van Ingen, John, Why Be Moral? The Egoistic Challenge (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) pp. viii, 192, US$42.00 (paper).

As the title suggests, van Ingen's project is to try to answer the 'Why Be Moral?' question posed (in a slightly different form) by Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*. Like Glaucon, van Ingen is a partisan of morality (as he is at some pains to stress) but, like Plato, his aim is to vindicate the moral life by mounting and then meeting a powerful challenge. The challenge - or perhaps the challenger - consists in the figure of the amoral personal egoist. This individual, who in later chapters glories in the name of Edgar, does not acknowledge the claims of morality and is completely selfish having no other aim besides the promotion of his own profit and pleasure. Other people represent mere obstacles or resources to him. They are none of them ends in themselves. Edgar is, however, an accomplished hypocrite and deceiver who convinces everyone - or almost everyone - that he cares and that he is a prodigiously moral fellow into the bargain. He is therefore a Pecksniff rather than a Jonas Chuzzlewit, since his egoism is discreetly concealed, van Ingen admits that it would be rather difficult to sustain this role indefinitely but meets this objection with Glaucon's remark that 'nothing great is ever easy'. Edgar is not an ethical egoist, someone who thinks everyone should look after number one (like a follower of Ayn Rand). *He* - rationally - ought to look after number one, but as for everyone else, he declines to prescribe (except insincerely when it suits him). He may have a private ought-language, but this is solipsistic and not universalizable. (This may be logically odd, but a man who sets morality at defiance is not going to be perturbed by a little logical oddity, especially in a set of imperatives which he keeps to himself.) Edgar is, in short, the unjust man of Glaucon's fancy done up in modern dress. Like Glaucon and Adeimantus, van Ingen spends a good deal of time - indeed the greater part of the book - polishing up this figure 'like a statue for an art competition' (*Republic*, II 361d). Edgar's life, he contends, represents a real, if repellent, option. It is only in the last chapter that van Ingen turns to the drawbacks attendant on Edgar's life-style and awards the palm of victory to the sincerely moral agent. An informed existential chooser would probably prefer not to be Edgar.

In chapter 1, van Ingen claims to develop a 'strongest-case analysis of the normative alternative to the just or moral life'. In chapter 2, he distinguishes between 'Why should I be moral?' ('What reason do I have for conforming to the dictates of morality?') and 'Why should we be moral?' ('What is the use of a common system of morality?'). It may be that without a commonly agreed morality, life would be nasty, poor, brutish and short. (Though van Ingen seems unaware of the minority opinion - due to Max Stirner - that a society of amoral but enlightened egoists would be more peaceful and cooperative than a society dominated by group loyalties, group hatreds and persecuting moral ideologies.) But given that an agreed morality is in force, why should I go along with it? Sometimes, at least, I can sin with impunity and even profit! van Ingen gives a somewhat inclusive definition of what it is to be moral. A moral agent is one for whom some choices are excluded because of their impact on the welfare of others - a definition which, as he admits,

converts Nazis and Mafiosi into moral agents. Indeed to be moral it is enough to take a sincere interest in one other person - a rather weak requirement! According to van Ingen, the question 'Why should I be moral?', need not be construed as the tautologous 'Why am I morally obliged to do what 1 am morally obliged to do?'. Rather it is a request for reasons of some sort for doing my duty besides the fact that it is my duty. But given his definition of what being moral consists in, the question should resolve itself into the following: 'What reasons are there for being interested in the welfare of anyone besides myself?'. And it is rather more easy to answer this question than to defend the life of the consistently just moral agent.

Because van Ingen thinks that to be an amoralist is to have selfish rather than altruistic motivations, he believes that behavioural conformity to the dictates of morality is not enough. Hence conformity-theorists such as T.S. Sprigge merely propound a conservative egoistic strategy, not a moral alternative to Edgar's existential choice. Sprigge might well reply that if Edgar has reason to conform, van Ingen has not managed to depict a coherent alternative to the moral life. Jesse Kalin offers reasons for conformity by developing an egoistic reconstruction of morality as what a group of selfish bargainers would agree on. van Ingen replies that a true egoist would cheat on the deal if there were a reasonable chance of getting away with it. Here the problem is that van Ingen has not sought out his most dangerous opponent. In Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory, Gregory Kavka contends a) that a rational egoist would be a rule rather than an act-egoist, and b) that one of the rules it would be rational to adopt would be to agree on a set of moral restrictions so long as other people were prepared to do likewise. Kavka therefore gives a reason why Edgar should both conform outwardly and avoid cheating when (he thinks) he can get away with it . By neglecting Kavka for Kalin, van Ingen avoids the best attempt at an egoistic vindication of morality. Glaucon and Adeimantus imagine groups of unjust men who get together in clubs to bamboozle and exploit the public.)Plato probably had in mind the oligarchic clubs that spawned the regime of Critias. A more modern example might be the Mafia or certain sections of the New South Wales police.) van lngen argues that Edgar's egoism is so extreme that he cannot be a genuinely loyal club-member but must be willing to exploit his co-conspirators should the opportunity arise. This argument evaporates once you admit that an amoralist or an unjust man can retain some degree of solidarity with others. In other words it relies on van Ingen's singular thesis that if I have genuine comrades in crime, I must be a moral agent.

The show-down with Edgar is deferred till the final chapter. The costs of being completely selfish apparently exceed the benefits. To begin with Edgar takes a metaphysical risk. He relies on the non-existence of a 'searcher of hearts'. Secondly, being a successful egoist is extremely hard work and might prove rather wearing in the long run. Thirdly Edgar's steadfast devotion to the main chance deprives him of particular pleasures. (This is Butler's argument misunderstood.) And finally,

Edgar's resolute decision to treat others as means rather than as ends deprives him of the pleasures of love and friendship. (People can be friends with him, but he cannot be friends with them.)

To my mind the argument is a failure. The problem is that van Ingen makes being moral so easy that only someone as bizarre and repellent as Edgar could fail to measure up. Justice is traditionally defined as a habit whereby the just person renders to each his due by a constant and perpetual will; perpetual because he wills always to do what is just, and constant because he always wills to do what is just. To be unjust is to lack this habit; it is not to be committed to a career of injustice, or even to a principle of being unjust whenever it appears to pay. To be amoral is to lack the perpetual will, either because you do not believe that anything is 'due' to anyone, or because you do believe in dues but remain unmoved by this belief. This is quite compatible with selective altruism, or even altruism on the grand scale, so long as the amoralist is not moved by the thought that he is somehow *obliged* to have a regard for other people's interests. Thus altruism and amoralism are distinct. So far from mounting the 'strongest-case . . . alternative to the just or moral life', van Ingen pitches upon the most unattractive amoralist he can conceive of and then deploys the T.I.N.A. principle, falsely claiming that there are no alternatives. He is not the philosophical tough-guy that he takes himself to be. It may be that no sane and reflective person would wish to be Edgar. But this does not mean that no sane person would wish to be an amoralist. For there are many ways of being an amoralist which don't amount to being Edgar. In particular Kai Nielsen's 'classist amoralist' (scorned by van lngen as lacking in conceptual clarity) represents a much more attractive option. To vindicate morality it is not enough to show that life goes with more of a swing when spiced with a little altruism. Most amoralists could agree to that. You need to show that we have reason to render to each one his due (under some conception of morality) even when we don't want to and when it does not appear to pay. And that is a tall order.

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