

Anarchism and Religious Facts

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« Appelez cela Dieu, l’Absolu, si cela vous amuse, que m’importe »

Not so long ago, any rapprochement or confrontation between anarchism and religion would have seemed incongruous. But that was before the current situation and debates suddenly gave it back a burning topicality; before the 21st century, alongside the most constant enemies of anarchism — Capital and the State — re-actualized the urgency of another fight, of a libertarian denunciation of the idea of God, and more particularly of the monotheistic God; this “third power” of which Proudhon speaks; this logical and imaginary keystone of the authoritarian order; this analogue and this supreme justification of Capital and the State¹.

Bright and sharp in its first affirmation, but rusty for lack of use, and for so many years, the contemporary libertarian critique of religious facts oscillates between three quite distinctly different positions: one, the most recent, which can be qualified as “Marxist”; another, older and apparently contrary to the first, which can be qualified as “secular” and “republican”; and finally a third position, specifically anarchist this time, but partly forgotten after the long eclipse of libertarian thought.

The “Marxist” Position

The rebirth of the libertarian movement, at the end of the last century, took place largely within a Marxist framework, in the shadow of an intellectual hegemony whose strength and influence are difficult to measure, fifty years later. Faced with the current collapse of the socialist idea, only the movements with a libertarian sensibility manage, from near or far and in their different manifestations, to maintain a project and an imaginary dominated until now by Marxism. But they continue to undergo the effects of it, doubly: 1) by the past conditions of their rebirth; 2) by a contemporary situation where, as minority as it can be, anarchism (in the broad sense) is led, in its relative diversity, to welcome all that can remain of the old positions and other postures of the left and of the extreme left, including when they are the farthest from its own presuppositions. Hence a direct consequence on the way in which certain contemporary libertarian currents are led to perceive religious facts; through the denunciation of “islamophobia” for example, and a kind of understanding and guilt-tripping towards religious extremism: a double-ended understanding that denies what it authorizes by this negation²; a guilt-tripping or new avatar of Marxism one can easily recognize a long Christian and “Third Worldist” tradition.

Indeed, alongside other roots — secular or Jewish, for example, but also Judeo-Arabic, in the anti-religious violence proper to the popular and millenarian insurrections of a certain number of regions of Spain — the importance of the “Christians of the left” in the Marxist hegemony of the second half of the twentieth century is not sufficiently emphasized (from Althusser to Garaudy, passing through a myriad of other second-tier cadres and theorists). In many respects one could say that the repercussion and the strengths of the so-called “May ’68” movements are largely due to the crisis and decomposition that Christianity underwent during the years 1960–1970; for the bulk of the troops at least and not without many emancipatory practices and ideas, as close as

¹ On this analogy (in the Proudhonian sense of the word) see Pierre Ansart, “Proudhon, des pouvoirs et des libertés” in Proudhon, Pouvoirs et libertés, Université de Besançon, 1987. “Capital, whose analog, in the order of politics, is the Government, has as its synonym, in the order of religion, Catholicism...” quoted by P. Ansart p. 12.

² For a Marxist analysis, Islam is nothing or almost nothing (see below), and we can therefore defend it and allow it to be, without worrying about its effects.

possible to the libertarian project (in the beginnings of the CFDT, for example), but drawing up between them the double and invisible glass partition of the presuppositions of Marxism and the monotheistic faith.

And it is here that we should underline an important distinction within the Marxist positions; a distinction that also has to do with the religious facts, with two ways, certainly different, of denying them any importance, but both equally foreign to anarchism because they are placed under the double sign of “guilt” and “resentment”³.

— With, on the one hand, militants of Christian origin, the most numerous, for whom one can indeed speak of “guilt”, because of the singular and hazardous meeting between, on the one hand, their accidental and inherited belonging to the European imperialisms of the XIXth and XXth century; and, on the other hand, a sense of “sin” and “guilt” inherited from the Christian tradition (the “original sin”), which contributes to bind them intimately to any affect or process of collective responsibility.

— With, on the other hand, militants of Muslim origin who, within the Marxist representations, risk to identify themselves subjectively with the “Islam” of the “islamo-phobia”, substituting to the traditional Marxist cleavages of “classes” and of “social and economic condition” of the analogous cleavages but catastrophic in their effects: the essentialist cleavages of races, of colors of skin and of ethnic and religious origins.

How, in a more general way, can one characterize this Marxist or Marxistizing way of approaching the religious facts? Mainly by an underestimation or a de-negating indifference which, paradoxically, leaves them free to act without being seen, in the manner of a blind spot (the beam in the eye of the Christian gospels), of an unthought of dominations. For the Marxist or Marxistizing perception and representations, religion (as the State in other times) is only a “superstructure”, a reality certainly spectacular in its staging, but secondary in its material dimension; a blinding reality but that it is advisable to ignore precisely, to make invisible, in the manner of Cyrano’s nose or Andersen’s king’s nakedness. In the Marxist position religion is only an appearance and an ideological *trompe-l’oeil* entirely determined by what really matters and only: no longer the royal majesty or Cyrano’s swordsmanship, but the economic infrastructure, the class struggle and a dialectical and materialist becoming which, by their unveiling effects, can only dissipate, necessarily and spontaneously, the religious mists. The Marxist blindness to the State, to nationalism, to brown and red fascism or, more tragically, to the monstrous singularity of Nazism and the genocides of the twentieth century⁴, is repeated today in the face of the reaffirmation of dominations of a religious character and more particularly of this new form of fascism and totalitarianism that constitutes Islamism.

Hence, for a long time, the indifference of the communist parties of the “third world” in front of the convictions of their adherents, in the regions most subjected to the religious domination, in particular in the Moslem countries. Hence the evaporation of these same communist parties in favor of nationalism and religion. Hence also, on the extreme left this time, and not without commiseration and underlying contempt, the current discourses on Islam. Islam is thought of as the ideology of the poor, the humble and the oppressed, in the same way as the Christianity of the Hussites or the peasants’ war of the 15th and 16th centuries. The corollary is the systematization

³ On the libertarian importance of these two concepts and more generally on the deep affinity between Nietzsche’s analyses and anarchism (without a glass cage this time), see “Nietzsche and Anarchism” in Acontre-temps.org

⁴ Through the “revisionism” and “negationism” so particular to the Marxist currents of the ultra-left.

of an “Islamophobic” catch-all where all those who denounce this religion, the “religion of the weak” that Emmanuel Todd speaks of⁵, even in its most extreme crystallizations, would first of all attack the poor and the oppressed, taking the side of the rich and the oppressors.

Survival and new avatar of the old Marxist and Third Worldist model, this first way of treating religious facts, more or less diffuse in the current circles of anarchism — by clinging for example to stakes as spectacular and symbolic (but determining) as the question of the Islamic veil or blasphemy — should not be overestimated however. It clashes with a second position, apparently contrary, and largely in the majority in libertarian circles (without being for all that anarchist); an approach that can be qualified as “secular” and “republican”.

The “Secular” and “Republican” Position

This second attitude is older and may seem at first to be in frontal opposition to the first one, in the form of an explicit and unmitigated denunciation of the religious fact, be it animist, polytheist, Christian, Jewish or Muslim, but especially Muslim in the present context. As the whole of the Latin and Catholic countries (in Europe and South America), where the libertarian movements were the most powerful, show, this old anti-religious tradition is largely due to the conditions of appearance of anarchism and more precisely of worker anarchism, in the middle of the 19th century.

Anarchism was born within a “national” and “popular” left, itself born of the French revolution and the rationalism of the “enlightenment”; a left that was violently anti-religious because it had long been confronted with a powerful and hegemonic church, properly speaking “reactionary”, claiming to bring society back to the “old regime” and the totalitarian dream of “Christendom”. Anarchism was born within a republican, statist and patriotic left, identifying itself with an undifferentiated “people”, but largely dominated by the literate and property-owning petty bourgeoisie of the time⁶, and which decomposed at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, giving rise to hitherto unknown far-right movements. This republican, statist and petty-bourgeois left, working-class anarchism distanced itself from it very early on, from its birth, but without ever ceasing to maintain with it, in the face of “reaction”, relations of alliance and sympathy regularly revived in a more or less punctual manner as shown by the Dreyfus affair for example or, in the long term, the participation of a certain number of libertarians in Freemasonry.

Rationalist and anti-religious, the secular and republican position can thus, within the contemporary libertarian movements, seem to be opposed frontally to the complacency of the Marxist or Marxizing approach. With, on the secular side, the importance given to an obsessive denunciation of the religious manifestations, mainly Islamic, and, on the other side, a social and culturalist denunciation of the “islamophobia” which, certainly, has no trouble finding in contemporary critiques of religion the old representations of imperial and so-called “civilizing” colonizations of the late nineteenth century, but also, in parallel and for its own sake, all the identity supports (geographical origins, histories, languages, skin colors, cultures, religions...) that feed, on the extreme right and — as a new phenomenon — on the extreme left, a disturbing return to such calamitous notions as those of “races”, to explicitly “racist” or “racialized” cleavages and representations.

⁵ Who is Charlie? Sociology of a religious crisis, Seuil, 2015.

⁶ And of which the “republican” and “radical-socialist” parties will long be the political expression.

Marxist” approach and “secular” approach are opposed, but share however a common position: the underestimation of the religious facts; by contempt and indifference on the Marxist side, by rationalist irritation on the secular side (“how can one — in the XXIst century! — still believe in such things?”); with in both cases the same conception, (“providential” would say the Christians) of time and history: “Progress” and science against obscurantism and superstitions on one side; dialectical materialism and the class struggle against the mists of religious ideology on the other.

The Anarchist Position

Long obscured by the a priori oblivion and disconsideration of its principal theorists, and in contrast to the other two positions, whether secular or Marxist, the way in which anarchism considers religion can be formulated as follows: 1) to take very seriously the religious facts and the religious question as multi-millennial expressions of human experience and life; 2) to refuse a providentialist, deterministic and optimistic (or progressive) conception of a history of humanity which would necessarily and spontaneously destroy or surpass them.

For Proudhon or Bakunin, and in the same way as the State or any other human reality (science, law, art or philosophy for example), the practices, the beliefs, the hopes, the myths, the texts and the enormous accumulation of representations and religious explanations are neither superstructures nor superstitions made null and void by progress, education or historical materialism; with only, here and there, “survivals” or “delays”; on the side of the people, of the poor or of the “primitive” civilizations, retarded on the way of the progress and of the civilization.

Buried at the heart or in the very structure of human experience, “in the archives of the human mind” as Proudhon would say⁷, and in the same way as the “instincts” of which Malatesta speaks,⁸ or as the “grammar” denounced by Nietzsche⁹, religious practices and representations, from their anarchic, animistic and magical forms, to the great totalitarian machines of the three monotheisms, contribute from the depths of their being to express and shape human existence. And first of all on the ground of the domination.

Domination and Obedience

“What capital does to labor and the State to freedom, the Church in turn does to intelligence,” says Proudhon.¹⁰ For the libertarian critique, and because it is the analogue of Capital and the State, the God of the three monotheisms does not escape the “new ontology” proposed by anarchism. He does not escape the libertarian theory of “collective beings”, of “collective forces” and of their “resultants” — States, nations, companies, cultures, families, individuals, household (or military) appliances, communities of believers, various deities -. Resultants” themselves “composed” of other “resultants” (screws, bolts, atoms...), other “compositions of forces”, other “coop-

⁷ Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la révolution et dans l'église*, Rivière, tome III, p. 73.

⁸ See *L'anarchisme de Malatesta*, ACL, 2010, p. 90.

⁹ *Twilight of the idols or how to philosophize with a hammer*, “reason in philosophy”, paragraph 5: “I fear that we cannot get rid of God, because we still believe in grammar”.

¹⁰ Proudhon, quoted by P. Ansart, op. cit.

erations”, other “associations”, from the smallest to the largest, ad infinitum¹¹. 12] “Resultants” that owe everything they are to the reality of the forces that compose them, but which, produced by these compositions, appropriate their power, disguise it in signs and turn it against itself in a relationship of domination where the effect becomes the cause, the flags, the castles and the mansions the primary source of the arrangements that produce them.

At a maximum degree of intensity and pretension, but like any other thing, as small and fleeting as it may be, the figure of the monotheistic God (with its rites, its apparatuses, its sects, churches, legislations, faithful and servants) is lived as an “absolute”, says Proudhon¹². An “absolute” that is homologous to the absolute of Capital, of the State, of the Individual or of any other “resultant” (oppressive or emancipatory). Absolutes or “monads” say Proudhon and Tarde, “all born free and original” but, “all eager (...) for domination and universal assimilation”¹³. Absolutes that produce faith(s) and beliefs, convictions, wills and subjective identifications. Absolutes embedded one in the others, and confronted with an infinite multitude of other absolutes, positively, by resisting them, by revolting against them, by refusing their law and their imperialism, but also negatively by claiming to submit them to their own law and their own imperialism, inside as well as outside of what constitutes them; by reduction and decomposition, by absorption, colonization, submission and oppression.

For a long time dispersed and competing, in the immediacy of a multitude of occult forces, practices and local deities, singular and contradictory — “within reach” -, religious expressions and their “magical” proximity like all the other products of collective forces (economic, social, political...), have found themselves, almost everywhere in the world, centralized, monopolized and “alienated” by entities and machines that are ever more vast and dominant¹⁴. 16] “God and the State”¹⁵. God and Capital. Capital and the State as alienations of economic and political forces. God as alienation and concentration of representations and intelligence, as the imaginary key-stone of authority. God as dispossession of oneself, of one’s faith in one’s own power (to raise one’s arm, to write a poem...) of one’s beliefs in the strength and happiness everywhere observed and experienced, of creations, associations and immediate interactions; where the meeting of others, of their absolute freedom and singularity, reveals in each one the infinite possibilities that he carries within himself. God as alienation and as voluntary servitude where from immanent to the nature and to the human activities the collective forces are brought back and subjected to the divine transcendence; where the anarchy and the multiplicity of what is are disguised in lying and oppressive unity.

God and Satan

Because they are linked to human experience, religious representations do not fail — at the very heart of the relations of domination — to express revolt and freedom, not only in the archaic tangle of the old magical beliefs, but also at the very heart of the most logical, ritualized and ordered monotheisms.

¹¹ See *De la Justice ...*, Rivière, volume 2, pp. 266 and following: “power is born of society, it is the resultant of all the particular forces grouped for work, defense and Justice” *ibid.* p. 268.

¹² On the importance and ambivalence of the notion of “absolute”, see *De la Justice...* tome 3, pp. 200 and following.

¹³ G. Tarde, *Monadologie et sociologie, les empêcheurs de tourner en rond*, 1999, p. 57.

¹⁴ On “the alienation of collective force”, see Proudhon, *ibid.* volume 2, p. 266.

¹⁵ According to the beautiful title given by Elisée Reclus to a manuscript of Bakunin.

Because of its totalitarian logic and the reduction of the multiple to the One, to the sovereignty and goodness of an all-powerful God and creator of all things, monotheism is confronted with a difficult problem which can be summarized as follows: either God is all-powerful but he is not good, since he tolerates evil, or he is good, but powerless, and for the same reason. How to account for the noise and fury of the real world? How to account for the evil and disorder? How to account for this anarchy of the world and of life that the old animistic and polytheistic arrangements expressed so easily by the multiplication of religious “forces” both good and bad, in the image of the reality of which they were the expression? Confronted with evil and disorder, with the anarchic complexity of what is the divine unification of monotheism, does it not necessarily imply, in a contradictory way, the dualism of Manichaeism, the double existence of a God of Evil and a God of Good, the two divinities of Marcion for example¹⁶? In another way, and like Eve coming out (by hook or by crook) of one of Adam’s ribs, must “evil” itself come out of good, of the world willed and ordered by God?

It was to this last, rather desperate solution that the three monotheisms resolved themselves; an improbable solution, constantly threatened by Manichaeism, but which, in the rarefied and ordered atmosphere of monotheistic logic, nevertheless gave anarchy the right to exist. Not only or first of all the Good and the Evil, a good God and a bad God, but the asymmetry of the One and the multiple; the uniqueness of an impossible ordering, founded on oppression, constraint and domination; the anarchic multiplicity of the “demons”, the revolts, the freedom, the autonomy and the emancipation; the “dia-bolic” and its effects of division against the hindrances and the “bonds” of the “sym-bolic” and the “religious”; the “devil in the body” of the wise children; Indra the figure of the Indo-European myths, the god of “pure and measureless multiplicity”, the god “of the ephemeral” and of “metamorphosis”, the god who “unties the bond as much as he betrays the pact”;¹⁷ or the “other woman” of the Bible and of monotheism, of which Fethi Benslama speaks¹⁸, directly issued from the nature she expresses, but also — in an improbable tangle — “mother of God” (Christianity) or diabolical matchmaker of the earthly paradise (Bible), of the “tree of science”: the “woman witch who knows” and whom psychoanalysis, three thousand years later, still strives to flush out¹⁹.

Indeed, what religious myths have been saying and repeating for so long, philosophy and modern thought repeat it and find it again in turn, in the reverse side and inside of its statements; in the mists and storms that surround and threaten the island of Kant’s “pure understanding”²⁰, in Descartes’ “malignant genius”, in Socrates’ (kind) “demon”; or, more recently, the “a-symbolic” and the “divisor” that the Belgian philosopher Guy Hottot believes to discover with terror in the work of Gilbert Simondon,²¹ through propositions that anarchism has indeed no difficulty in making its own:

“The radical splintering of time and being”.

“Individualizations, to the infinity”.

¹⁶ Founder in the second century of a very powerful and durable Christian church, Marcion opposed to the wicked God of the Hebrew Bible the good God of the Christian Gospels.

¹⁷ Deleuze, Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, éditions de minuit, 1980, p. 435.

¹⁸ Fethi Benslama, *La psychanalyse à l’épreuve de l’Islam*, Aubier, 2002.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

²⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paris, 1944, p. 216.

²¹ Simondon and the philosophy of “technical culture”, De Boeck, 1993.

“An exploded universe, without principle and without faith, or with infinity of principles and times”.

“A universe of monads that can, but do not have to communicate”.

“A universe of the infinity of the possible where nothing is impossible a priori”.

“The absolute anarchy of singularities and ruptures”²².

Faced with the God of kings and the ordering of the world, the God of caliphs, emperors and the Law (of the Father, of the State, of Science, etc.), faced with the political, economic and religious rules — and in the court of men this time but alongside witches, demons and magical forces — monotheism is forced to invent or invent a new one.), in the face of political, economic and religious rules — and in the court of men this time but alongside witches, demons and magical forces — monotheism is forced to invent or leave a place (which changes everything) for the old anarchic figure of Satan; Lucifer (the “light-bearer”), for a long time the most obedient of God’s servants, the most reasonable and luminous of the divine court, the one who sat at the right hand of the “Most High”, who passed him the dishes and who, one day, by an incredible miracle, refuses to obey, for no reason at all — “pass me the salt! “; “no!” — but thus dragging along in revolt a multitude of other angels, in a never-ending war against divine authority and thus against all similar or delegated authority; thus expressing, on the register of myth, the very real revolts and struggles of the human world; the struggles for freedom and independence, against order and power; revolts always defeated and contained, but always reborn everywhere and under an infinity of forms, in the manner of the “fraticelli” and other “fraternities” of which Bakunin speaks²³, “who dared to take, against the celestial despot, the side of Satan, this spiritual leader of all past, present and future revolutionaries, the true author of human emancipation (...), the negator of human freedom, the one who is the only one who has the power to change the world.), the negator of the celestial empire as we are of all earthly empires, the creator of freedom”; in an intimate and sensitive relationship where the “feeling of revolt” proper to anarchism can then be identified with the “satanic pride that repels the domination of any master whatsoever, divine or human, and that alone creates in man the love of independence and freedom”²⁴.

It is thus, within the divine mythology, that the figure of Satan can give a face to a conception of the world where “positive anarchy” (Proudhon), the “free association of free forces” (Bakunin) never ceases to emerge from a first anarchy always there, its condition and its other dimension; neither good nor bad, “beyond the good and the evil” would say Nietzsche, but giving all its sense to the enigmatic and seizing formula of Proudhon:

“Come Satan, come, the slanderer of priests and kings; let me embrace you, let me hold you to my breast! I have known you for a long time, and you know me too. Your works, the blessed of my heart, are not always beautiful and good; but they alone give meaning to the universe and prevent it from being absurd”²⁵.

²² Ibid. pp. 109, 110, 116.

²³ Originating from the movements of Francis of Assisi (13th century), the “friars” (mainly Italian and Czech) undertook, in the name of poverty and its effects of equality, to kill all those who pretended to hold on to power and wealth.

²⁴ Bakunin, Complete Works, free field, volume 8, pp. 72 and 64.

²⁵ On Justice, volume 3, pp. 433–434.

Law and Mysticism: The Example of Sunnism and Shiism

What the figures and myths of God and Satan — the leader and the rebel, the unifier and the divider, the authoritarian and the libertarian, etc. — show, not without humor, the anarchist approach to religious facts also shows it, but in a much more detailed and detailed way, in the evaluation of a multitude of situations and singular and concrete histories: Judaism is the most important of these. -The anarchist approach to religious facts also shows this, but in a much more detailed and detailed way, in the evaluation of a multitude of singular and concrete situations and stories: the libertarian Judaism of the late nineteenth century, for example²⁶; the political and magical dimension of the experiments and lines of force of Chinese Taoism; the irreducible resistance of local and immediate beliefs and representations in the face of the totalitarian systems of the three monotheisms; or again the multiple expressions of mysticism, messianism and millenarianism.

In order to focus only on the most current events, and leaving aside for the moment the singularity and the stakes of the jihadist crystallization, we will limit ourselves here to examining another dimension of this topicality: the differences between Sunnism and Shiism.

It would undoubtedly be a mistake to take the current confrontations between these two main currents of Islam at face value (see below); a reductive confrontation overdetermined by the games and stakes of geopolitics, by the violence and the mortifying simplicity of the relationship between friends and enemies, and more generally by the plague of identity, whether racial, national, partisan or religious. Historically, as in what we are currently observing, what is usually called Shi'ism and Sunnism, far from putting order into realities and representations, only functions within a multitude of other entangled and contradictory divisions, mixtures and positions where, against all expectations and all criteria of classification, the importance of the relationship to the law in Sunnism, for example, can just as well become the currently dominant mark of Iranian state Shi'ism. While, conversely, mysticism, so important in Shi'ism, has historically been one of the main components of Sunnism²⁷. And even though a literalism as obtuse and exacerbated as Salafism does not fail, in its improbable composition, to associate itself with forms of millenarianism as extreme and mortifying as Daech for example.

But it would also be wrong (and more seriously) not to see how Sunnism and Shi'ism, in the chaos of their long history, their mixtures, their conflicts and their crossroads, allow, as far as Islam is concerned, not only to shed light on the realities of human experience (under its double aspect of oppression and emancipation) but also to grasp the present implications of their differences and precisely what can be done with them, not only to shed light on the realities of human experience (under its double aspect of oppression and emancipation) but also to grasp the present implications of their differences and more precisely still what can be expected from an anarchist point of view — in good as well as in bad -, through the libertarian criteria of the “inside” and the “outside”, of experience and dogma, of immanence and transcendence, of life and law, of liberty and compulsion.

²⁶ See Michael Löwy *Utopia and Redemption, Le Judaïsme libertaire en Europe Centrale*, PUF, 1988.

²⁷ Through the multiple currents and expressions of Sufism mainly, but also the endemic figure of the “mahdi”, “the well-guided”, supposed to return at the end of time, and whose personal and incarnated messianism, so frequently present in the Shiite currents (from the “hidden imam” to the “masters” of a multitude of schools and sects) is also found in the upheavals of Sunnism with, In the twelfth century, the puritanical and legalistic movement of the Almohads in the Maghreb, or more recently (at the end of the nineteenth century) the Sudanese “madhism” around the person (charismatic but in flesh and blood) of Muhammad Ahmadi (1844–1885).

A few remarks on Sunnism first, and rather on the register of discouragement for the moment. In the most radical tendencies of this current of Islam (largely in the majority on a world scale) one finds at present the reaffirmation and the authoritarian and extreme tightening of a monotheistic tradition which tends in addition and most often to privilege obedience and submission. In this tradition and because he is absolutely transcendent and inaccessible to man, God only communicates with him through a law and a letter (the word by word of the Koran and the hadith) all the more brief, arbitrary and imperative as the distance between them is greater (immeasurable in this case). A law and a letter that pretend to freeze life in the present of a human history definitively completed, 1400 years ago. A law and a letter that come out all armed with divinity (the “uncreated” Koran), and all the more violent, oppressive and simplistic in their injunctions that, apart from obedience and submission, they deny any other existence to the “real world” of which Bakunin speaks²⁸, to its infinite richness and complexity; including when it is a question of their own and long history: the mysticism and the innumerable schools and “brotherhoods” of Sufism for example; or again, at the very heart of the transcendent authority of the law, the immense jurisprudence of its numerous legal schools, reduced to the literal application of a handful of prescriptions²⁹.

With Shi’ism this time, and rather on the register of hope, we find, as a source of differences, a completely different tradition that has no doubt nothing to envy to other religious confessions in terms of oppression, law and authority, but which, in its history and its first (and always repeated) origins, tends, more than others, from human experience, to take shape in the darkness, confusion and hidden character of the infinite and anarchic power of life, of the real world and of what it is capable of in good and bad³⁰. Hence, in the past and present history of Shi’ism, and because it starts from the lived world, the tumultuous and uninterrupted anarchy of a splintered multitude of practices, beliefs and implications of the body, of “guides”, currents, churches, schools, groups and diverse “heresies” all equally astonishing as each other³¹: the Qarmates, for example, warriors and brigands who, after having stolen the Black Stone from the Ka’ba, tried in vain to organize themselves in an egalitarian manner; the Sabeans, who claimed to give the right of city to neo-Platonic paganism; the Noseiris (or Alawites) and their esoteric and eclectic doctrines, which drew as much from Christianity as from Zoroastrianism³²; The Nizaris and, in the manner of the Cathars, their network of autonomous fortresses; the Zaidists of Yemen, for whom the Koran was necessarily “created”, one day, somewhere, through the language and realities of a given society and who, alongside the twelve (or ten) imams of the official theology, admit the simultaneous existence of a multitude of other “saints”, guides, models and “inspired”. To these currents, and often at the limits of Islam itself, one can add many others: the Druze who affirm

²⁸ Œuvres, stock, volume 3, 1908, p. 216.

²⁹ On this elimination of jurisprudence, see Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et Histoire, essai d’épistémologie*, Flammarion, 1999. And, for a libertarian reading of this book, see *Trois essais de philosophie anarchiste, Islam, histoire et monadologie*, éditions Léo Scheer, 2004.

³⁰ It is in this sense that Shiism, within the very restrictive framework of monotheism (with regard to other religious traditions, animist or polytheist), can be brought closer to Christianity, for which, let us recall, “God became man”, which is obviously not nothing, one might say, except to think that this human and natural dimension of the “divinity” (the mysteries of nature and the world) should never have been lost from sight.

³¹ On the contrast between the long stagnation of the Arab-Muslim world of Sunni tendency and the vitality of the Shiite world, in particular in its Iranian branches, see Henry Corbin, *La philosophie islamique*, Gallimard, 1986.

³² Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, founder of a monotheistic religion outside the Bible and more or less recognized by Iranian Shi’isms as the religion of the “book”, in the same way as the Christians, the Jews, Apollo or Plato and Aristotle.

in their turn the need to abolish the sharia; the numerous and different Ismaili schools who also claim a personal and interior “revelation”, passing first through life and experience and who, for the most extreme of them, propose outright to burn the Koran, in order to eliminate all fetishism (or idolatry) of the letter and the law ; or again the Alevis for whom the Koran is only the work of Mohammed, certainly “inspired” by the “divine” power, but on condition that this divinity is identified with the “reality” of the world; a world of which man is a part and which he has the eminent possibility, through practice and experience, of including in himself and expressing in its entirety in the infinity of its possibilities.

To a history completed and making a clean sweep of the past and of what is, to the immobile time of the sharia and of religious obligations are substituted incessant, sensitive, material and circumstantial histories, which, from the old animist and polytheist beliefs to the hidden or martyred imams, do not cease to start again, in the impatient waiting of what can always happen. The idolatrous, fetishistic and authoritarian exteriority of religious prescriptions is replaced by the interiority and indeterminacy of life, its power and its hopes, which are quite literally unheard of. The dictatorial intermediaries of the letter and the law are replaced by an intimate and direct relationship with the totality of what is. To the oppressive and arbitrary legality of a God-Imperator who orders the world and who entrusts to the most obedient and therefore the most “limited” men, the care to impose the rules and the prohibitions, is substituted the infinite and sensitive character of the life, of the subjectivity of the beings, of what they can, from themselves; in good as in bad would say Proudhon. To the nothingness of a divinity which appropriates the world by emptying it of its substance, is substituted the superabundance of the life. The transcendence of a divine power communicating only by decrees and norms (sunna) is replaced by the unpredictable immanence of an infinite power which the world carries and to which (by misfortune and by submission to grammar) we give the name of “God”. To the “law of the Father” and to its way of cutting us off from the real world, to the castration operated by the sleight of hand of the patriarchy, of the symbolic, of the representatives, of the “patents” and other property rights, is substituted — under the figure of the demons, of the witches but also of the infinite and obscure bottom of the desires, of the experience and of the heart of men — the reality of what is.

Deus sive Natura, “God that is Nature” said Spinoza³³. Because they start first of all from the human experience and not from the order of the law and the letter, and because the human being is at the same time a part and the whole of what is — a “summary of the universe” (Proudhon),³⁴ an “interior reverberation” (Simondon)³⁵, “nature becoming aware of itself” (Reclus)³⁶, a “microcosm” that includes the “whole macrocosm” (the Alevis), a place and a “hearth” where “all the spontaneities of the nature meet, all the instigations of the fatal Being, all the gods and all the demons of the universe” (Proudhon)³⁷ — the mystical dimensions and practices of Shiism as well as of Sunni Sufism, Judaism or Christianity, but also of animism, shamanism, Taoism and a great number of other human experiences, are not only an antidote to the oppressive monotheisms that they accompany, support and betray. Ambivalent but immanent expressions of what is, they give an account — under the name of God — of what anarchism calls “nature”, thus justifying

³³ Spinoza, *The Ethics*.

³⁴ Proudhon *De la Justice*, op. cit. volume 3, p. 423.

³⁵ Simondon, *The psychic and collective individuation*, Aubier, 1989, p. 65.

³⁶ *Man and the Earth*. Librairie universelle, Paris, 1905–1908.

³⁷ *The economic contradictions*, Rivière, volume 2, p. 253.

Bakunin's remark at the beginning of his *Philosophical Considerations on the divine ghost, on the real world and on man*.

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"Call it God, the Absolute, if that amuses you, what does it matter to me, provided that you give this word God no other meaning than the one I have just specified; that of the universal, natural, necessary, and real combination, but in no way determined, nor preconceived, nor foreseen (emphasis added by B.), of that infinity of particular actions and reactions that all really existing things incessantly exert on one another."⁴³.

Notes

and made the tour of the human body.

Found the course of the universes

All in the human body.

The Torah and the Gospels

The Psalms and the Koran, all written words

Are found in the human body "Yunus Emre (1240 — 1321)

³⁸ Spinoza, *The Ethics*.

³⁹ Proudhon *De la Justice*, op. cit. volume 3, p. 423.

⁴⁰ Simondon, *The psychic and collective individuation*, Aubier, 1989, p. 65.

⁴¹ *Man and the Earth*. Librairie universelle, Paris, 1905–1908.

⁴² *The economic contradictions*, Rivière, volume 2, p. 253.

⁴³ Op. cit, pp. 217–218.

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