

The Land of the Altruists

A Parable for the Infant Class

John Beverley Robinson

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If you start from the South Pole and sail due north, you will come to a wonderful country inhabited by the people called Altruists. They are called so because they prefer other people's happiness to their own.

They are a very industrious, hard-working, uncomplaining people, forever toiling from daylight til dark, making all kinds of useful and luxurious things; yet so unwilling are they to enjoy the fruits of their labor, so anxious for somebody else to be happy at their expense, that they have made this very ingenious and complete arrangement to secure that result.

They have ordained that everybody who has produced a thousand dollars' worth of goods shall receive from the rest of the community sixty dollars a year; he who has made or obtained in any way ten thousand dollars' worth shall receive six hundred dollars a year; and so on in proportion.

Now, it is easily seen that, as the people to whom these stipends are paid are at liberty to go on working and making enough to live on, they are able to lay by the amounts paid to them by the community. After a while these amounts become so large that they need not work at all, for all the rest of the Altruist community are pledged to support them, their children, their grandchildren, and great grandchildren, not only til death, but forever.

Such sweet and unselfish dispositions have these Altruists. There are getting to be a good many of these people who are supported by the Altruists.

Two or three million at a guess in every twenty or thirty million families do not work, but are paid because they have so much already. They are getting to be very bossy, too, these stipendiaries of the workers, and begin to hold themselves very loftily, and despise the unselfish workers as dirty, ignorant, low creatures, unmindful of the fact that it is only because the workers are Altruists that they enjoy providing luxuries for others rather than for themselves.

It is getting to be rather hard scratching, too, for the workers, Altruists though they be, who enjoy hunger and suffering; for to the objects of their care, the supported class, they have given, not only all the houses and furniture, and all but a little of the butter and meat and bread, but the very land itself, so that now, when the Altruist workers want to work still harder and to cultivate more land to support the rapidly growing numbers of the Aristocrats, they find themselves forbidden by these very Aristocrats to use the land which they have given them.

Clearly a catastrophe must occur. Although the Altruists enjoy starving as long as they have the pleasure of seeing the Aristocrats, as they call those whom they support, have plenty, there is

a physical limit to the process of starvation, and, when the Altruists begin to diminish in number, the Aristocrats must also dwindle.

What the outcome will be no man can prophesy - a relapse into slavery at least, which the Altruists would no doubt enjoy even more than their present arrangements; but there is a chance that their natures may change: they may become Egoists, and no longer take pleasure in giving to those who give nothing in return. Then there will be no more Aristocrats, and everybody who is not an Altruist will have a much better time.

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