Socratic Selfishness:

One of the greatest mental debacles to spawn from my chimeric curiosity was the pungent exchange of a rather raw and torpid deliverance of existential motives pulled from the hollow chambers of the late Dr. Grimshaw. I had been feeling quite fulfilled in my life recently, however, I was yet to meet the digging questions of my cynical professor. Thus, it was in this juxtaposingly parasitic fashion that I sat in the hot seat during Dr. Grimshaw’s “Lesson of Ego.”

“My good boy, you are the most selfish man I ever met.” His supercilious sneer met my begrudged eye. “Unless you intend to prove me otherwise?”

I was momentarily taken aback. What had I done to offend Grimshaw? I barely knew the man! “Well, all I do is work to improve my physical and mental skills. Surely there’s nothing evil about that.”

“For *personal gain*. How self centered.”

“In proportion, but at other times I work to let others have a good time.”

“Surely, now. But think.”

I took a mental step back and began to think. Why did I want others to have a good time? Well, the first parameter was that it couldn’t be at my expense. With this, I wanted them to have a good time so that they would improve my environment or they would recognize me as an asset and thus benefit me since I benefited them. It seemed in any case that the core of the matter was for personal gain. “I humbly concede. It seems that road leads to selfishness as well. But what about raising a family? Or giving to charity? Or doing nothing at all?”

“Now, please note that I’m assuming. Feel free to correct me here, but I have a feeling there won’t be much in the way of corrections. Raising a family? Either you do it because *you* feel *you* should, *you* want children/connections in *your* life, or *you* want to advance *your* species from which *you* will gain because you are one of them. Any other miscellaneous reason in between is also bound to be selfish.

Giving to charity? Either it makes *you* feel good because you helped someone, *you* want to correctly abide by “ethics”, or *you* want to show off/prove that you are able to do it—i.e. arrogance.

Do nothing at all? Seems rational enough. If everything is for a selfish reason, then surely the most altruistic thing is to do nothing at all. But you see, the human body does not permit that. If you cut out all unnecessaries, you would still be using air, calories, space, attention, and energy that could’ve been used elsewhere. And since you give nothing back, it’s selfishness in its purest form!”

I could see, now, that Professor Grimshaw had won in all the monumental arguments and that if these could be won, all the rest in between could be won as well. “I’ll admit, you compel me in a manner hitherto unimaginable in my previously miniscule mind. But while my mind agrees for the moment, my heart does not. Perhaps I’m ignorant, or naive, or blindly blissful, but your arrogance, hubris, and unmatched cynicism leaves me with no choice but to deplore you. Who are you to sit in a chair for five minutes and dethrone the foundation of human purpose throughout history? Who are you to cut down the joy of a young man and feel good about it? Who are you to take a good citizen and mark him as an unknowing evil? Who are you to present yourself in a manner exclusionary of any other being, for are you not a man yourself?”

I had had enough of Grimshaw; this arrogant disease that seeked to unsettle my wisdom. I got up and left, feeling shaken, but otherwise unbroken.

It was not until later that night that I received a letter from Grimshaw: “My good sir, your words cut deep but they shall not go unhealed, for they cut the skin and not the nerves. However, I beg of you to take two minutes—aided with the presence of a calm and rational mind—to review the record of our conversation that I have attached at the bottom. I think you’ll find very little evidence for your claims earlier to-day.

—Hope all is well (by whichever scale you wish to judge from)

Arthur Grimshaw”

Being in a calm and rational mentality at the hour, I decided to skeptically review the record. To my utter amazement I didn’t find one notion that Grimshaw had *dethroned* any foundations, but instead recognized them; I didn’t find one notion that Grimshaw had *felt good* about cutting away my joy, only the fact that he had; I didn’t find one notion that Grimshaw had marked me as *evil*, only that he had marked me as selfish—a trait he never explicitly condoned nor condemned; I didn’t find one notion that Grimshaw had *excused* himself from the selfish infection of humanity, only that he had brought forth to my realization what we all suffer—or prosper, for that matter—from.

I reviewed every word carefully several times over, but my latest observations held true.

*Now here’s a good man*, I thought. *For the unexamined life is not worth living.*