

Ego and Society

Sidney E. Parker

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We live in the Age of Society. On every side pundits of various political and moral hues pontificate about the “need” for a society that is “caring”, “compassionate”, “moral”, even “Christian”. They proclaim differing degrees of real or assumed fervour that “society” should or ought to do this or that and are quick to denounce as “selfish” those who refuse to go along with their particular panaceas. Traditional conservative moralists of the Right, Marxist socialists of the Left (and their “libertarian: allies), liberal welfarists of the Centre, fuelled by their visions of a past or future paradise, or the latest statistics of old people suffering from hypothermia, all join in the chorus of supplication to the god of Society and demand that its “will” be done.

Behind this clamour lies the mistaken belief that when individuals form a “society” they thereby create an organic entity to which appeals can be made and to which they are related as mere cellular parts of a whole. Such a belief has no basis in fact. “Society” is no ego which can cause, feel, or will anything. It is an abstract noun denoting a specific aggregation of individuals relating to each other for certain purposes. To claim, therefore, that such individuals are nothing but cells of an organism is a gross misuse of words. A cell cannot exist apart. An individual can — albeit at the cost of considerable discomfort and inconvenience. “Society” is thus a purely mental construct. The only concrete entity involved is the particular, flesh-and-blood individual.

It may be objected to this line of reasoning that “man” is, after all, a “Social animal”. If by this is meant that each individual living in a society has a multiplicity of relations with other individuals that is true. But if from this obvious fact the conclusion is drawn that these inter-individual relationships themselves constitute a real body with a life and demands of its own then those who draw it are simply placing themselves on the same level as the animism of primitive savages. It is no more than an empty hypostatisation.

Nonetheless, no belief exists which does not serve some purpose, however foolish or irrational that may be. The sociocentric myth, the belief that the individual is mere a component of an abstraction called “society”, in the gloss put upon the interests of those who have in mind some prescriptive ideal as to how people *ought* to behave. It is another spook with which to deceive the naive and the gullible. To make plain one’s own interest is by no means as impressive as invoking the interests of “society”. And as long as one is not called upon to explain how such a disembodied entity can have interests the myth remains intact for the future use of its beneficiaries. Against the mystique of the sociocrat, stands the conscious ego of the autocrat, whose being is pivoted within, and who regards “society” simply as a means or instrument, not a source or

sanction. The egoist refuses to be ensnared by the net of conceptual imperatives that surrounds the hypostatization of “society” preferring the real to the unreal, the fact to the myth.

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