

From Reflections on Individualism

Manuel Devaldes

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As he is understood by individualist philosophy, the individual – potential capacity for uniqueness and autonomy – is not an entity, a metaphysical formula: it is a living reality. It is not, as Fichte believed in criticizing Stirner's "unique," a mystical, abstract self, whose ridiculous and harmful cult would arrive at the negation of sociability, which is an innate quality in man and which engenders moral needs which must be satisfied under penalty of suffering.

With this peculiar religious character individualism would be nothing but a stupid systematic isolation, as well as a barbarous and incessant struggle in which man would lose every ancestral acquisition and any possibility of progress. The cult of this abstract Self would engender slavery, in the same way that from the cult of the Citizen Positivism: Man – is born modern servitude, characterized by the associationist and solidarist constraints of current society that the State imposes on individuals.

To be sure, the individualist self is not an abstraction, a spiritual principle, an idea. It is the corporeal self with all of its attributes: appetites, needs, passions, interests, strengths, thoughts, etc. It isn't the ideal Self, it is me, you, him – precise realities. In this way individualist philosophy bends itself to all individual variations, the latter having as motive the interest the individual attaches to facts and things and as the regulator of the strength he disposes of. For this very reason it establishes a natural harmony, truer and more durable than the factitious and entirely superficial harmony owed to religions, to dogmatic moralities and laws, to the forces of ruse, and armies, to the police, penal colonies and gallows, and to the forces of violence which the authoritarians have at their disposal.

Individualism moves only in the realm of the real. It rejects any metaphysics, any dogma, any religion, any faith. Its methods are observation, analysis, reasoning, and criticism, but it is by referring to a criterion issued from himself, and not one he finds in the collective reasoning honored by his surroundings, that the individual establishes his judgment. Individualism repudiates the absolute; it cares only for the relative. Finally, it poses the individual, the only living and unique reality capable of autonomy, as the center of every moral, social or natural system.

“Certainly, monsieur professor of morality, our navel is the center of the world, as you say when, through inattention, you wander into the land of Irony. It is the center of the world for each of we individualists, as much as it is for you, Mr. Slave, or rather

Slaveholder. Except we say it out loud, while you carefully hide it by teaching the opposite.”

I am for me, you are for you, he is for him the center of the world.

Don't laugh. As God loses in each of us that long preserved prerogative to be the center of the world, the aim of our acts, and the usurping motive for our activity, to that same degree each of us takes control of that prerogative for himself. But for this to be, it is first necessary that all metaphysical absolutes, which are nothing but divine avatars, join God in his flight that resembles that of a grotesque ghost. Our reason then proclaims the permanence of the relative – of that which is relative to our selves, naturally.

‘Where, my Christian contradictor, do you place the center of the world?’

“In God”

“And you, Monsieur Positivist, Monsieur Atheist, who believe you don't believe in God, because you ingest the anti-clerical sausage on sainted Friday?”

”..”

You no longer know which to choose of the various monstrosities that offer themselves to your view. You're overflowing with centers of the world. In the realm of the sacred you have an embarrassment of riches; you can gravitate at will around this or that center as the occasion dictates. This is why you are the same poor being, if not worse, as your theist neighbor, who at least only knows his one God. In the world in which you move you place the center everywhere except where you should see it: in you. Of your own will – do you even have a will? – of your own unconscious will you are nothing but a poor satellite who continuously spins around illusory centers which to your eyes are more or less divine. During this time the clerical and lay priests of all religions fulfill their roles as hamstring cutters and pickpockets.

I, the individualist, I am the center of all that surrounds me, and I say my activities, all my acts, reasoned as well as impassioned, premeditated as well as spontaneous, have one goal, which is always my personal satisfaction. When my activity is aimed at others I am certain that in the end its material and moral product will return to me. It is only up to the other that it be the same for him.

I have a personal morality, and I rebel against Morality; I practice a personal justice and I refuse the cult of Justice, etc.

I am the wise man and you are the fool; I am the free man and you are the slave, I am the man of joy and you are the man of suffering...

The primary meaning of individualism is thus summed up in this, that it opposes to the entities and abstractions supposedly superior to man and in the name of which he is governed, the sole reality there is for him: the individual; man – not the Man of the Positivists, “the essence of man,” the man citizenized, electoralized, mechanized, annihilated – the man that I am, that you are, that he is : the self .

In this way everything which in every religious philosophy and consequently in every religious system, emanated from the individual – inferior, low matter, contemptible atom, simple unit, to arrive at these entities, these divinized abstractions and to remain their property, the individual being thus dispossessed – all of this remains the property of the individual. The abstractions

which have the right to be admitted to human mentality in order to express inter-individual relations, are henceforth stripped of their false superiority, of their sanctity, are reduced to their simply utilitarian role; they are, from this point forward, stripped of the ability to cause harm which they'd been granted.

And so, no more sacrifice of the individual to Society and its priests, to the Fatherland and its priests, to the Law and its priests, to God or the gods and their priests. Man finally becomes the sole beneficiary of his labors, the sole owner of everything whose conquest motivated his efforts and labors.

What is society if not the result of a collection of individuals? How can a society have an interest (why not also appetites, sentiments, etc.)? And if it were to have an interest, how could this be superior and antagonistic to the interests of the individuals who make it up, if the latter are free? As a result, what nonsense and what hypocritical misdeed is it to mold individuals for society instead of making society for individuals?

Can we individuals not replace the State by our free associations?

For the general, collective law could we not substitute mutual agreements, revocable as soon as they are a hindrance to our welfare?

Do we need the parceled out fatherlands our masters have made when we have one that is vaster: the earth?

And so on... So many questions that the free examination of the individualist justly resolves to the advantage of the individual.

Doubtless, those who live on lies, who rule through hypocrisy, the masters and their domestic class of priests and politicians, might have a different opinion because their petty, very petty interests invite them to do so. But I, an individualist and a working man, who has neither the interest nor the wish to rob from others, nor to be robbed by others, I can't think like them, and I rebel.

They will take vengeance for this insurrection by discrediting me. So be it. The individualist is abhorred by masters, lackeys, and the sheep-like mass. This is quite understandable. This will remain the norm as long as ignorance is the queen of the world. The individualist thinker, if he wants justice rendered to his words and acts, must wait for a distant age of reason – under the evolutionist elm ... But he could care less for the justice of others. His own suffices to immediately satisfy himself.

Individualism being generalized, the individual is not in the least dispossessed and enchained. He is the owner of the products of his labor and is independent. As for the parasites who only lived thanks to this belief in illusory Superior Causes, demanding the holocaust of inferior beings, they are forced to become producers like everyone else, or to disappear.

It is after what we have just said that the idea of the aristocratic M. de Voltaire, who held the people – the canaille, to use his words – for a herd to be shorn, can be clearly understood: “If God didn't exist he would have to be invented.” A God is needed so that the pretexts of his mysterious wishes, his religion, his cult serve to maintain the mass of individuals in a servitude favorable for the profits and privileges of all kinds, and especially those of the masters.

But also, with what light is Bakunin's proud quip not surrounded, that “If God existed he would have to be abolished!” If God existed, he would entail the servitude of a true Superior Cause; he would dispossess man of his possessions. For the freedom and happiness of man it would be necessary that he not exist.

Laplace said: "The God hypothesis . is useless." Since his time the sciences have progressed. The results of their investigations in the realm of man and human societies leads us to say: the lie God is harmful, which Proudhon affirmed in other terms in his famous aphorism: "God is evil." For the cause of God is the Superior Cause par excellence, from which flow all the other causes of superiorised, divinized abstractions, with their paraphernalia of rights and duties, of rewards and punishments based on the superiority of free will.

What is the use of killing God if we give birth to the divine. As long as man is persuaded of the existence of causes superior to his own, he will be fatally, and so to say legitimately, deprived of real autonomy; his uniqueness would be but a word. The phantom called God, in his various and coexistent avatars, would snatch joy from him.

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