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Some times ago, the Anarchist Students asked Albert Camus to come and speak to them, in a room of the Learned Societies, on a theme of common interest – such as the death penalty or revolutionary violence.

The author of *The Plague* accepted, provided that the room was small, that the welcome was fraternal and that all took part in the conversation.

These requirements did not surprise us. We know, in fact, that the volume of “certainties” that are expressed in a given room is proportional to its sound capacity. Albert Camus is too keen on this set of sharp doubts which constitute his personal convictions to present them disguised as affirmations at a meeting. Nothing is less thunderous than his books, where tragic pessimism lay at the bottom under clear water; or his plays, where the idea while there, never presents itself as an impudent spectacle.

What we imagined of the writer and the playwright – if not and even more – we met in the conversationalist and the man; we loved even more his punctuality, his simplicity, his in-

timate sense of freedom, and – I insist again – his intellectual modesty. And direct contact having been established, we listened, questioned, interrupted, replied, proposed, without any conventional feeling of "distances", seeing a friend whose problems were ours, and whom we found difficult to leave.

No confusion, by the way. Camus, a libertarian sympathizer, and who knows anarchist thought very well, smilingly proclaimed himself "a radical socialist": we might as well say a "liberal humanist". He refuses to leave this middle position which consists of retaining, in the order of practical reason, part of what was imperatively denied to him in that of pure reason. The intransigence of metaphysical judgment is accompanied here by a "realism" that he took care to accentuate for us, riders of chimeras and fanatics of freedom. But if Camus marks this refusal to renounce the "duality of human things", it is less in the face of the practical dangers of commitment than in the face of the excessive security of extreme positions.

This attitude has its beauty, but socially we deem it untenable. Still, our interlocutor poses both the use of violence and murder (whatever the revolutionary ends) as fully unjustifiable, and Tolstoyian non-violence, the search for complete innocence in the face of social murder, as completely inapplicable. We generally agree with this thesis. But Camus' Pascalian dualism leads him, on the one hand, to throw down, in absolute terms, the entire edifice of repressive moralities, with their penal sanctions — and, on the other, practically, to accept a minimum of legality sanctioned by force, consecrated by the State, applied by the police and the courts – in order to oppose a "lesser evil" to the vendettas, furies and lynchings of anarchic society, to the attacks of sadists and madmen, etc. He does not seem to see that the State, absolutist by definition, never allows itself to be reduced to the modestly technical role of

a good policeman and a keeper of justice and peace. That to refuse to completely justify its violence in the name of the absolute that it embodies is to completely deny it. That there are also forms of social security based on autonomous conscience and the freely debated pact and that between these forms and their complete annihilation by the totalitarian State, everyone is, today, forced to choose.

Authority, for Albert Camus, can be relatively good. We do not all, I admit, have this breadth of acceptance, and our adversaries do not have it. The very idea of authority is fused for me, in all possible aspects, with the "power to punish" – a power which, not only is morally unjustifiable in its attacks against the life or freedom of individuals, but which is also unjustifiable scientifically or technically as a means of social therapeutics.

"Man is the only species that beats its young when it falls," said Montherlant, without seeming to appreciate all the moral and intellectual monstrosity that there is in the religious idea of redemption, progress, rehabilitation, compensation, improvement, redress, amendment, retribution, beneficial suffering, eternal salvation, etc., provided by the strongest to the weakest in the form of blows added on those of "destiny". Our total refusal of authority means that we are ready, for our part, to admit all the personal insecurity of a "social jungle" (where man would at least be responsible and free, therefore susceptible to ethical growth), rather than the wisest and most honest of "comfortable" violence, weighing crimes and punishment on its balance, in the most rigorous medico-legal asepsis. If violence seems to us to be exclusively the right of the oppressed and this in the very moment of their resistance to oppression, if by tearing down the prisons we want to burst open our universal concentration camp; if murder seems too

repulsive in itself to be the object of any ritual consecration; if the modern State is odious to us (as to Camus, as to Nietzsche) because it is "the coldest of cold monsters", it is not to make us admit, in any practical measure whatsoever, the blows given by the man to his young when he falls; blows whose only excuse could be anger, and which would be a thousand times more cowardly if they were measured in cold blood.

We are not the helpers of the executioners of history, of society, of destiny or providence. We are on the other side. The very meaning of tragic existence, thus conceived, imposes this rule on us: we may as well be forced to kill those who prevents us from living, to destroy what makes us murderers, but we will never consent to punish.