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Han Ryner

Mini-Manual of Individualism

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1905

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What should we do in the presence of affirmative metaphysics? We should generously strip them of the ugliness and heaviness of affirmation in order to consider them poems and systems of dreams.

What do you think of dualist metaphysics?

They are provisional explanations, semi-metaphysics. There is no true metaphysic, but the only true metaphysics are those that arrive at a monism.

Is individualism an absolute morality?

Individualism is not a morality. It is only the strongest moral method we know, the most impregnable citadel of virtue and happiness.

Is individualism fitting for all men?

There are men who are invincibly repelled by the seeming harshness of individualism. These should choose another moral method.

How can I know if individualism is not appropriate to my nature?

If after a loyal attempt at individualism I feel myself to be unhappy, if I don't feel that I am in the true refuge, and if I am troubled with pity for myself and others I should flee individualism.

Why?

Because this method, too strong for my weakness, will lead me to egoism or discouragement.

By what method can I create a moral life for myself if I am too weak for the individualist method?

By altruism, by love, by pity.

Will this method lead me to acts different from those of an individualist?

Truly moral beings all carry out the same acts and, even more, all abstain from the same acts. Every moral being respects the life of other men; no moral being occupies himself with earning useless wealth, etc.

What will the altruist say who uselessly attempted to use the individualist method?

He'll say to himself: "I have the same path to follow. I have done nothing but leave behind an armor too heavy for me and that attracted violent blows from destiny and men. And I took up the pilgrim's staff. But I will always remember that I hold this staff to support myself, and not to strike others."

I have adopted the question and answer format, so handy for rapid exposition. In this case it not an expression of any dogmatic pretensions: we won't find here a master who interrogates and a disciple who responds. There is an individualist questioning himself. In the first line I wanted to indicate that it was a question of an interior dialogue. While the catechism asks: "Are you Christian?" I say "Am I individualist?" However, prolonged this procedure would bring with it some inconvenience and, having laid out my intention, I remembered that the soliloquy often employs the second person.

One will find pell mell in this book truths that are certain but whose certainty can only be discovered in oneself and opinions that are probable. There are problems that admit of several responses. Others — aside from the heroic solution, which can be advised only when all else is crime — lack an entirely satisfactory solution and the approximations I propose are not superior to other approximations: I don't insist on mine. The reader who is incapable of separating them out and, acquiescing to truths, finding the probabilities analogous to my probabilities and in many cases more harmonious for him would not be worthy of the name of individualist.

Due to lack of development, or for other reasons, I will often leave unsatisfied even the most fraternal of spirits. I can only recommend to men of good will the careful reading of Epictetus's Manual. There, better than anywhere else, can be found the response to our worries and doubts. There, more than anywhere else, he who is capable of true courage will find the source of courage.

From Epictetus, as well as others, I have borrowed formulas without always thinking it necessary to indicate my debts. In a work like this one it is the things that matter, not their origin, and we eat more than one fruit without asking the gardener the name of the river or stream that fertilizes his garden.

* * *

Chapter 7. On the Relations Between Morality and Metaphysics

In how many ways do we conceive the relations between morality and metaphysics?

In three ways: 1- Morality is a consequence of metaphysics, a metaphysics in action; 2- Metaphysics are a necessity and a postulate of morality; 3- Morality and metaphysics are independent of each other.

What do you think of the doctrine that makes morality depend on metaphysics?

This doctrine is dangerous. It forces the necessary to be supported by the superfluous, the certain on the uncertain, the practical by the dream. It transforms moral life into a somnambulism trembling in fear and hope.

What do you think of the concept that renders morality and metaphysics independent of each other?

It is the only one that can be supported from a moral point of view. This is the one that should be held to in practice.

Theoretically, don't the first two contain a portion of truth? Morally false, they express a probable metaphysical opinion. They signify that all realities form a whole and that there are close ties between man and the universe.

Is individualism a metaphysic?

Individualism appears to be able to coexist with the most differing metaphysics. It appears that Socrates and the Cynics had a certain disdain for metaphysics. The Epicureans were materialists. The Stoics were pantheists.

What do you think of metaphysical doctrines in general?

As poems and I love them for their beauty.

What constitutes the beauty of metaphysical poems?

A metaphysic is beautiful under two conditions: 1- It should be considered as a possible and hypothetical explanation, not as a system of certainties, and it must not deny neighboring poems; 2- It must explain everything by a harmonious reduction to unity.

Chapter 1. On Individualism and a few individualists.

Am I an individualist?

I am an individualist.

What do I mean by individualism?

I mean by individualism the moral doctrine which, relying on no dogma, no tradition, no external determination, appeals only to the individual conscience.

Hasn't the word individualism only designated this doctrine?

The name of individualism has often been given to the appearance of doctrines aimed at covering with a philosophical mask cowardly or conquering and aggressive egoism.

Cite a cowardly egoist who is sometimes called an individualist.
Montaigne.

Do you know of any conquering and aggressive egoists who proclaim themselves to be individualists?

All those who extend the brutal law of the fight for life to relations between men.

Cite some names.

Stendhal, Nietzsche.

Name some true individualists.

Socrates, Epicurus, Jesus, Epictetus.

Why do you love Socrates?

He didn't teach a truth external to those who listened to him, but rather taught them to find the truth within themselves.

How did Socrates die?

He died condemned by laws and judges, assassinated by the city, a martyr to individualism.

What was he accused of?

Of not honoring the gods the city honored and of corrupting youth.

What did this last grievance mean?

It meant that Socrates professed opinions disagreeable to those in power.

Why do you love Epicurus?
Beneath his carefree elegance, he was a hero.
Cite a clever phrase of Seneca on Epicurus.
Seneca calls Epicurus “a hero disguised as a woman.”
What was the good that Epicurus did?
He delivered his disciples from the fear of gods or God, which is the beginning of madness.
What was Epicurus’ great virtue?
Temperance. He distinguished between natural and imaginary needs. He showed that very little was needed to satisfy hunger and thirst, to defend oneself against heat and the cold. And he liberated himself from all other needs, that is, almost all the desires and all the fears that enslave men.
How did Epicurus die?
He died of a long and painful illness while boasting a perfect happiness.
In general do we know the true Epicurus?
No. Unfaithful disciples covered his doctrines with vice, in the same way a sore is hidden beneath a stolen coat.
Is Epicurus guilty of what false disciples have him say?
We are never guilty of the foolishness or perfidy of others.
Is the perversion of Epicurus’ doctrine an exceptional phenomenon?
Every word of truth, if it is listened to by many men, is transformed into a lie by the superficial, the crafty, and charlatans.
Why do you love Jesus?
He lived free and a wanderer, foreign to any social ties. He was the enemy of priests, external cults and, in general, all organizations.
How did he die?
Pursued by priests, abandoned by judicial authority he died nailed to the cross by soldiers. Along with Socrates, he is the most celebrated victim of religion, the most illustrious martyr to individualism.
In general, do we know the real Jesus?
No; the priests crucified his doctrine as well as his body. They transformed the tonic beverage into a poison. On the falsified words of the enemy of external organizations and cults they founded the most organized and most pompously empty of religions.

Speak of the particular demands of the Fatherland.
Military service and war.
Can the individualist be a soldier in time of peace?
Yes, as long as he isn’t asked to commit a crime.
What does the wise man do in time of war?
The wise man never forgets the order of the true God, of Reason: Thou shalt not kill. And he prefers to obey God than men.
What acts will his conscience dictate to him?
The Universal conscience rarely orders pre-determined acts. It almost always carries prohibitions. It forbids killing or wounding your neighbor and, on the point, it says nothing more. Methods are indifferent and constitute personal obligations.
Can the wise man remain a soldier in time of war?
The wise man can remain a soldier in time of war as long as he is certain not to allow himself to be dragged into killing or wounding.
Can the formal and open refusal to obey murderous orders become a strict duty?
Yes, if the wise man, by his past or for other reasons finds himself in one of those situations that attract attention. Yes, if his attitude risks to scandalize or edify it can bring other men towards good or evil.
Will the wise man fire at the officer who gives a murderous order?
The wise man kills no one. He knows that tyrannicide is a crime, like any willful murder.

In a neighboring country the idol of the Fatherland was Prussia; today, under the same name, the idol is Germany. It demanded that the Prussian kill the Bavarian. Later it demanded that the Prussian and the Bavarian kill the Frenchman. In 1859 the Savoyard and the Nicois were at risk of soon bowing before a fatherland shaped like a boot. The hazards of diplomacy have them adore a hexagonal Fatherland. The Pole hesitates between a dead and a living idol; the Alsatian between two living idols who pretend to the same name of Fatherland.

What are the current principal idols?

In certain countries, the King or the Emperor, in others some fraud called the Will of the People. Everywhere Order, the Political party, Religion, the Fatherland, the Race, the Color. We shouldn't forget public opinion, with its thousand names, from the most emphatic, Honor, to the most trivially low, the fear of "What will the neighbors say?"

Is Color a dangerous idol?

The White color especially. It has managed to unite in one cult the French, Germans, Russians, and Italians and to obtain from these noble priests the bloody sacrifice of a great number of Chinese.

Do you know other crimes of the White Color?

It is they who have made all of Africa a hell. It is they who destroyed the Indians of America and lynched Negroes.

Do the adorers of the White Color offer only blood to their idol?

They also offer it praise.

Speak of this praise.

It would be too long a litany. But when the White Color demands a crime the liturgy calls this crime a necessity of civilization and progress.

Is Race a dangerous idol?

Yes, especially when it is allied to religion.

Speak of a few crimes of these allies?

The wars of the Medes, the conquests of the Saracens, the Crusades, the massacres of the Armenians, anti-Semitism.

What is the most demanding and universally respected idol today?

The Fatherland.

Is Jesus guilty of what disciples and priests have made of his doctrine?

We are never guilty of the foolishness or perfidy of others.

Why do you love Epictetus?

The Stoic Epictetus courageously bore poverty and slavery. He was perfectly happy in the situations most painful to ordinary men.

How do we know Epictetus' doctrine?

His disciple Arrien gathered together some of his sayings in a small book entitled "The Manual of Epictetus."

What do you think of "The Manual of Epictetus?"

Its precise and unflinching nobility, its simplicity free of any charlatanism render it more precious to me than the Gospels. Epictetus' Manual is the most beautiful and liberating of all books.

In history are there not other celebrated individualists?

There are others. But those I have named are the purest and the easiest to understand.

Why do you not name the Cynics Antisthenes and Diogenes?

Because the Cynic doctrine is but a sketch of Stoicism.

Why do you not name Xenon of Citium, the founder of Stoicism?

His life was admirable and, according to the testimony of the ancients, always resembled his philosophy. But today he is less well known than those I have named.

Why do you not name the Stoic Marcus Aurelius?

Because he was an emperor.

Why do you not name Descartes?

Descartes was an intellectual individualist. He wasn't a clearly moral individualist. His actual morality appears to have been Stoic, but he didn't dare render it public. He only made known a "provisional morality" in which he recommends to obey the laws and customs of your country, which is the contrary of individualism. What is more, he seems to have lacked philosophical courage in other circumstances.

Why do you not name Spinoza?

Spinoza's life was admirable. He lived modestly, on a few grains of groats and a bit of milk soup. Refusing the chairs that were offered him, he always earned his daily bread through manual labor. His moral doctrine is a stoic mysticism. But too exclusively intellectual,

he professed a strange absolutist politics and, in the face of power, only reserved the freedom to think. In any case, his name puts one in mind more of a great metaphysical power than of a great moral beauty.

Chapter 6. On Sacrifices to Idols

May I sacrifice to the idols of my time and country?
With indifference I can allow idols to take indifferent things from me. But I must defend what depends on me and belongs to my God.

How can I distinguish my God from idols?
My God is proclaimed by my conscience the moment it is truly my voice and not an echo. But idols are the work of society.

By what other characteristic do we recognize idols?
My God only desires the sacrifice of indifferent things. Idols demand that I sacrifice myself.

Can you explain yourself?
Idols proclaim as virtues the most servile and low expedients: discipline and passive obedience. They demand the sacrifice of my reason and my will.

Do idols commit other injustices?
Not content with wanting to destroy what is superior to them and what I never have the right to abandon, they want me to sacrifice what doesn't belong to me at all: the life of my neighbor.

Do you know any other characteristics of idols?
The true God is eternal and immense. It is always and everywhere that I must obey my reason always and everywhere. But idols vary with the time and country.

Show how idols vary with the times.
Once I was asked to suppress my reason and to kill my neighbor for the glory of I don't know what God foreign and external to myself for the glory of the King. Today I am asked to make the same abominable sacrifices for the honor of the Fatherland. Tomorrow they will perhaps be demanded for the honor of the race, the color, or the part of the world.

Does the idol only vary when its name changes?
As much as possible the idol avoids changing its name. But it often varies.

Cite changes in an idol that aren't accompanied by a change in name.

Doesn't society have rights different from those of the individual? Society, a gathering of individuals, cannot have a right that isn't found in any individual. Zeroes, when added up, however numerous they might be, always add up to zero.

Isn't society in a state of self-defense against certain malefactors? The right to self defense only lasts as long as the attack itself.

Will the wise man sit on a jury?

He will always answer "no" to the first question: Is the accused guilty?

Won't that response sometimes be a lie?

That response will never be a lie.

Why?

The question of the president should be translated thusly: "Do you want us to inflict punishment on the accused?" And I am forced to answer "no," for I don't have the right to inflict punishment on anyone.

What do you think of duels?

Every appeal to violence is an evil. But the duel is a lesser evil compared to appealing to justice.

Why?

It isn't a form of cowardice; it doesn't cry out for assistance, and doesn't employ the force of all against one alone.

Chapter 2. Preparation for Practical Individualism

Is it enough to proclaim oneself individualist?

No. A religion can be satisfied with verbal adherence and a few acts of adoration. A practical philosophy that isn't practiced is nothing.

Why can religions show more indulgence than moral doctrines? The gods of religions are mighty monarchs. They save the faithful through grace and miracles. They grant salvation in exchange for the law, certain ritual words and certain agreed upon gestures. They can even give me credit for gestures done and words spoken for me by mercenaries.

What must I do to truly deserve the name of individualist?

All my acts must be in agreement with my ideas.

Is that agreement not difficult to obtain?

It is less difficult than it seems.

Why?

The beginning individualist is held back by false goods and bad habits. He only liberates himself at the cost of some effort. But the discord between his acts and his ideas is more painful to him than all renunciations. He suffers from it in the same way that a musician suffers from lack of harmony. At no price would the musician want to pass his life amidst discordant noises. In the same way my lack of harmony is, for me, the greatest of sufferings.

What do we call the effort of putting one's life in agreement with one's thoughts?

It is called virtue.

Does virtue receive a reward?

Virtue is its own reward.

What do these words mean?

They mean two things: 1- If I think of a reward I am not virtuous. Disinterestedness is the primary characteristic of virtue. 2- Disinterested virtue creates happiness.

What is happiness?

Happiness is the state of the soul that feels itself free of all outside servitudes and feels itself in perfect accord with itself.

Is it not then the case that there is only happiness when there is no longer a need to make an effort, and does happiness succeed virtue?

The wise man always needs effort and virtue. He is always attacked from without. But in fact, happiness only exists in the soul where there is no longer internal struggle.

Are we unhappy in pursuit of wisdom?

No. While awaiting happiness each victory produces joy.

What is joy?

Joy is the feeling of passing from a lesser to a greater perfection. Joy is the feeling that we are advancing towards happiness.

Distinguish between joy and happiness by a comparison.

A peaceful being, forced to fight, carries away a victory that brings him nearer to peace: he feels joy. He finally arrives at a peace that nothing can trouble: he has reached happiness.

Should one attempt to obtain happiness and perfection the first day we understand them?

It is rare that we can attempt immediate perfection without imprudence.

What dangers do the imprudent risk?

The danger of retreating and becoming discouraged.

What is the right way to prepare oneself for perfection?

It is right to go to Epictetus by passing through Epicurus.

What do you mean?

One must first place oneself from the point of view of Epicurus and distinguish natural from imaginary needs. When we are able to despise in practice all that is unnecessary to life, when we will disdain luxury and comfort, when we will savor the physical pleasure that come from simple food and drink; when our bodies as well as our souls will know the goodness of bread and water we will be able to advance further along the road.

What steps remain to be taken?

It remains to be felt that even if deprived of bread and water we could be happy; that in the most painful illness, where we have no

Why?

Testifying before tribunals for material or indifferent interests means sacrificing to the social idol and recognizing tyranny. What is more, there is cowardice in appealing to the power of all for assistance.

What will the wise man do if he is accused?

In keeping with his character he can tell the truth or oppose disdain and silence to social tyranny.

If the individualist recognizes his guilt what will he say?

He will speak of his real and natural error; will clearly distinguish it from the apparent and social error for which he is pursued. He will add that his conscience inflicts true punishment on him for his true error. But for an apparent error society, which only acts on indifferent things, will inflict an apparent punishment.

If the accused wise man is innocent before his conscience and guilty before the law, what will he say?

He will explain in what way his legal crime is a natural innocence. He will speak of his contempt for the law, that organized injustice and that powerlessness that can do nothing to us, but only to our bodies and our wealth, indifferent things.

If the accused wise man is innocent before his conscience and the law, what will he say?

He can only speak of his real innocence. If he deigns to explain these two innocences he will declare that only the first one matters to him.

Will the wise man testify before civil tribunals?

The wise man will not refuse his testimony to the feeble oppressed.

Will the wise man testify at penal court or before the court of assizes?

Yes, if he knows a truth useful to the accused.

If the wise man knows a truth harmful to the accused, what will he do?

He will remain silent.

Why?

Because a condemnation is always an injustice and the wise man doesn't make himself an accomplice in an injustice.

Why do you say that a condemnation is always an injustice?

Because no man has the right to inflict death on another man or to lock him in prison.

the modern incarnations of the tyrant. But the tyrant can do nothing against the wise man.

Will the individualist explain his refusal to obey?

Yes, if he thinks the social chief capable of understanding and rejecting his error. The chief is almost always incapable of understanding.

What will the individualist then do?

The refusal to obey is the sole universal obligation before an unjust order. The form of the refusal depends on my personality.

How does the individualist consider the crowd?

The individualist considers the crowd as one of the most brutal of natural forces.

How does he act in a crowd that is causing no harm?

He strives to not feel himself in conformity with the crowd and to not allow, even for a single instant, his personality to be drowned in it.

Why?

In order to remain a free man. Because perhaps soon an unforeseen shock will cause the cruelty of the crowd to burst forth, and he who will have begun to feel like it, he who will truly be part of the crowd will have difficulty in separating from it at the moment of moral élan.

What will the wise man do if the crowd that he finds himself in attempts an injustice or a cruelty?

The wise man will oppose, by all means noble and indifferent, the injustice or the cruelty.

What are the methods the wise man will not employ, even in these circumstances?

The wise man will not descend to falsehood, prayer, or flattery.

Flattering the crowd is a powerful oratorical method. Does the wise man absolutely forbid this to himself?

The wise man can address to the crowd, as to children, that praise that is the ironically amiable envelope of his counsels. But he will know that the limit is uncertain and adventure dangerous. He will not risk it unless he is absolutely certain not only of the firmness of his soul but also of the precise flexibility of his speech.

Will the wise man testify before tribunals?

The wise man will never testify before tribunals.

assistance, we could be happy; that even dying under torture in the midst of the insults of the crowd we could be happy.

Are these peaks of wisdom reachable by all?

These peaks are reachable by all men of good will who feel a natural penchant towards individualism.

What is the intellectual path that leads to these peaks?

It is the Stoic doctrine of the true good and the true evil.

What do we call this doctrine again?

We call this the doctrine of things that depend on us on those that don't depend on us.

What are the things that depend on us?

Our opinions, our desires, our inclinations, and our aversions: in a word, all our internal acts.

What are the things that don't depend on us?

The body, riches, reputation, dignities: in a word, all those things that are not counted among our internal acts.

What are the characteristics of the things that depend on us?

They are free by nature: nothing can stop them or place an obstacle before them.

What is the other name of the things that don't depend on us?

The things that don't depend on us are also called indifferent things.

Why?

Because none of them is either a true good or a true evil.

What happens to he who takes indifferent things for things that are good or evil?

He finds obstacles everywhere. He is afflicted, troubled; he complains of things and of men.

Does he not feel an even greater evil?

He is a slave to desire and fear.

What is the state of he who knows in practice that the things that don't depend on us are indifferent?

He is free. No one can force him to do what he doesn't want to do or prevent him from doing what he wants to do. He has nothing to complain about of any thing or person.

Illness, prison, and poverty, for example: don't they diminish my liberty?

External things can diminish the liberty of my body and my movements. They aren't hindrances to my will as long as I don't have the folly to want that which doesn't depend on me.

Doesn't the doctrine of Epicurus suffice during the course of life? Epicurus' doctrine suffices if I have the things necessary for life and if my health is good. Before joy it renders me the equal of animals, who don't forge for themselves imaginary worries and ills. But in illness and hunger it no longer suffices.

Does it suffice in social relations?

In the course of social relations they can suffice. It frees me from all the tyrants who have power only over the superfluous.

Are there social circumstances where they no longer suffice?

They no longer suffice if the tyrant can deprive me of bread, if he can put me to death or wound my body.

What do you call a tyrant?

I call a tyrant whoever, in acting on indifferent things — such as my wealth or body — pretends to act on my will. I call a tyrant whoever attempts to modify the state of my soul by other means than reasonable persuasion.

Are there not individualists for whom Epicureanism suffices?

Whatever my present might be, I am ignorant of the future. I don't know if the great attack, where Epicureanism will no longer suffice, is laying in wait for me. I must then, as soon as I have attained Epicurean wisdom, work at ever more strengthening myself until I reach Stoic invulnerability.

How will I live in calm?

In calm I can live gently and temperately like Epicurus, but with the spirit of Epictetus.

Is it useful to perfection to propose for oneself a model like Socrates, Jesus, or Epictetus?

This is a bad method.

Why?

Because it is my harmony I must realize, not that of another.

What kinds of duties are there?

There are two kinds of duties: universal and personal duties.

What do you call universal duties?

I call universal duties those incumbent on any wise man.

forget that professional obligation is a fiction and that human obligation is the only moral reality. He will never forget that hierarchies are follies and he will act naturally, not socially with the men that social falsehood affirm to be his inferiors, but which nature has made his equals.

Will the individualist have many dealings with his social inferiors? He will avoid abstentions that could upset them. But he will see little of them for fear of finding them social and unnatural; I mean for fear of finding them servile, embarrassed or hostile.

What will the relations of an individualist be with his colleagues and his fellows?

He will be polite and accommodating with them. But he will avoid their conversation as much as he can without wounding them.

Why?

In order to defend himself against two subtle poisons: esprit de corps and professional stupefaction.

How will the individualist conduct himself with his social superiors?

The individualist will not forget that the words of his social superiors almost always deal with indifferent things. He will listen with indifference and respond as little as possible. He will make no objections. He won't indicate the methods that appear to him to be the best. He will avoid all useless discussion.

Why?

Because the social superior is generally a vain and irritable child.

If a social superior orders, not an indifferent thing, but an injustice or a cruelty, what will the individualist do?

He will refuse to obey.

Won't disobedience cause him to risk danger?

No. Becoming the instrument of injustice and evil is the death of reason and liberty. But disobedience to an unjust order only places the body and material resources in danger, which are counted among indifferent things.

What will the ideas of the individualist be in the face of the forces of order?

The individualist will mentally say to the unjust chief: you are one of

scholar and artist since it imposes natural needs on them, as on other men.

The infirm also have material needs, and you wouldn't be so cruel as to impose a task on them they wouldn't be capable of?

Without a doubt, but I don't consider the beauty of a body or the force of a mind to be infirmities.

So the individualist will work with his hands?

Yes, as much as possible.

Why do you say: "As much as possible?"

Because society has rendered obedience to natural law difficult. There is not remunerative manual labor for all. Ordinarily, we awaken to individualism too late to do an apprenticeship in a manual trade. Society has stolen from all, in order to turn over to a few, that great instrument of natural labor, the earth.

The individualist then can, in the current state of things, live off a task that he doesn't consider true labor?

He can.

Can the individualist be a functionary?

Yes, but he can't agree to all kinds of functions.

What are the functions the individualist will abstain from?

The individualist will abstain from any function of an administrative, judicial, or military order. He will be neither a prefect, a policeman, an officer, judge or executioner.

Why?

The individualist cannot figure among social tyrants.

What functions can he accept?

Those functions that don't harm others.

Aside from functions paid for by the government, are there harmful careers that the individualist will abstain from?

There are.

Cite a few.

Theft, banking, the exploitation of the courtesan, the exploitation of the worker.

What will the relations of the individualist be with his social inferiors?

He will respect their personality and their liberty. He will never

What do you call personal duties?

I call personal duties those that are incumbent on me in particular.

Do personal duties exist?

Personal duties exist. I am a particular being who finds himself in particular situations. I have a certain degree of physical strength, of intellectual strength, and I possess greater or lesser wealth. I have a past to continue. I have to fight against a hostile destiny, or collaborate in a friendly one.

Distinguish with a simple sign personal and universal duties.

Without any exception, universal duties are duties of abstention. Almost all duties of action are personal duties. Even in those rare circumstances where action is imposed on all the detail of the act will bear the mark of the agent, will be the like the signature of the moral artist.

Can personal duty contradict universal duty?

No. It is like the flower which can only grow on the plant.

Are my personal duties the same as those of Socrates, Jesus, or Epictetus?

They don't resemble them at all if I don't lead an apostolic life.

Who will teach me my personal and universal duties?

My conscience.

How will it teach me my universal duties?

By telling me what I can expect from every wise man?

How will it teach me my personal duties?

By telling me what I should demand of myself.

Are there difficult duties?

There are no difficult duties for the wise man.

Before reaching wisdom can the ideas of Socrates, Jesus and Epictetus be useful to me in difficulty?

They can be useful to me, but I would never portray these great individualists as models.

How do I portray them?

I portray them as witnesses. And I want them to never condemn my way of acting.

Are these serious and slight errors?

Any error recognized as such before being committed is serious.

Theoretically, in order to judge my situation or that of others on the path to wisdom can I not judge serious from slight errors?

I can.

What do I call a slight error?

I ordinarily call a slight error one that Epictetus would condemn and Epicurus wouldn't condemn.

What do I call a serious error?

I call a serious error that which would be condemned even by the indulgence of Epicurus.

Chapter 5. On Social Relations

Is work a social or a natural law?

Work is a natural law worsened by society.

How does society worsen the natural law of work?

In three ways: 1- It arbitrarily dispenses a certain number of men from all work and places their part of the burden on other men. 2- It employs many men at useless labors and social functions. 3- It multiplies among all, and particularly among the rich, imaginary needs and it imposes on the poor the odious labor necessary for the satisfaction of these needs.

Why do you find the law of work natural?

Because my body has natural needs that can only be satisfied by products of labor.

So you only consider manual labor to be labor?

Without a doubt.

Doesn't the spirit also have natural needs?

Exercise is the only natural need of our intellectual faculties. The spirit forever remains a happy child who needs movement and play.

Aren't special workers needed to give the spirit occasions for play?

The spectacle of nature, the observation of human passions, and the pleasure of conversation suffice for the natural needs of the spirit.

So you condemn art, science, and philosophy?

I don't condemn these pleasures. Like love, they are noble as long as they remain disinterested. In art, in science, in philosophy, in love, the delight I feel in giving to myself shouldn't be paid for by he who enjoys the delight in receiving.

But there aren't there artists who create with pain and scholars who seek with fatigue?

If the pain is greater than the pleasure I don't understand why these poor people don't abstain?

So you would demand manual labor of the artist and the scholar?

As is the case with lovers, nature demands manual labor of the

Chapter 3. On the Mutual Relations Between Individuals.

Say the formula defining obligations towards others.

You will love your neighbor like yourself and your God above all.

What is my neighbor?

Other men.

Why do you call other men your neighbor?

Because, gifted with reason and will they are closer to me than are animals.

What do animals have in common with me?

Life, feelings, intelligence.

Don't these common characteristics create obligations towards animals?

These common characteristics create in me the obligation to not make animals suffer, to avoid their useless suffering, and to not kill them unnecessarily.

What right is given me by the absence of reason and will in animals?

Animals not being persons I have the right to make use of them in accordance with their strength and to transform them into instruments.

Do I have the same right over certain men?

I never have the right to consider a man as a means. Every person is a goal, an end. I can only ask people for services that they will freely accord me, either through benevolence or in exchange for other services.

Are there not inferior races?

There are no inferior races. The noble individual can flourish in all races.

Are there not inferior individuals incapable of reason and will?

With the exception of the madman, every man is capable of reason and will. But many only listen to their passions and have only whims. It is among them that we meet those who have the pretension to

command.

Can't I make instruments of incomplete individuals?

No. I must consider them as individuals whose development has been halted, but in whom the man will perhaps be awakened tomorrow.

What am I to think of the orders of those with the pretension of commanding?

An order can only ever be the caprice of a child or the fantasy of a madman.

How should I love my neighbor?

Like myself.

What do these words mean?

They mean: in the same way that I should love myself.

Who will teach me how I should love myself?

The second part of the formula teaches me how I should love myself.

Repeat that second part.

You will love your God above all else.

What is God?

God has several meanings: he has a different meaning in every religion or metaphysic and he has a moral meaning.

What is the moral meaning of the word God?

God is the name of moral perfection.

What does the possessive "your" mean in the formula for love: "You will love YOUR God?"

My God is my moral perfection.

What must I love above all else?

My reason, my freedom, my internal harmony, and my happiness, for these are the other names of my God.

Does my God demand sacrifices?

My God demands that I sacrifice my desires and my fears. He demands that I detest false goods and that I be "poor in spirit."

What else does he demand?

He also demands that I be ready to sacrifice to him my sensibility and, if need be, my life.

What then will I love in my neighbor?

I have the same duties towards the sensibilities of my neighbor as I do towards the sensibilities of animals or myself.

Does the wise man then have no pity for the oppressed?

The wise man knows that the oppressed who complain aspire to be oppressors. He relieves them according to his means, but he doesn't believe in salvation through common action.

The wise man then doesn't believe in reform?

He notes that reforms change the names of things and not the things themselves. The slave became a serf, and then a salaried worker: nothing has been reformed but language. The wise man remains indifferent to these questions of philology.

Is the wise man revolutionary?

Experience proves to the wise man that revolutions never have lasting results. Reason tells him that lies are not refuted by lies, and that violence isn't destroyed by violence.

What does the wise man think of anarchy?

The wise man regards anarchy as a form of naiveté.

Why?

The anarchist believes that the government is the limit of liberty. He hopes, by destroying government, to expand liberty.

Is he not right?

The true limit is not government, but society. Government is a social product like another. We don't destroy a tree by cutting one of its branches.

Why does the wise man not work at destroying society?

Society is as inevitable as death. On a material level our strength is weak against such limits. But the wise man destroys in himself the fear of society, just as he destroys the fear of death. He is indifferent to the political and social form of the milieu in which he lives, just as he is indifferent to the kind of death that awaits him.

So the wise man will never act on society?

The wise man knows that we can't destroy either social injustice or the waters of the sea. But he strives to save an oppressed person from a particular injustice, just as he throws himself into the water to save a drowning man.

the prejudices it imposes on other men, and he will forbid himself from hating or loving it. He will progressively free himself from any fear or desire concerning it. He will advance towards perfect indifference, which is what wisdom is when confronting things that do not depend on him.

Does the wise man hope for a better society?

The wise man forbids himself any hope.

Does the wise man believe in progress?

He notes that wise men are rare in all eras and that there is no moral progress.

Does the wise man take joy in material progress?

The wise man notes that material progress has as its object the increasing of the artificial needs of some and the labor of others. Material progress appears to him as an increasing weight, which increasingly plunges man in the mud and in suffering.

Won't the invention of perfected machines diminish human labor?

The invention of machines has always aggravated labor. It has rendered it more painful and less harmonious. It has replaced free and intelligent initiative with a servile and fearful precision. It has made of the laborer, once the smiling master of tools, the trembling slave of the machine.

How can the machine, which multiplies products, not diminish the quantity of labor to be furnished by man?

Man is greedy, and the folly of imaginary needs grows as it is satisfied. The more superfluous things the madman has, the more he wants.

Does the wise man carry out social acts?

The wise man notes that in order to carry out social acts one must act on crowds, and one doesn't act on crowds through reason, but through the passions. He doesn't believe that he has the right to stir up the passions of men. Social action appears to him to be a tyranny, and he abstains from taking part in this.

Is the wise man not selfish in forgetting the happiness of the people?

The wise man knows that the words "The happiness of the people," have no meaning. Happiness is internal and individual. It can only be produced within oneself.

Explain yourself.

I will not create pointless suffering in others or myself.

Can I create pointless suffering?

I cannot actively create pointless suffering. But certain necessary abstentions will have as a consequence suffering in others or myself. I should no more sacrifice my God to the sensibility of others than to my sensibility.

What are my obligations towards the lives of others?

I must neither kill nor wound them.

Are there not cases where we have the right to kill?

In the case of self-defense it would seem that necessity creates the right to kill. But in almost all cases, if I am brave enough, I will maintain the calm that permits us to save ourselves without killing.

Is it not better to be attacked without defending oneself?

In this case abstention is, in fact the sign of a superior virtue, the truly heroic solution.

In the face of the suffering of others, are there not unjustified abstentions that are exactly equivalent to evil acts?

There are. If I allow to die the man who I could have saved without crime, I am a veritable assassin.

Cite a phrase of Bossuet's dealing with this.

"This rich inhuman being has stripped the poor man because he did not clothe him. He cruelly murdered him because he did not feed him."

What do you think of sincerity?

Sincerity is my primary duty towards others and myself, the testimony that my God demands as a continual sacrifice, like a flame that I must never allow to be extinguished.

What is the most necessary sincerity?

The proclamation of my moral certainties.

What sincerity do you put in second place?

Sincerity in the expression of my sentiments.

Is exactitude in the exposition of external facts without importance?

It is much less important than the two great philosophical and sentimental sincerities. Nevertheless, the wise man observes it.

Chapter 4. On Society

How many kinds lies are there?

There are three kinds of lies: the malicious lie, the officious lie, and the joyous lie.

What is a malicious lie?

The malicious lie is a crime and an act of cowardice.

What is an officious lie?

An officious lie is one that has usefulness to others or myself as its goal.

What do you think of the officious lie?

When an officious lie contains no harmful element the wise man doesn't condemn it in others, but he avoids it himself.

Are there not cases where the officious lie is needed; if a lie can, for example, save someone's life?

In this case the wise man can tell a lie that doesn't touch on the facts. But he will almost always, instead of lying, refuse to respond.

Is a joyous lie permitted?

The wise man forbids him the joyous lie.

Why?

The joyous lie sacrifices to a game the authority of the word which, maintained, can sometimes be useful to others.

Does the wise man forbid himself fiction?

The wise man doesn't forbid himself any open fiction, and it happens that he tells parables fables, symbols, and myths.

What should the relations between men and women be?

The relations between a man and a woman should be, like all relations between people, absolutely free on both sides.

Are there rules to be observed in these relations?

They should express mutual sincerity.

What do you think of love?

Mutual love is the most beautiful of indifferent things, the nearest to being a virtue. It makes a kiss noble.

Is a kiss without love a fault?

If a kiss without love is the meeting of two desires and two pleasure it doesn't constitute a fault.

Do I not have relations with isolated individuals?

I have relations, not only with isolated individuals, but also with various social groups and, in general, with society.

What is society?

Society is a gathering of individuals for a common labor.

Can a common labor be good?

Under certain conditions a common labor can be good.

Under what conditions?

A common labor will be good if, through mutual love or through love of the task workers all act freely, and if their common efforts bring them together in a harmonious coordination.

Does social labor in fact have this characteristic of liberty?

In fact, social labor has no characteristics of liberty. Workers are subordinated to each other. Their efforts are not spontaneous and harmonious acts of love, but grinding acts of constraint.

What do you conclude from this characteristic of social labor?

I conclude from this that social labor is evil.

How does the wise man consider society?

The wise man considers society as a limit. He feels social in the same way he feels mortal.

What is the attitude of the wise man in face of these limits?

The wise man regards these limits as material necessities and he physically submits to them with indifference.

What are limits for he who is on the march towards wisdom?

Limits constitute dangers for he who is on the march towards wisdom.

Why?

He who cannot yet distinguish in practice, with unshakeable certainty, the things that depend on him from those that are indifferent risks translating material constraints into moral constraints.

What should the imperfect individualist do in the face of social constraints?

He should defend his reason and his will against them. He will reject