The Gulf

Émile Armand

1910

All the societies of the vanguard — Social Democrats, revolutionaries of all shades, various communists — say that the individual is a "product of his environment." It would be more exact to say that individuals are products of their environment, adding that the individual person, more especially, is the end of an ancestral line, which traces its origin back into animal darkness, holding this fact accountable for certain individuals in whom essentially predominate the characteristics of temperament and disposition of a particular ancestry. All societies — religious, lay, collectivist revolutionaries or not — say that the individual is a composite, therefore a dependent upon his environment. The anarchist individualists wish to make the individual person an independent, therefore a decomposite of his environment. The societies see in the individual a stone of the structure, a member of the body. The anarchists aim to make each individual person a distinct organism, a unified freeman. Whence two conceptions of education and propaganda:

1st. The social conception, which regards the individual as a wheelwork of society, and in its most audacious dreams does not go beyond the idea of the tremendous final transformation or revolution of the environment. It regards evolution as a quantitative result, a question of numbers. It takes the child or the adult, and, a priori, fills him with the concept of binding solidarity, of necessary harmony, of a communal organization inevitable and universal. It proceeds by shaping the brain after a pattern arranged in advance. It prescribes a special education.

2nd. The anarchistic conception, which regards the individual as detached — as the cause or reason of all association — who opposes it to society, and who would daringly like to make each personal life a ferment destructive to the prescribed or submissive life of the environment. It considers that all emancipation is due to quality, to individual effort. It seeks to make the child or the adult more competent for resistance, better endowed, a being deciding for himself as much as he can his own needs, and supplying them as much as possible; a union now or to come of others more capable or better endowed in one way or another. Outside of all intervention, of all guardianship, of all protection of the state or the community. Anarchistic education does not proceed by force, but by free examination, by approved elimination. It suggests, it selects.

And these two points of view are irreconcilable.

E. Armand.

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http://libertarian-labyrinth.blogspot.com/2010/08/e-armand-gulf.html
This short piece by Émile Armand appeared in Horace Traubel's *The Conservator* in 1910. It's an interesting piece to have appeared in a magazine dominated by the shadow of Walt Whitman — and an interesting example of Armand's thought. — Shawn Wilbur

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