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… In his lecture of 6 March 1896, to which our Norwegian comrade Hz refers, Kropotkin neither explains nor justifies the idea — to me an absurd and arbitrary one — that Anarchy is 'a concept of the universe based on a mechanistic interpretation of phenomena.'

Kropotkin makes obscure and debatable analogies between society and certain facts (or supposed facts) of the physical and biological world. He must have made them because it was the vogue in those days to relate everything to 'Science' without attaching great importance to it. For instance, Kropotkin begins by saying:

> 'Let me take some examples from the field of the natural sciences, *not to draw our social ideas from them* — far be it from us to do that — but simply to clarify certain relationships that are easier to understand in the context of the events observed by the exact sciences than by surrounding ourselves with examples taken from such a complex phenomenon as human society.'

And, in fact, once he had paid his tribute to the fashion of the time, he suddenly, without any apparent logical connection, went on to defend anarchy with arguments derived from the desire for justice, liberty, the well-being of all — none of which have anything to do with the natural sciences.

Moreover, if one cares to make a rigorous analysis of the contents of Kropotkin's lecture, one is forced to the conclusion that, fundamentally, he himself was far from being a *mechanist.* 'Nothing,' he says, 'in what we call the harmony of nature is preordained. It can be established by a chance collision.' *Chance*? But how can one suppose that something occurs by chance without also supposing a free agent, a force that, without prior cause, suddenly appears on the scene to alter the static and dynamic balance already in existence?

And then, what is this *harmony of nature* — this *natural order* to which Kropotkin-inspired anarchists so frequently appeal? What do harmony and order have in common with the *social harmony* which is the true goal of anarchism?

Nature builds and destroys, gives birth, causes suffering and death, creates life and works in such a way that a life can only be maintained at the expense of other lives. Love and joy are natural as are hatred and pain. Abundance is natural as are sterility and poverty. The crushing of the weak by the strong is a natural phenomenon; so are the hurricane and the earthquake, so are cancer and tuberculosis … Upon my word this natural order looks much more like bourgeois order than to what we anarchists want! All that exists and occurs independently of the will and of human endeavour is natural and, possibly, responds to a mechanistic necessity. But it is certainly not *harmonious*, not at least in the sense that we give to the word 'harmony' when we invoke it for the salvation and happiness of humankind.

Hz objects to the principle, generally accepted by the physical sciences, of the conservation of energy. He observes that 'a lighted candle can light a thousand others without burning

itself out more quickly, and a machine does not wear out more quickly by doing a useful job than by standing idle.'

Without claiming to understand a great deal, I would certainly not be shocked if the principle of energy conservation were ever refuted. Like any other principle on which science is founded, it is basically no more than a hypothesis, extremely useful for linking known events and stimulating the discovery of others. But it fails to give complete satisfaction because it does not reveal to us what energy really is.

If someone were to demonstrate the inadequacy of this theory and thus stimulate research and reflection in a new direction, it could only be cause for rejoicing. But criticism must be supported by fact and reasoning, while the objections of our comrade seem to me to lack any validity.

When the lighted candle flame communicates its flame to others, it loses a little heat each time it makes contact with a cold wick and, if successive contacts occur too fast and the chemical energy released by the candle in the process of transforming into heat is too rapid to compensate for the cooling produced by contact with cold wicks, the candle will burn itself out. In short, the candle could last longer, with a dimmer and less constant light, but neither it nor the other candles which it has lighted would produce more or less calorific, luminous, etc., energy than the energy which, in other forms, is contained in their components and in the oxygen with which these components combine.

A machine does not wear out more quickly by doing a useful job than by standing idle. What does *useful job* mean? 'Usefulness' is a human concept with no place in rational mechanics. Useful, useless or injurious to people as a machine's movement may be, it neither produces nor destroys energy, but simply transforms and transports it.

In any case, even if the examples given by *Hz* were really to prove some point against the conservation of energy, he would end up with a curious result: wishing with Kropotkin to extend

the law of mechanics to the moral and social world, he would end by removing it even from that material world in which its reign would seem incontestable.

It seems to me that if Kropotkin's definition of anarchy is accepted, we would fall into an irremediable illogicality. It has been said that everyone is free to make their own judgements — i.e. that everyone may base their reasoning on whatever principle seems true to them, extracting from it whatever experience or fantasy it may suit them to do. But once that principle has been affirmed, the consequences that inevitably flow from it are governed by logic, the law of thought which is the same for all.

If you affirm that 'everything that occurs must occur,' including in that *everything* what people think and want and do; if you hold that thought and will are not the products of mechanistic forces, of the *collisions*, whether inevitable or accidental, of material atoms, you cannot then go on to say that there is a sense in which human endeavour can also act upon events — not even by way of speeding up or slowing down the rate at which they occur. If you hold that human beings cannot do otherwise than they do, there is no acrobatic feat of logic than can give any real meaning to the words *freedom* and *responsibility.*

To conclude, if Kropotkin's definition is taken seriously, all those who entertain a view of the universe which differs from the mechanistic one, or who have no view at all — which, I fear, is the case of this writer — would be placed beyond the pale of anarchism. This is certainly not Kropotkin's intention, nor can it be that of our *mechanistic*, *materialist* and *determinist* comrades. Above all, it doesn't suit us.

Therefore, leaving philosophic uncertainty aside, I prefer to keep to those popular definitions which tell us that *Anarchy* is a form of living together in society; a society in which people live as brothers and sisters without being able to oppress or exploit others and in which everyone has at their disposal whatever means the civilisation of the time can supply in order for them to attain the greatest possible moral and material development. And *Anarchism* is the method of reaching anarchy, through freedom, without government — that is, without those authoritarian institutions that impose their will on others by force, even if it happens to be in a good cause.