

Solneman's Manifesto

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("The Manifesto Of Peace And Freedom" by K.H.Z. Solneman. The Mackay Society, Freiburg and New York, 1983. Translated from the German by Doris Pfaff and John Zube. Edited by Edward Mornin. Apt. 2E 227 Columbus Ave., New York, N.Y. 10023, U.S.A. 11.95 US Dollars)

The most crucial struggle that anyone can engage in is the struggle to achieve self-ownership against the demands made by others in the name of the ideologies of the "society" into which he is born. In this interesting, if badly titled, work by K.H.Z. Solneman it is pointed out that these demands are "more of a mental than a material kind". Out of the primitive belief in ghosts and gods arose domination by abstractions and fixed ideas. This was not only a product of priestly deception, it was also fad by those who wished to avoid the burden of thinking for themselves and wanted "a leadership which would relieve them of this burden and impress them by superior appearances". Always, despite changes in form and terminology, there exists this demand for the acceptance of some transcendent power to whom or which allegiance is regarded as obligatory:

"While on the one side belief in a personal God gradually disappeared, even though it is still alive in millions, originally religious commandments remained still in force, but now as 'ethical' commandments and without people being conscious of their origin. At the same time, new gods with new commandments took the place of the previous ones. Philosophy, sociology and even modern theology have depersonalized the concept of God more and more and transformed it into the rather misty concept of an abstraction of 'love' or an impersonal world law, which again sets 'tasks' or a 'final aim'. Naturally, the self-appointed prophets and interpreters of this new God determine the specific commandments and prohibitions and, more or less through coercion, keep the individual at work to fulfill his 'task' or 'destiny'."

To accept the validity of such abstractions as 'God', 'Society', 'Nation' and 'Class' is to condemn oneself to wandering in a perpetual fog haunted by the ghosts of what are no more than human inventions. To think realistically one needs a concrete starting point. This is "the actual

mortal ego of each individual human being” and here Solneman acknowledges Max Stirner as the pioneer of such egoistic thinking.

From an egocentric standpoint, therefore, it becomes clear just how nonsensical it is to regard abstractions as volitional beings and to ascribe to collectivities the ability to think, to feel and to demand (“the will of society”, etc.) Only the individual is capable of such activities and basing himself on this awareness Solneman launches a well-argued assault upon all those ideologies that have as their purpose the subordination and sacrifice of individuality - in particular, the ideology of the State, the ideology of Marxism, and the ideology of democracy.

In general I agree with Solneman’s criticism of these ideologies and the fallacies and frauds that are used to justify them, although at times I think that in his efforts to be “fair” to his opponents he lands himself in the very trap he is seeking to expose. For example, in his discussion of the development of the idea of sacrifice in primitive tribes he remarks that

“So the feeling grew - and was confirmed by the behaviour of others - that sacrifices for the community were something worthy of praise. They are this, in fact, under certain circumstances and within certain limits, provided the person concerned makes them himself voluntarily, and does not demand them from others through pressure and coercion.”

Certain religious and humanist moralists would not dissent from such a view, but from an egoist standpoint I cannot see how Solneman can justify it. Apart from the fact that he does not specify the “circumstances” and “limits” he mentions, it would seem here that he is investing “the community” with the same idolatrous qualities that he so effectively denounces when it has been labelled “society” or “people” (“A purely mental construct, a fanciful image in the heads of those who merely *believe* this product of their faith”). Sacrifices carried out while under the domination of a fixed idea like “the community” are not *voluntary* behaviour - that is, behaviour stemming from an individual’s *own* will.

However, such lapses in his critical *analysis* are rare. It is when he comes to outline his *constructive* proposals for “new social relationships” that my fundamental disagreements begin. I do not intend to go into the details of his programme of “equal access to natural resources and the distribution of land-rent to everyone”, “open associations of management”, “freedom of the means of exchange” and “autonomous legal and social communities” which are designed to replace “the law of the sword and aggressive force” with “non-domination and equal freedom”. Readers can find these described in his book and can make up their own minds about them. The crux of Solneman’s case does not lie in such a programme, which is nothing new, but in the method he claims will achieve it.

He is not so naive as to believe in the totalistic tactics and dreams of the various communistic and anarchist churches. He recognizes that “the broad mass” of human beings have a strong desire “to submit and worship,” the urge to dominate having its complement in the urges of those “for whom sacrifice and submission have become overwhelming needs”. It follows that since so many want either to rule or be ruled their “right” to such a state of affairs must be granted since not to do so would mean that one becomes an authority oneself.

The problem for Solneman is how one can acknowledge this “right” and at the same time start in motion the process that will eventually lead to the abolition of rulership that he so ardently desires. His solution is a scheme he calls “To Everyone The State Of His Dreams”, which is based

on an 1860 essay by the Belgian advocate of “panarchy”, P.E. de Puydt. De Puydt argued that the way for everyone to have the type of government he wants is to establish a plurality of governments in any given area in place of the system of one government for each area that exists today. This, he likened to the replacement of one church by the present multiplicity of churches and congregations that now exist peacefully side by side.

In this way, de Puydt claimed, every individual could have the government he wanted and those who did not want to be governed would be free to live without government. He wrote:

“All compulsion should cease. Every adult citizen should be and should remain free to select from among all possible governments the one that conforms to his will and satisfies his personal needs. Free not on the day following some bloody revolution, but always and everywhere. Free to select, but not to force his choice on others. Then all disorder will cease, and all fruitless struggles will be avoided.”

Solneman believes that in this way it would be possible to achieve a non-governmental society in a peaceful and amicable manner. The fatal flaw in this belief, however, is the assumption that everyone will voluntarily agree to the implementation of his scheme - even those who are opposed to voluntarism and support coercion. I cannot see how someone who adheres to an ideology which incorporates “the truth”, and furthermore thinks that all others should be compelled to accept this “truth”, can be brought to agree to a scheme whereby those who reject his ideas are free to live according to their own tastes without interference from him and his fellow “truth” holders. In other words, Solneman thinks those who are authoritarians can remain such as long as they behave like non-authoritarians. Since he does not show how this contradiction can be resolved his whole scheme smacks of personal fantasy rather than the realism he claims for it.

Indeed, he nowhere gives any cogent reason to suppose that the “broad mass”, whom he acknowledges have always displayed an overwhelming need to be dominated, can so transform their mentalities as to become capable of self-determination. He admits that the “anarchy” of his dreams has never existed in “a consistent form”. And for this reason he dismisses the charge that it would amount to “disorder... or even chaos” because it “does not express an experienced fact”. But if it does not express an experienced fact then it merely expresses a hope, a wish, an unverified belief. It belongs to those “metaphysics” which he himself defines as “all concepts and doctrines which go beyond the realm of sensibly and logically graspable experienced reality.”

To sum up: Solneman’s critique of prevailing ideologies is of great value to individualists everywhere. His claimed peaceful transformation of the world, however, belongs to a category of faith akin to all those other utopian delusions that litter the history of human beliefs. To reject all belief in authority over myself is certainly experientable and sensible. To deduce from this that all others individuals can do the same thing does not follow. It is an accomplishment limited to a few, as all “experienced fact” testifies.

S.E.P

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