



THEORY OF EGOISM.

(5 Nivôse, Year X.)

Man is born with self-love; this love is the constitutive principle of his being; it is for him what movement is for matter.

The exclusive love of self descends from it without resembling it; it is the abuse of a good thing, and I would happily call it the error of loving ourselves.

The good man, otherwise the man who reasons justly, loves himself in others; that is to say, he does not separate his happiness from that of his fellows; he feels that happiness, in society, can only be the result of a reciprocity of assistance and affections.

The wicked man sets himself apart and loves himself alone; he makes himself, as much as he can, the center of the universe. But always, either deceived in his desires or troubled in his enjoyments, and pressed between dangers and remorse, he finds his torture in his frightful system.

This man who prefers himself enough to other men to want to sacrifice them all to himself, is a true egoist, whatever his dominant vice.

In this first regard, egoism would express the common principle of vices, rather than a particular vice.

But in ordinary language, we give this word a less extensive meaning; let us try to fix this meaning by bringing together all of the ideas that compose it.

It seems to me that the egoist must be placed between the honest man and the scoundrel; he is equally distant from both.

Preoccupied with himself alone, he narrows as much as he can the duties of probity; but he sees some advantage in it, and he rarely deviates from it.

He sees danger in crime; and he counts too little on the precautions that can hide him to allow himself to indulge in it. He has lost neither his reason nor his fear; vice, in his soul, is without passion.

This character does not exclude spirit, which is only a happy combination of ideas; but it excludes the energy of the soul, from which comes all that is great.

The egoist believes his principles to be wisdom itself; but he senses that they must be odious; he neither displays them nor hides them: different in this from the cynic and the hypocrite. His face does not lie, but it does not announce his soul.

He loves pleasures, but he fears their consequences; he is not debauched. Money must be his only passion; but he is looking for it to use it soberly, and not to bury it like a miser.

What affects him most about dignities is profit and he does not seek them with the passion of ambition.

He is usually cold and hard; he becomes cruel as soon as his interest requires it; but his cruelty is more passive than active; that is to say, he exercises it more through refusals than through violence.

We are no more born with this vice than with the others; but it manifests itself early, and we cannot be too hasty in stifling its germ. There is only one means; it is to tire the child in a long ordeal of this dependence when men are among themselves: obliged to implore help, he will learn under what conditions it is obtained.

The egoist does not marry; but he nonetheless takes precautions to be the main heir of the family.

If an unhappy friend pours out a heart devoured with sorrow, he replies: *How glad I am to no longer be in that situation!*

He looks at relatives as people from whom we expect and with whom we share inheritances; friends, as reasoning beings whom we sometimes enjoy listening to and talking to; benefits, like as actions of a dupe, which a prudent man does not do, but which a fortunate man repays with words; all men, as enemies to be feared and deceived; he judges them according to himself: such is the egoist.



OF CHEERFULNESS.

(19 Nivôse, Year X.)

Cheerfulness is the happiest gift of nature; it is the most pleasant way to exist for others and for oneself. It takes the place of spirit in society, and of companionship in solitude; it is the first charm of youth, and the only pleasure of advanced age; it is opposed to sadness, as joy is to sorrow. Joy and sorrow are situations; sadness and cheerfulness are characters. But the most followed characters are often distracted by situations; and this is how it happens to the cheerful man to be overwhelmed with sorrows. We rarely find cheerfulness where there is not health. Scarron was pleasant; I can't believe that he was cheerful. True cheerfulness seems to flow through the veins with blood and life. It often has innocence and freedom as companions. That which is only external is an artificial flower that is only made to deceive the eyes. Cheerfulness must preside over the pleasures of the table; but it is often enough to call it to make it flee. People promise it everywhere; we invite it to all the dinners; and it is usually boredom that comes. The world is full of bad jokers, of cold buffoons, who think they are cheerful because they make people laugh. If I had to describe in a single word, cheerfulness, reason, virtue and voluptuousness combined, I would call them *philosophy*.

There is cheerfulness of the mind, cheerfulness of the soul, cheerfulness of the imagination. The first is for others, the second is for yourself, the third is for books.

Addison claims that cheerfulness is one of the greatest obstacles to women's wisdom; and I myself maintain that naturally cheerful people are too easily distracted by the different objects that amuse them, to indulge too easily in the sweet weaknesses of love. I believe that women of a melancholic temperament are more likely to allow themselves to be drawn into the dangers of this passion.

There is a sect among the English that never laughs; these are the Presbyterians: it is said that they have made laughter an eighth mortal sin. According to them, a woman who laughs sins as much as, according to us, a woman who transgresses the austere laws of modesty and decency would sin. Among them are families who, from father to son, have never laughed.

The public papers announced, a few years ago, that an Englishman intended to give lessons in laughter to his compatriots of both sexes: we do not know if he made a fortune; but it is believed that, until now, he has had mediocre students. We will see English people passing through France to cure themselves of consumption, and this is very natural; but what should we think of the French who will go to London to recover the cheerfulness they have lost in their homeland?