

FRAGMENTS

Vol. 36

July - September 1998

No. 3

The Individual and Society

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Translated from the French by Steven Schwartzman

The primary element of the social problem is the individual considered as an entity having its own existence and its own needs.

We use the word *individualism*, which few people understand, and which most people distort.

Isn't the purpose of all our efforts — so divergent and at times even so incoherent — the true happiness of the individual? Everything else is, too often, only chimera and illusion, when it's not outright lying and deception! The individual is the very basis of Society; Society couldn't exist without the individual.

Separate people got together to form social groups. They did so to be stronger and to establish communities. As soon as Society exploits them or oppresses them rather than helps them, it betrays its mission — and naturally the individual fights back.

Who can deny that Society, with its current economic, political, and moral tyranny, is the intransigent and implacable enemy of the freedom and happiness of the poor individual? Such a Society can't help but impart, and even impose, moral principles conceived specifically to condone and sustain the dominant institutions that keep the weak and the oppressed beneath the yoke of their rulers. Only an individualistic morality, based on justice and reason, can carry out this

truly emancipating mission in all areas.

"Everything not forbidden by the law is permissible," our official censors proclaim. Because *they* create and apply laws, *they* therefore limit and control our freedom. In contrast, we propose our own principle: "Everything that isn't against the legitimate rights of someone else and isn't detrimental to Society's harmony is normal and beneficial."

To Our Readers

It was not our intention to make this issue a "special one," since each author wrote on whatever topic he or she desired. By a strange quirk of "coincidence," however, most of the articles in this edition deal with "Natural Law," "laws of nature," "natural rights," and "rights" — generally.

We went along with the "natural" flow — naturally. The result is fascinating.

Enjoy the reading — and let us hear (and see) your comments.

—The Editors

Power exists because submission exists. In *Voluntary Servitude*, Étienne de la Boétie affirmed: "Don't prop up power, and it will collapse like a colossus whose base has been yanked out from under it."

Our position with regard to established power is, and will remain, permanent and generalized conscientious objection everywhere on earth. The September 24, 1949, issue of *Paris-Match* began an investigation of conscientious objection. Here is Jean Giono's beautiful response: "Conscientious objection in all areas is the first right of man, and his first duty. Through the exercise of this right and the acceptance of this duty, man lays claim to and affirms his nobility. Obedience, even unto death, accepted in full conscience, reveals a lack of personal power, together with an excessive pride. In our age, when the man most unaware of the true requirements for freedom is prey to tyranny, conscientious objection is the last hope for rescue. But a person must be conscientious, and that's the most difficult thing."

The simple and logical principles of non-power-based, individualistic philosophy derive from the elementary laws of nature.