

Without Amoralization, No Anarchization

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I

At times Liberty takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her! And happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in her time of her beauty and her glory.

Macaulay: *Essay on Milton*.

The men of order, those we call “honest folk,” demand nothing but gunfire and shell-fire.

Renan: *Nouvelles lettres intimes*.

I read and hear it claimed that anarchism is beset by a crisis. This is not precisely correct. In truth, there is a conflict between the static and dynamic conceptions of anarchism, between those who want to gregarize and stabilize anarchism and those who want the revolutionary, individualist spirit to remain and simmer permanently within anarchism. At base, it is more a question of two methods than of two ideas. It would be extraordinary if a competition did not exist between them. It is precisely because they compete that, far from being stagnant, anarchism asserts itself, develops, expands and surpasses the narrowness of a church or a party.

The organizers of traditional anarchism have long attempted not only to create an orthodox anarchism, “ne varietur,” but to stabilize the anarchist idea by integrating them into the general aspirations of humanity. To cite one name among those of the thinkers who have lent the support of their talent to that effort, I would name Kropotkin. Let one read carefully *Mutual Aid, Modern Science and Anarchy* or the *Ethics*, where are summarized very quickly the aim of the author of the *Words of a Rebel*: to demonstrate to his readers that the principal demands of anarchism are in agreement with the needs, knowledge, experiences and facts of human evolution, of the history of living organisms. If we believe Kropotkin on the matter—and if I have understood him clearly—all the observations, all the events in the history of living beings tend to the establishment of a social system of morals, to such an extent that nature itself could no longer be considered amoral. We see where this is going: anarchist communism, as Kropotkin and his friends or disciples understand it, arises naturally from the aspiration of humanity for a state of things better than those presently existing.

I do not want to sift the Kropotkinian idea through a close critique and entirely empty—in order to account for its value as a factor in individual evolution—the content of the three elements on which Kropotkin built the system of morals: mutual aid, justice and the spirit of sacrifice. Nor do I want to dwell on the mystical and too often metaphysical character of the Kropotkinian Ethics, to show that scientific culture and language is not always enough to prevent us from taking pure phantoms for beings of flesh and bone. As an anarchist individualist, an anarchist associationist, I understand that we make use of our own sensibilities to create a line of individual conduct; I understand that we associate with individuals endowed with approximately similar sensibilities, that we then act according to a group guidelines. But to set up the manner of behaving of one individual or group as a universal, *absolute* morality, that is what does not appear anarchist to me, that is what I rise against.

Let us suppose that Kropotkin had succeeded in persuading all the anarchists that anarchist communism was the form of economic system toward which humanity tended in its aspirations and dreams of a better future. There we would have it: anarchism stabilized, crystallized, petrified.

That is to say, it would no longer exist, dynamically speaking.

Indeed, the day when it is accepted that there is only *one* single anarchist moral system, only one unique line of anarchist conduct, it will follow that anyone who decide against or places themselves outside these guidelines or this moral system could no longer be considered anarchist. At that moment, Anarchism would have no reason to envy Church and State: it would have its moral system, one and indivisible, its sacrosanct, stagnant morality. There would exist an anarchist morality of the sort of which Boyer spoke the other day in the issue of the *Ecole émancipée* where he proposed a “proletarian morality” for the approval of the pedagogues supporting the C. G. T. U.

I cannot understand how thinkers like Kropotkin have not realized that by seeking to establish a single anarchist moral system, they would return to exclusivism, to statism. In order for Anarchism not to be transformed into a tool for social or moral conservation, it is obviously necessary that all the ethics, all the antiauthoritarian means of *living life* compete within it.

In *anarchy*, there are as many “moralities” as there are anarchists, taken individually, or groups or associations of anarchists. Thus, in anarchy, one is amoral, or put another way: every moral system presented as anarchist is only so relative to the unity or the group that proposes or practices it. there is no absolute anarchist morality, so no one can logically say that it summarizes or incorporated the demands, the desiderata, the relations of *all* the anarchists.

The anarchist work cannot consist of moralizing anarchism, but of amoralizing it, of destroying among the anarchists the final remnants of exclusivism and statism, which can still lie dormant in the *spirit* of their relations between individualities or associations. My or our line of conduct only have value for me or our group or our association—or again for all those to whom it gives satisfaction, among those who already carry its seeds, to whom I have had to explain it, to whom we propose it so they can find what they seek, perhaps without really knowing it. My “morals,” our “morals,” are only valid for those, individually or collectively, to whom they are suited, not for everyone and not for others.

In other words, *we relativize* what we call ethics, morals or rule of conduct according to individual temperament, to instinctive or natural affinities that lead human unities to act in isolation or to association for specific ends and for a desired time. We do not modify our means of conducting ourselves relative to an injunction or imperative superior or external to the isolate or associate. We declare ourselves *amoral* with regard to all morals drawn from religion, science, sociality and even nature itself that stand in the way of our aspirations, desires or appetites. Being anti-authoritarians, we refuse, of course, and in every case, *with respect to ourselves*, to have recourse to violence or to any form of governmental or statist coercion in order to satisfy our desires or gratify our passions.

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It is because the present anarchist mentality is saturated with *petit-bourgeoisism*—it will be necessary to return to the question—that so many anarchists are so slow to understand that the collective or individual amoralization of the social milieu is a powerful factor in anarchization. The more the human milieu is amoralized, the more the guardians of religious or secular morality, those who want to keep human societies within uniform rule of conduct or absolute moral systems, feel their usefulness diminish. The more amoralization saturates the relations among

men, the more the idea that an imposed, common moral system is necessary to living *happily* disappears; we feel the need for moral instructors less and less. Unconsciously, a new basis for ethical relations between isolated individuals and associates appears: it is the unity or association that sets out the rule of conduct to be maintained in order to reach the maximum of sociability, a sociability that in no way answers to a moral conception of good and evil, to a transcendent *a priori*, but is based on the self-interested observation that no one is, can or wants to be an object of consumption for me except to the extent that I am or can or want to be such for them.

I have, the other day, touched very rapidly upon one point on which it is appropriate to insist, warmongers, the marshals of domination, the grand masters of exploitation and the blackmailers [maitres-chanteurs] of politics are glorifiers of public or private virtues, lay moralizers, defenders of religion and wholesome traditions. When the global butchery of 1914-1918 broke out, it was under their flags that the honest, puritanical, moral anarchist theorists, communists and individualists alike, came to line up; how could all of these factions not have made a united front? They were all partisans of a unique, common, universal moral system; the wolves do not eat each other.

II

The Larousse dictionary defines the word *morality* as: *the relation of an act, of the sentiments of a person, with the rule of morals*. From this comes the expression “certificate of morality,” to designate an official confirmation of a clean criminal record. Each time that I hear morality spoken of in a publication that calls itself anarchist, to whatever degree, there comes to my mind, unbidden, the idea of a “certificate of good behavior,” delivered by the police chief of the district.

As I wrote in the last issue, the word *morality* would never have appeared in the anarchist or anarchist-friendly journals if the anarchist movement had not been swamped with people coming from bourgeois backgrounds, who have brought with them the notion that it is important to conform, in matters of morals, to the established rules.

An experience that is already great, a familiarity that does not date from yesterday, has shown me that a great number of people who declare themselves theoretically as advocates of anarchism have been seduced particularly by the teachings of Rousseau, humanitarianism, and the revolutionary aspiration to egalitarianism revealed by the writings of certain anarchist dogmatists. From that comes an all too obvious tendency to make pronouncements on the acts and movements of comrades, valuations and judgments like those issued by the representatives of bourgeois society and those chiefs of police who deliver certificates of good behavior.

When, in 1900, I entered into contact with the anarchists, I came from a Christian milieu; many times, I have been stupefied by comparing the materialist declarations of certain anarchist theorists with the judgments they passed on the conduct of comrades who had taken seriously formulas like “no gods, no masters” or “with neither faith nor law,” which makes concrete, in a brief and clear form, the whole individual anarchist idea of life. I could not understand how, after having battled the law and the prophets, both religious and secular, they could bring, with regard to certain kinds of individual behavior, condemnations that would not have been disapproved of by the judges in the criminal court. As I did not consider propaganda a profession and did not wish to make a vocation of it, I would have long since dumped these respectable folks, and that would have saved me some unpleasantness, if afterwards I had not been convinced that these

judgments simply reflected the bourgeois education (primary and secondary) received by these theorists, of which they have never wished or been able to rid themselves. Later, fortunately, I met real anarchists, liberated and freed from the education of the schools, who avoided, in general, bringing judgment on the actions of their comrades. When they ventured to express an opinion on their manner of conducting themselves, they did so in relation to the anarchist conception of life and not some standard of morality established by the supporters of bourgeois society.

I meet old *compagnons* who tell me that they have withdrawn from the movement because of the disillusionment they have experienced, meeting too many anarchist theorists with bourgeois inclinations. Where they hoped to meet men who had abandoned social prejudices and moral preconceptions, they found only minds, so spineless as to be ridiculous, whose ethical mentality differed in no way from that of their porter and their housekeeper.

Not that, forced by circumstances, the anarchist individualists do not disguise themselves, but in the manner of the Calabrian brigand, who disguises himself as a carabineer in order to rob a stage-coach. Every concession that the anarchist individualist makes to the social milieu, every concession that seem to make to the State, they make amends by undermining the notion of the necessary power, by demonstrating to all those with whom they come into contact that there is no need for morals and moralists, for imposed, obligatory leaders and magistrates, in order to fulfill the organic individual functions and for humans to get along.

But where is the giant who will get on with the task of amoralizing and immoralizing the anarchist men and women, of making them catalysts of the amoralization and immoralization of the human milieu? For it is only then, O anarchy, that your advent could foreseen.

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