his job" and even in the total to do his duty and to fulfil his social mission, consists in winning the greatest possible return from the earth: in that sphere, all means are good. But this man assimilated to his own province the situation of the magistrate. A 'place'—to cultivate that without wresting the maximum from it, by all means possible, would be a sin where the soil is concerned. When such a principle is transplanted, however, the evil done towards one's neighbour is not seen—one's neighbour here is far away: he is invisible: all that is seen is the good done to oneself. Morally, such men are just innocents.

I have chosen these two limiting cases designedly: that of the peasant who cultivates the soil and that of the irresponsible official who 'cultivates the situation'. The simple fact that social consequences so opposite can proceed, in the case of these two men, from states of mind all but identical, from an even level of morality, should be enough to demonstrate the absolute necessity for a radical alteration in the spirit of modern institutions. Egoism and the sense of duty are not in fact, as an inhuman moralism born of Kant teaches us, two sentiments which oppose and exclude each other. They have the same ontological root. (To the narrow and carnal egoism of which I have spoken above there corresponds a narrow and carnal sense of duty.) In a healthy natural state, the two principles unite and are identified in one another. *It is the rôle of healthy institutions to bring together in their social results two sentiments which naturally coincide in the effective life of individuals.* Hence the urgent need for a system of professional and local organisations whereby the individual may be vitally conditioned and sanctioned.

It may be said of this conception that it is of the earth earthy and that it strikes a bargain with higher morality. I put it plainly: an eternal conflict between egoism and duty is not consonant with human ways. For those who are capable of it, there will always be many opportunities to be heroic. To refrain from exacting it of everybody is not to attack heroism. But to put the immense majority of men and women in a position in which the simple accomplishment of their duty calls for a superior morality is to encourage the worst form of egoism, an egoism which is anti-human and anti-social.

(Translated)