

# A SELFISH MAN



John O'Loughlin

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By

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## PREFACE

Another of those projects in which a number of my principal philosophical themes are recycled in literary guise for the benefit of a wider understanding, *A Selfish Man* begins with the title piece, a first-person narrative by an advocate of spiritual selfishness, and winds its way through fifteen other examples of my art in this field, culminating in a selection of interior monologues which features twelve different thinkers who successively elaborate on their likes and dislikes from a similar ideological standpoint, thereby establishing a unity of mind which transcends their phenomenal individualities.

In between these two literary extremities there are varying amounts of unity and disunity between the characters, but all are caught-up in the throes of a vigorous philosophical debate. For here, as in other kindred works of mine, action is subordinate to thought, whether we are dealing with a drive to the cinema, a couple watching television, reflections on a soapbox orator, a clandestine affair, or the vicissitudes of a revolutionary politician.

Sometimes the characters have names, at other times not. Sometimes they are a fairly transparent projection of me, at other times a degree of fictional objectivity has gone into my fashioning of them. Whatever the case, this further collection of short prose to those examples of the genre included in the previous collection, *Millennial Projections*, also dating from 1983, bears ample witness to this philosopher-artist's search for literary perfection through thought and a repudiation, in consequence, of premeditated or deliberate action.

John O'Loughlin, London 1983 (Revised 2022)

## *A Selfish Man*

I am a selfish man and proud of it! People are apt to say to me: "You ought to think more of others sometimes, Jonathan. Happiness comes from being of help to others." Old Mrs Murphy is the person most inclined to take this line with me, and she treats it as the height of wisdom! Apparently, she has been of service to others all her life and, not altogether surprisingly, is keen to let people like me know of the fact. I used, in my then-relative ignorance of moral issues, to be half-impressed, wondering whether such wisdom oughtn't to play a greater role in my life, too. But nowadays I would turn a deaf ear to her admonitions and not feel particularly ashamed of myself for being selfish. I would react no less negatively to any similar admonition received, in letter form, from my aunt, who has also specialized in a life of service to others, and tends, on occasion, to offer me what she considers to be 'good advice'. I am free to accept or reject it. I would now choose to reject it, having given the matter, in my capacity of self-styled philosopher, some considered thought!

Of course, I am not completely selfish. No man is, unfortunately! But I do regard myself as being predominantly selfish, which is no mean achievement in this world, even these days. There are still, alas, quite a number of relatively selfless people around, and some of them rub-up against one on occasion, threatening one's spiritual integrity and perhaps even detracting from it, if only on a temporary basis. Nevertheless I remain quite proud of my record to-date, which is the consequence, in no small measure, of a principled stance in relation to selfishness. People like my aunt and Mrs Murphy would not understand this, because they tend to pride themselves on quite opposite behaviour than myself. Should I attempt to explain it to them? No, I think not! They are too old and, besides, I would only succeed in hurting their feelings... Not that such a prospect greatly worries me. But one has to consider oneself as well, and thus avoid, if possible, giving others an opportunity to tarnish one's peace of mind. If it came to the crunch, I would probably turn the other cheek – assuming they hadn't made that too difficult. Unfortunately, Mrs Murphy has a lethal faculty for obliging her opponents to come to grips with her. It is almost as if she were a masochist!

But turning the other cheek is a policy I often adopt with my neighbours when they are making rather a lot of noise. I could respond, as I used to do several years ago, by making some noise myself, giving them a taste of their own

medicine, so to speak. But I prefer not to engage in noise combat with them because it distracts me from my reading or writing or thinking or contemplating, as the case may be, and disturbs my peace of mind even more than their respective noises. I prefer, when possible, to plug-up with wax earplugs and carry-on with whatever I happen to be doing at the time. Naturally, I may get sore ears in the process. I may even go deaf eventually or, at the very least, succumb to an infection. But I always put the intellect, and thus by implication my peace of mind, above the senses these days. I would take that risk. As also the risk of being taken for a fool by my neighbours because I don't fight back but prefer to remain silent and endure what, from their cynical point of view, must seem like unreasonably putting-up with noise. I am quite resigned to such a risk because I know it would be ill-founded on their part, a reflection, so to speak, of their own psychological limitations as dualists, which is to say, as semi-pagans for whom the doctrine of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' remains valid even in this late-Christian or, as some would say, early-transcendental age. Christ, of course, taught 'turning the other cheek'. Someone else, of Old Testament provenance, preferred to teach the former doctrine. Christians have never been entirely clear as to which teachings to adopt, because the Bible is comprised of both Old and New Testaments. Along with Christ's moderately transcendental teachings we find the mundane, quasi-pagan teachings of the ancient Hebrews – of people like Moses and King David. No wonder Christians, or so-called Christians, have been so ambivalent over which teachings to adopt! As dualists they have acted now one way, now another, depending on their mood and/or the nature of the violence being directed against them. They are indisposed to maintaining a peaceful, and therefore heavenly, state-of-mind all the time. For that would require a post-dualistic mentality in an unequivocally transcendental age. They are prepared to plunge into violence and, by implication, a hellish state-of-mind when circumstances would seem to necessitate.

Thus if I were more of a dualistic Christian, or let us rather say less of a post-dualistic transcendentalist, I wouldn't hesitate, on occasion, to plunge into vengeful activity against my neighbours by repaying them in kind with as much noise as I considered appropriate to the circumstances. But precisely because I am a predominantly selfish man of transcendental bias, I prefer, like Christ, to 'turn the other cheek' and carry on, as best I can, with my intellectual commitments ... which are, after all, what I am really interested in and consider to be of paramount importance. I wouldn't want to play recorded music too often – as would surely be the case if I made a habit of responding

to my neighbours' noises by repaying them in kind – because, frankly, music only appeals to me in small doses and when I wish to hear it, being, so far as

I'm concerned, a lesser commitment than philosophy or literature or contemplating salvation in any ultimate sense. My selfishness compels me to steer as determined an intellectual course through life as possible, and, on the whole, I nobly succeed in sticking to my bent. Not everyone, however, would understand my reasons for doing so, least of all those who are less partial to a heavenly bias in their adherence to dualistic, and thus partly hellish, criteria. A people accustomed to a dualistic tradition will be more disposed to behaving in a relative manner. A people acquainted, on the other hand, with some form of transcendentalism will be in a better position to understand Christ's advice about turning the other cheek. They won't be far off the mark if someone like Gandhi should come along and advise them to offer but passive resistance to oppression. Resistance of any kind is of course less than heavenly, but passive resistance is a good deal better than the active variety! It, too, pertains to the post-dualistic.

All this may seem a long way from selfishness but, in reality, it is a manifestation of the selfish, as signified by intellectual or, preferably, spiritual preoccupations. I am not thinking about sensual selfishness, which is an entirely different matter – as I hope to demonstrate in a moment. In fact, to make absolutely certain that no-one misunderstands me, I am going to distinguish not only between spiritual selfishness and its sensual counterpart, but also between spiritual selflessness and *its* sensual counterpart ... in the unequivocally diabolic. By which I mean the stars.

This isn't something that either my aunt or Mrs Murphy would care to hear, so I shall confine myself to paper for the benefit of posterity or, maybe if I'm fortunate enough, some intelligent, not to say sympathetic, readership in the years ahead. I am going to begin by defining the diabolic principle as 'doing for others', a necessarily selfless and (certainly in the case of stars) unconscious principle – one not apparent, in other words, to the doer as such. Our sun, for instance, isn't conscious of the fact that it sustains a solar system, let alone a planet on which human and other life forms are to be found. And yet, considered objectively from the vantage-point of a human mind taking account of the fact that without the sun there would be no solar system, it does, in fact, sustain one and makes life on earth possible, to boot. The sun doesn't exist for itself but for others, namely planets and life forms, and it is precisely in this 'doing for others' that its existence becomes justified and that

it is intelligible to us *as a sun*. So must it be with the millions of other stars in the Galaxy, as indeed the billions of stars in the Universe as a whole, and this regardless of whether the stars in question be major or minor, central governing stars or peripheral revolving ones, like our sun. When a star is deprived of a *raison d'être*, in the context of any particular galaxy, it becomes a shooting star, an outsider and loner, as we would say of the human equivalents to such stars, who have come apart from society, which is the microcosmic reflection of the galactic macrocosm while nature predominates over the supernatural, as it will do for a considerable period of earthly time. Fortunately, shooting stars, like tramps and outsiders, are the exception to the rule! Most stars continue, in spite of themselves, to exist for others, to burn and transmit energy throughout vast areas of space. Our sun has been doing so for billions of years. It shows no signs of abandoning its natural inclinations at present. So much, then, for the diabolic principle!

Now let us turn our attention to the divine principle, the principle antithetical to 'doing for others' which is 'being for self' – the most selfish and self-conscious principle conceivable. It exists only for itself in the most complete self-absorption of transcendent spirit. This will be the case whether such transcendent spirit is one of many spiritual globes converging, in space, towards ultimate unity or whether it is the definitive spiritual globe itself – at the climax, so to speak, of supernatural evolution. Wherever transcendence has occurred, on whichever level, the principle of 'being for self' will prevail, and to such an extent that the ensuing spiritual globe won't be conscious of anything else, least of all planets or stars, because the ultimate introversion. A star, by contrast, isn't conscious of anything *inside* itself, because the ultimate extroversion. Yet such extroversion is beneath consciousness, and therefore devoid of reference to the external.

Here, then, are the two extremes of evolution, beginning naturally in the 'doing for others' of the stars and culminating supernaturally in the 'being for self' of transcendent spirit. Human life falls somewhere in-between, and the degree to which either tendency prevails will to some extent depend on one's sex and also to some extent on the phase of evolution existing at any particular time. The lower the phase ... the more will 'doing for others' predominate. Conversely, the higher the phase ... the more will 'being for self' predominate. The former will be predominantly sensual, the latter, by contrast, predominantly spiritual. At neither extreme, however, will there be an approximation to the absolute, whether diabolic or divine, because man is but



a stage of evolution combining both alpha and omega in himself, a stage which stems, on the one hand, from the pre-human life forms and which aspires, on the other hand, towards post-human life forms (as loosely defined by me in terms of brain- and new-brain collectivizations), each of which will be more extreme than himself – the former directly stemming from the Diabolic Alpha, the latter directly aspiring towards the Divine Omega. The totality of stages would run something like this: major stars, minor stars, planets, plants, animals, men (in pre-atomic, atomic, and post-atomic phases), supermen, superbeings, planetary spiritual globes, galactic spiritual globes, universal spiritual globe. Everything from minor stars up to men (including atomic-phase men) stems from the Diabolic Alpha in natural evolution. Everything from men (including atomic-phase men) up to galactic spiritual globes aspires towards the Divine Omega in supernatural evolution. Prior to this evolutionary divide, 'doing for others' predominates. Subsequent to it, 'being for self' plays an increasingly important role.

Let us look a little more closely at the human stage and add to those antithetical tendencies already mentioned what could be called the compromise tendencies of ... 'being for others' and 'doing for self', each of which also plays a significant role in life. What is the distinction, you may wonder, between 'doing for others' and 'being for others'? For there *is* one, and quite important it is too, even though both tendencies appertain to the sensual as opposed to the spiritual realm. Women like Mrs Murphy are especially good at 'doing for others', as when they prepare a man's dinner or feed a tiny-tot his soup or take care of the washing-up or help a man into his coat. Such women are or were – if I am to insist on the increasingly post-atomic nature of the age, and thus pay passing tribute to feminist sensibility – more disposed to 'doing for others' than to 'being for self', a fact which needn't surprise us, since for long centuries women were more natural than men and thus stemmed from the Diabolic Alpha, in both appearance and behaviour, to a greater extent than men – ugly, intellectual, spiritually-striving creatures that they generally are. Isn't this still partly the case today? I shan't apologize to 'libbers' because I am, after all, a philosopher and must therefore speak honestly, not in terms of what Schopenhauer would have called 'theological expedience'. The philosopher doesn't expect to be read by the millions in any case, as I think I intimated a little while ago. His is the voice of truth or, at any rate, a will to truth, and truth isn't something that everyone can appreciate, least of all at a point in time which is overly enamoured of strength and beauty! I certainly wouldn't expect either my aunt or Mrs Murphy to appreciate it, particularly in view of the fact that it may reflect less than flatteringly upon themselves! This world

is, after all, a battleground, and often enough its battles take place between the sexes and the generations.

To return to my main thesis: most women have long been more disposed to 'doing for others' than to 'being for self', partly because men have insisted on their behaving in a certain way, partly because they have chosen or been obliged to behave in that way as a consequence of natural inclination – the extents to which either influence may have predominated depending on the age and degree of civilization; though I suspect that, even then, nature has had the bigger role to play in that respect. Be that as it may, there is no simple way of regarding this problem, not, at any rate, from a philosophical standpoint. Even a majority of men were more inclined, at one time, to 'do for others' than to 'be for self', and they haven't ceased, in the main, to be capable of the former – as, for example, when making love to a woman. For making love to a woman, to put it politely, is largely to 'do for others', i.e. to copulate for propagative purposes and/or the woman's greater pleasure, with a lesser personal pleasure for the male as a ...