

The

Ethical Record

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EDITORIAL

The Editor was called to hospital urgently. He was about to write the Editorial, so readers get the programme first this month!

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS COMING TO CONWAY HALL JANUARY — FEBRUARY

Sunday (morning) Lecture (Free—collection)
(Afternoon) Forums and Socials (Free)
South Place Sunday (evening) Concerts (tickets £2.00)*
All the Society's Meetings, Forums, Socials and Classes
are held in the Library (unless otherwise indicated)
Concerts are held in the Main Hall

JANUARY 1989

Sunday January 8

at 6.30 pm **Concert: Maggini String Quartet. MOZART G K387, PROKOFIEV No. 2, BEETHOVEN C Opus 59 No. 3.**

Saturday January 14

at 6.30 pm **South Place New Year Party for Members, Friends and others.**
until The evening will include musical and other Entertainment, including (it is hoped) a performance of songs by DAME FLORIBUNDA.
10.00 pm

Drinks and refreshments. Tickets : £2.50. Please book in advance with the office (tickets also available at meetings).

Sunday January 15

at 11.00 am **JAMES HEMMING: The Rules of the Life Game.** James Hemming, a Life Member of the Society and author of *Individual Morality*, *Instead of God* and other seminal books states: "At a time when everyone is pontificating about 'morality', it is good that humanists should review their position".

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The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Society.

prevented or minimized, for the sake of self-preservation, the old law of nature. now thought of as human survival.

The world that ended with World War II was one in which centuries of European national rivalry overflowed in the rise of racial nationalism of Nazi Fascism. GOEBBELS noted in his Diaries:

"The old Holy Roman Empire was the greatest political creation of the post-Roman era. It took its European character from the Roman Empire, and we shall assume that mantle now. Because of our organisational brilliance and racial selectivity, world domination will automatically fall to us".

Mussolini, too, took Rome as his model. The word "fascism" betokens it. This was the last bid for restoration of the Roman imperium. The "Wealth of Nations" had been consummated in the British Empire. The "Decline of the West" came more dramatically than Spengler had predicted.

The new human capability that makes humanity responsible for its own future, which therefore cannot be predicted, is shared world-wide with technology. It constitutes a new heritable attribute of human nature, and shows that human nature is not a constant, but is historical, like societies. □

MAX STIRNER: PHILOSOPHER OF EGOISM

S. E. PARKER

*Summary of a lecture given on October 23, 1988 to the
Sunday Forum of the Society*

EGOISM HAS BEEN ALMOST UNIVERSALLY DENOUNCED AS "SINFUL". Conservatives and anarchists, Humanists and Buddhists, liberals and socialists, Judaists and fascists, have all joined in condemning the egoist. There was one philosopher, however, who was an unabashed egoist and said so in his major work *The Ego and His Own*. This was MAX STIRNER (JOHANN CASPAR SCHMIDT) 1806-1856.

Stirner begins *The Ego and His Own* by asking what is to be his concern. The usual answers are God, Mankind, Society, Truth, Justice and so on. "Only my cause", he observes, "is never to be my concern. 'Shame on the egoist who thinks only of himself!'" I am not to serve myself, but some abstraction. Stirner can see no good reason why his interests ought to be sacrificed to the supposed interests of abstractions. Therefore "away with every concern that is not altogether my concern. You think at least the 'good cause' must be my concern?" That is not the case. I am my own concern and my concern "is neither the divine nor the human . . . but solely what is mine; and it is not a general one, but is unique, as I am unique. Nothing is more to me than myself".

This, is of course, selfishness, but not selfishness as it is conventionally understood: a grubbing after material advantage to the exclusion of anything else. Stirner regards selfishness as the negation of any idea that has become fixed, which has become a **conceptual imperative**. To be unselfishness is to have an end that is our master. To be selfish is to have the end in our power and to "dispose of it at our pleasure". Those who pursue the ideal of Mammon are as possessed as those who pursue the ideal of God. **Self-ownership** is the pivot of selfishness or egoism. "I am my own when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered . . . by anything else (God, man, authority, law, State, Church, etc); what is of use to me, the self-owned or self-appertaining one, my selfishness pursues".

In *The Ego and His Own* Stirner analyses many aspects of life and thought from this egoistic standpoint. The concept "freedom", for instance, is idolized by many, yet little of it remains when looked at critically. Freedom is not a positive state of being, but an activity of "free-ing", a getting rid of something

that is an obstacle or an impediment. If I am rid of a headache I am "free" of it. How free I am depends on what power I have. Whatever I am competent to achieve I will achieve. If I am incompetent in any respect, then in this respect I am "unfree". Donated or granted "freedom" is of no value to an egoist—for what can be given to me can be taken away. Only what is within my power is mine—whether it is freedom or anything else.

Stirner takes a similar position regarding "rights". That "right" prevails that has the most might behind it. "I decide what it the **right thing** in me, there is no right outside me. If it is right for me, it is right". In the final analysis "might" is the only "right". "What I have without an entitling spirit I have without right: I have it solely and alone through my power".

As for "man" or the "human", Stirner points out that those who, like his contemporary Ludwig Feuerbach, substitute a belief in Man for a belief in God have not rid themselves of the religious attitude. "Man with the great M is only an ideal . . . to be a man is not to realize the ideal of Man, but to present oneself, the individual. It is not how I realize the **generally human** that needs to be my task, but how I satisfy myself . . . the human religion is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion." Thus to say of me that I am a human being is to **describe** me as a member of a certain species, but to demand of me that I be **human** is to **prescribe** for me a model of behaviour to which I **ought** to conform. I am to cease to be my own and become the "human".

An egoist rejects fixed ideas and spurns the sacred in every form. He joyfully prizes himself as more important than any totality. His concern is not with the reformation of mankind in the name of idealized fallacies such as "the moral", "the free", or "the equal" ("liberty, equality and fraternity" are mere empty phrases), but with himself and his interests. The life he lives is his own. Such is Max Stirner's philosophy of egoism. □

WHAT IS ETHICAL RATIONALITY?—PART II

TOM RUBENS

The Lecture delivered to the Society on Sunday, July 31, 1988

Part I of this Lecture was published in the November/December 1988 issue

The latter, the issue of events over which he has had no control, will inevitably condition all future conduct. The dye of unreason, so to speak, has been cast. Future ethical thought, like present, will grow from the soil of the irrational and will remain, via environmental channelling, the voice of biological forces.

The primacy of unreason in human conduct applies even to the practice of science. There are two reasons for doing science. One is for the practical and material benefits it brings. The other is for the sheer satisfaction of knowing. Both are grounded in feeling and value. The first involves valuing benefits because they ensure physical survival and enhance the pleasures and comforts of life.

The second involves valuing knowledge for its own sake. Neither of these attitudes is derived from knowledge or reason. The former springs instinctively from the pre-rational will to live. The latter too is pre-rational since there is no purely rational basis for valuing knowledge *per se*; it is, in essence, an emotional commitment to truth, a love of truth, and, like all love, is not arrived at by a process of reasoning.

The attempt, incidentally, to establish a rational justification for truth-love by advancing the consequentialist argument that such love leads to honesty and truthfulness with oneself and others, succeeds only in establishing a non-rational justification; for when one considers why veracity is valued in the first place, one is led back to feeling and predilection.