Revue Anarchiste
Is the Anarchist Ideal Achievable?
1930

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Working Translations by Shawn P. Wilbur

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principles that give combat in our mind and in society, — which is always the reflection of that former: — they cooperate, without us knowing it, in holding up the vault. Each pressure necessitates an equal counter-pressure. That is why my personal ideal of peace and harmony could be expressed paradoxically by the image of two rams that clash over the abyss. — But what else is a cathedral?..

"Cathedral that rests — on the just equilibrium of enemy forces; — dazzling rose-window, — where the blood of the sun — gushes in many-colored sheaves, — that the harmonious eye of the artist has linked... » (Ara Pacis)

So, I say to you: "Gather your strength, friends, enemies! And let none of you weaken! From your energies, joined in the body-to-body, is born the supreme harmony."

Romain Rolland

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and progressive increase of authority from within, of internal mastery. Man only exists, in fact, in a social milieu. Between the milieu and man, there is a constant interchange of actions and reactions. In order for them to harmonize, an order is required, either from within or from without. Order from within the finest, but it is infinitely more difficult to win. It supposes extremely evolved traits. And it is not even enough that a small number of men attain that superior state, since they are, for better or worse, enclosed in the human bloc. It is necessary that this bloc also arrive at a high degree of evolution. If not, the free personalities will be crushed.

So I believe that it is illusory to believe that a few individuals could achieve the anarchist ideal for themselves, without having formed the social milieu capable of letting them live and be fulfilled in their fullness. Unless he confines himself to a platonic independence of mute thought, content with his inoffensive liberty, mouth closed and arms shackled, the man who want liberty for himself must not only win it for others, but labor at the social progress that teaches the others to tolerate it: car for it is what they know the least.

Permit me now to explain to you in a few words my own point of view:

I am not anarchist. I am not socialist, nor of any particular social group. I am the grandson of my grandfather Colas des Gaules, whose experience was expressed, under the veil of ironic *bonhomie*, with the old French proverb: "*It takes all kinds to make a world!*" — On the condition, naturally, that from this all one succeeds in making a harmony. Life, the world, society, the mind, appears to me as a perpetually unstable state, a polyphony in movement, the fixing or stoppage of which would be death. It follows that the living equilibrium demands the counterbalancing of opposed forces. The present evolution of the nations towards socialism requires and kindles the vigorous vital reaction of anarchist individualism. The victory of either of the forces that clash would smash the whole edifice. Their coexistence and struggle is necessary. It is thus with all the other

But these difficulties, much more easily overcome than the upholders of Authority like to say, — you will guess why — would not long resist the honest, serious and persistent effort of men of good will, having become the masters of their own destinies.

As for the acts of violence, excesses, misbehaviors and crime, for which the absence of all Authority will give the signal, I consider:

On the one hand, that the responsibility for these reprehensible acts will be imputable to the spirit of Authority, of which they are relics, and that, the cause being eliminated, the effect will not be slow to disappear;

On the other hand, that these acts of violence, excesses, misbehaviors and crimes will be far, very far from reaching the level of the savageries, iniquities and crimes for which Authority is accountable and for which the trial is concluded: credulity, poverty, ignorance, deceit, brutality, prostitution, jealousy, hatred, vengeance, war, rapine and brigandage of every sort.

Sébastien Faure

Romain Rolland.

You ask me: "*Is the Anarchist Ideal achievable?...*"

I would respond first of all: "The characteristic of an ideal is that it is not achieved. Its purpose is to arouse our energies towards an aim, which always withdraws before human efforts. If it had achieved its goal, life would no longer have any prize. It would no longer even be. Life is in the impetus, in the struggle and effort. The goal achieved is death."

But let us return to "anarchy"! we must agree on a solid definition of the ideal that this word represents. I take it in the sense of a free and full development of individuality. "*Is this development possible;*" you ask, "*can man live without authority?*" I specify: "without outside authority." For it is quite obvious that to every decrease of authority from without must correspond a proportional

OUR SURVEYS

In the first issue, the "Revue Anarchiste" had announced the opening of a survey on the following subject: *Is the Anarchist Ideal Achievable?* Can man live without authority, at present and in the future? Will the elimination of all coercion ever be anything but the prerogative of miniscule minorities?

We called upon individuals having quite different philosophical ideas and political opinions. Today, we reproduce the responses, in the order that they reached us, refraining — as we had agreed — from all commentary, allowing ourselves only to express our thanks to the authors.

The Editors.

Henri Barbusse.

Dear comrades,

I very willingly defer to the friendly invitation of the *Revue Anarchiste*, responding to the survey that it has initiated.

Is the anarchist ideal achievable? Doubtless, in principle, it is achievable. We can, in fact, absolutely conceive, without departing from practical likelihoods, that at a given moment, of each man becoming sufficiently conscious of his social, adapting his individual activity to it, by himself, of his own will, pushed by his own reason. Bu, on the other hand, I think that we have still not yet reach that generalization of social consciousness, a generalization that demands a long work of preparation in the order of understanding as well as that of action.

The elements that must be possessed in order to adapt spontaneously, in the individual sphere, to the needs and desires of the collectivity, are still the prerogative of personalities intellectually and above all morally very superior to the average—personalities whose example can only be followed with a certain tardiness by

the whole human ensemble. That is why, while rendering tribute to the beauty of the anarchist ideal and willingly recognizing that it constitutes a particularly elevated stage of social accomplishment, I think that this theory is not presently viable. It follows that those who take the initiative in disseminating it should never consider it except as a formula for which one can, in the present circumstances, only prepare the human masses, without attempting to realize it in a positive and concrete manner in contemporary society. It must be noted, indeed, that this formula of a supreme simplicity, crowning achievement of the common life of the crowds of the earth, can only exist if it is unanimously accepted. The absolute absence of constraint prohibits the possibility of scissions and exceptions in the social organism.

These, dear comrades, are my frank thoughts on the anarchist theory. I offer this summary to you with fraternal best wishes.

Henri Barbusse

Han Ryner.

An ideal is an absolute and only the relative can live. But one lives only to the degree that one approaches as absolute.

There are few among the living. Do you know practical anarchists who never impose demands and who scorn, laughing, all those to which they must submit? I believe them as rare as the true Christians or true Stoics.

Anarchy without anarchists has burst some bombs, as Christianity without Christians has lit countless pyres, as stoicism, professed paradoxically by an emperor, has been compromised by persecutions and wars.

Indeed, what does a far future matter to you? It is today that interests you, comrade of today. And today, you see only too well, can only be beautiful in you. So be Christian enough to scorn the priest, Stoic enough to despise the crimes of Marcus Aurelius and

We can boldly conclude that the Anarchist Ideal is, in my opinion, achievable; for if, by nature, I willingly yield to the attraction of the Ideal and if my heart feels itself that much more attract to it, as it appears more equitable, more fraternal, more noble and bearing more fecund promises, — and this is the case with the Anarchist Ideal, — my reason would prevent me and, age aiding, it would not fail to forbid me from working — now more than ever — for the triumph of an Ideal that appears to impossible.

Mine is neither a disturbed imagination, nor a fanciful mind and an effort that I consider useless does not interest me.

So my conviction is that the Anarchist Ideal is achievable. I have an unshakeable certainty that the evolution of human societies will *inevitably* lead future generations there and that, thus, this Ideal will become a reality.

But do not ask me at what hour that realization of the Anarchist Ideal will strike on the dial of history. I do not know that, any more than I could know at what age a young, vigorous and healthy man might die.

What I do know is that I can, without fear of being mistaken, affirm that it will die. And I can affirm, with no more hesitation, that the regimes of Authority will pass away and that the coming of a social milieu based on liberty, an "anarchist" milieu, will succeed their disappearance.

For me, this coming is not a simple hope, a probability, but a *certainty*.

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I reckon that, from this day forward, man can live without authority. It is obvious that, as a result of the centuries of servitude that weigh heavily on the man of the 20th century, the *immediate* establishment of a social milieu without constraint would necessarily give rise to numerous difficulties, and that the play of passions suddenly unbridled among individuals insufficiently prepared or totally uneducated will lead to unfortunate acts.

jects it to social constraint and legal sanctions whose grounds, good or bad, individuals have been able and are still unable to weigh or examine it relation to their individual development.

I do not know if those who constitute it make up an "elite," but I maintain that there exists all across the world an anarchist individualist milieu, milieu de *camarades*, which, by all the means in its power, strives to ignore the social, moral and intellectual conditions on which the archist society rests. Using stratagems, if open escape is not possible.

We do not live by hypotheses, nor by conjectures. If there is an anarchist ideal, I intend to achieve all of it that I can immediately, without waiting, without asking myself whether or not I make up part of an elite, by associating myself with the atheist, materialist, presentist, pleasure-seeking comrades like myself, eager to redouble their efforts, as I am. All the rest is distraction or metaphysics.

Let is thank *La Revue Anarchiste* for having furnished us with the occasion to distract ourselves, as comrades.

E. Armand

Sébastien Faure.

Yes. The Anarchist Ideal is achievable.

For more than forty years, I have been an anarchist. I did not become one as the result of a sudden *revelation*, but slowly and after having crossed, step by step, the whole distance that separates the total slavery to which the catholic religion constrains its fanatics from the independence without limits that the Anarchist Ideal, only, grants its disciples.

I have honestly subjected my libertarian convictions to the proof of the events, since that time, already far off, have made an impression on social life; and, very far from weakening these convictions, my observations have not ceased to strengthen them.

the inanities of Loisel, anarchist enough to wander, smiling, away from all the groups.

Han Ryner

Georges Pioch.

We can say of the anarchist idea—or, rather, anarchist ideas—what Buffon has said of genius: that it is a long patience.

To cause these ideas to descend from the consciousness where they soar, in order to give them, in our society, life in sentiment, that is not only possible, but, to the credit of the human spirit, it is seen every day.

To given them, in that same society, the life of action, is still only possible sporadically, if I may express myself so badly..., which amounts to saying that it is possible—and more, desirable—that groups form where these ideas will not only be cultivated, but reassured by those who have chosen them.

I would want these groups to take great care to harmonize what is just and nobly virile in their effort with what Beethoven called "the unique sign of superiority": goodness.

That is, certainly, one of the most difficult tasks, but also one of the most attractive, that can suggest itself to the activity and passion or a group of young men or of one young man alone.

It is necessary that, from the first, they have a reason; and I see that reason clarified in this well-known phrase, spoken by William of Orange and Nassau, known as the Taciturn:

"It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake, nor to succeed in order to persevere."

So must we despair? No. I said it at the beginning: anarchist ideas are a long patience.

Societies evolve and, as a result, they progress... Despite themselves, almost always... but it is a fact that they evolve and progress...

So it happens that they assimilate—oh! carelessly, a little or a great deal, depending on the individuals or groups of men—anarchist ideas that they have taken for follies, whose propagators they have persecuted, irrationally and without comprehension.

I will not swear—alas!—that all the anarchist ideas will be realized, and realized fully, in a society of men.

But I say, and this here is my deep conviction, that those who work, struggle and suffer for these ideas will not waste their time, and that their work is good, beautiful, grand and necessary.

My good friend and teacher Anatole France taught that the effort of reasonable men—or of those who at least pride themselves on being such—only succeed, socially, in giving a real life to the utopias a few unsung sages.

Let my comrades of the *Revue Anarchiste*, who are older or younger than me, — do we ever know? — receive, by way of greeting, the wish that forms for them such a hope.

That they help to bring about the success, in time, of the noble utopias of which they are the guardians.

Georges Pioch

E. Armand.

I am embarrassed, attempting to respond as I should to the survey of *La Revue Anarchiste*. Is there an anarchist ideal? Is anarchism an ideal? If there is an anarchist ideal, which is it, since there are several tendencies or currents in anarchism?

It is true that the continuation of the question posed by *La Revue Anarchiste* seems to delimit or define the anarchist ideal: "without authority" — "elimination of all constraint."

It is doubtless necessary to read: "of all political authority" — of "all constraint of the statist, governmental order and everything related to it," for we know that man "is not free," biologically speaking: he is subject to the direction of his determinism.

To be anarchist is to deny, to reject the *arché*, political and legal domination, the machinery of power. And it is more; it is to deny, to reject the utility of the State for ordering the relations between men. Better yet, it is to get along with one another without the intervention and protection of archist institutions.

How can I know if, in the future, "man" could do without political authority, without any imposed authority? How can I know if the "elimination of all constraint" will ever be anything but the prerogative of tiny minorities? Judging by appearances, I do not see any man doing without authority — I do not catch sight of any minority shielded from "all" constraint.

In the end, I am unconcerned.

I feel that I am anarchist and that is enough for me. I feel hemmed in, fettered, enveloped, limited and restrained by the multiple bonds forged by the institutions of the State. I rise up against these constraints; I slip free as soon as I can find the occasion. Each time I wish to deal with an ordinary (?) human being, I find them imbued with conventions, prejudices, beliefs, biases and points of view inculcated by the agents of archism. I try to liberate those that I meet from these foreign suggestions.

Alas! I do not live "without authority." On each corner of the road, at each crossroads, I must submit to its visible representation. And if it was only that! However, in my daily relations with the anti-statists on my side, I do my best to get along with others by taking no account of the play of governmental institutions. I succeed to a greater or less extent, but I persevere. And I am hardly concerned whether the relations that I maintain with "my own" tally or not with the education, the economic or sexual morality, the education of the State or the Church (spiritual aspect, stand-in for the State).

If we turn to anarchist individualism?

Anarchist individualism is not an ideal, but an activity, a *state of struggle*—open or masked, but continual—against every conception of life that subordinates the individual to governmental authority, which considers the individual as a function of the State, which sub-