

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Are These the Words of a Heretic?

Gustav Landauer

Gustav Landauer
Are These the Words of a Heretic?

Retrieved on May 14th, 2024 from:<https://x.com/dlondonwortel/status/1787470614107763006>

Translated from the German Daniel Wortel-London, originally entitled "Sind das Kertzergedanken?" ("Are These Heretic Thoughts?"). Originally published in *Von Judentum (On Judaism)* in 1911 by the Bar Kokhba League of Jewish Students.

theanarchistlibrary.org

A characteristic of our time is that much is accomplished in spirit but little is accomplished in reality. Perhaps even the lack of actual implementation corresponds to a special activity of the mind, which constantly strives to overcome its own formations without leaving the form of fantasy and doctrine. One could imagine a human society that is structured in such a way that the ideas in it have the character of tools, that is, like a spade or a vehicle, they only have meaning and life when they are used and can only wear out through use. With us, the ideas are not of the nature of serving tools, but rather of figures in a drama that takes place in the air: the ideas change, fight against each other, kill each other and themselves, bring natural and unnatural children into the world, and Meanwhile, reality lies there dull and mindless and won't budge. Almost our entire party system is such a dramatic, mostly tragicomic mirage as a substitute for real life drama.

Consider, for example, the history of socialism from this point of view. Is it not the history of a paralysis accompanied by vivid feverish faces? Almost the only reality that can be seen

in this long history is the so-called social legislation, the workers' protection and insurance system that the realist Bismarck began. But the inactivity in the camp of the real socialists is so great, and the inhibitions that they find above all in themselves are so powerful, that a separate theory, the Marxist theory of evolution, had to be invented so that the idea could support itself and its own illusory life.

Here a fate reigns over our time. The ideas that arise in individuals are of a social nature, that is, a plan arises in the mind of an individual, which can only be carried out, indeed, which only gains blood and nerve through the participation of many at the beginning. Here comes Theodor Hertzka or Silvio Gesell or Franz Oppenheimer or Josef Popper after intensively experiencing our oppressive and shameful conditions, and each, from a different experience, thought and desire, says simply, clearly and in detail what needs to be done, right now. But they have spoken into the air, and their entire success would be that their followers talk each other to death.

It is possible that this condition brings about a flowering of strong art. For productively charged natures who experience such isolation may ultimately recognize that the contrast between the individual form and the social content of their idea is to blame for the tragic disproportion. Creative and active as they are, there may be nothing left for them but to include the fulfillment in their idea and thus to accomplish in their imagination alone what in reality only the combined strength of those who are very carried away could do.

I believe I see that the idea of the renewal of Judaism is not following any other course than this. There is not even the slightest beginning of a realization, and already the party struggle anticipates everything that could follow one another in terms of reality. Take all the parties that exist in any nation and see whether the Jewish nation, which has no external form at all, does not have a few more than all of them put together. What is called a party here is characterized by a kind of mastur-

batory self-satisfaction of the so-called movement within itself; the party is like an inland lake into which the idea has flowed but from which it does not emerge again. The activity of the idea is thus transformed into the unpsychological and loveless, heretical intolerance of the party. If the other nations have at least the semblance of their state, so that politics, the semblance of reality, arises from all the strife of sterility, the shadowy struggle of the self-consuming Jewish ideology takes place in even thinner air: it is about opinions, about an infinitely variable and varied "if..." What will the language be when we are in Zion? What will the common customs and traditions be? I have no doubt that somewhere it has already been investigated whether pig-raising will be permissible.

There is another very important point to be made. The more we become aware of our Jewish nationality, the more we become aware of it as a reality that only has a full, beautiful, flowing life that fills our whole being when we no longer need to hold it and embrace it with our consciousness. The strong emphasis on one's own nationality, even if it does not degenerate into chauvinism, is weakness. If a German writes about Romanticism or Socialism or the conservation of energy, he is writing about Romanticism or Socialism or the conservation of energy. The conscious Jew writes about Romanticism and Judaism, about Socialism and Judaism, about the conservation of energy and Judaism, and also about radium and Judaism. But here too the cycle of the idea, remaining in the mind without even touching on any external realization, proceeds quickly. We are already tired of this constant emphasis on what is only true and valuable if it is self-evident. We already recognize that our Judaism is one of those things of divine ignorance, of which Meister Eckhart says: "Man is, and this must be true, an animal, an ape, a fool, as long as he remains in ignorance. But knowledge must develop into a superform, and this ignorance should not come from ignorance, rather: from knowledge one should come into ignorance. Then we should become knowledgeable

of divine ignorance, and then our ignorance will be ennobled and adorned with supernatural knowledge!" For all of us it was an enrichment, an elevation and a strengthening of our reality when we began to be fully conscious Jews. But now we are Jews so much so that we know: we are Jews in every intellectual and spiritual movement and activity, and we are least of all Jewish when we emphasize Judaism on its own. Nation is a readiness or disposition that becomes dry and hollow and rattling when it appears without connection to the material reality, with tasks and work, and when it is other than their origin and tone.

There is more to it. No one who feels a task within himself that spares him the question of why he lives is capable of living in *suspense*. One works from the grounds of his nationality for a cause that may have various ramifications and names, but in all its diversity is the cause of humanity that must become reality. Although everything that has just been said about the self-consumption of the idea applies to this struggle and construction, there is still a group of people who are prepared and feel that they belong together. Not only do they come from all nations and feel one and new-which is too little to say-they feel so united by the bond of the spirit and separated from those who do not go with them, as if they were a new nation. And they take the best that they feel from their old nationality with them into this new one. In every nation today there are decisive divisions between the many and the few; and this rift runs through Judaism as it does through other nations. In the new nation that is being created, a large number of Jews are of course predominantly Jews; but these Jews feel themselves to be a unity, a union that has to fulfill its calling for humanity; and the more they feel this within themselves, the more Zion is already alive for them. For what else is a nation than a union of those who, united by a unifying spirit, feel within themselves a special task for humanity? To be a nation means to have an office.

It may be that a development will come that will allow Jewishness to spread so widely that our Germanness, that Russian-ness, will be crushed; it may be that a Hebrew Judaism will come that will wipe out Yiddish Judaism. But who, who acknowledges himself, who feels that in all his diversity he is one and unique, called to serve humanity in his place, can wish for this and want to bring it about? Only the doctrinaires could want it; doctrinaires are those who take the One to be all that they disregard and suppress the other revelations of the One; but are they not defending themselves, as we find in ourselves as Jews, against the cold lovelessness and stupid intellectualism of doctrinaires?

Only that which has become lives; only those who, in their present and reality, understand past and future as one, only those who take themselves, as they are truly and whole, with them on the journey to their promised land, in which only Judaism seems to me to be a living asset. The nations that have separated themselves into states have neighbors outside who are their enemies, our nation has neighbors in its own breast; and this neighboring community is peace and unity in everyone who is a whole and acknowledges himself. Shouldn't this be a sign of the job that Judaism has to fulfill for humanity, in humanity?

What is being described is a new structure, something like a nascent nation, which, as a new community, is rebelling against all old nation states, dynastic states, unjust and violent states to build the beginnings of a just, free society that unleashes creative forces. They, who thus feel what is becoming within themselves and want to let go of what is creating within themselves, are consciously separated people who place all the ancient sacred goods of the individually national organization of their physical and spiritual bodies at the service of their exemplary work on humanity, which through them becomes reality shall be. The awareness and emphasis of this nascent nation is always a fresh necessity, because it is here that a reality is to grow from the spirit. We Jews, who are becoming Jews, cannot find two things and separate things in ourselves; The emerging as-if nation that is being spoken of here and what unites us when we want to express what we are as Jews are one and the same. We have separated and find ourselves together; Service to humanity drives us and our spirit longs to become more and different than spirit: society, people, corporation, organism. So that the more we raise our nation from the hidden silence of mere actuality to words of will and change, the more we become conscious Jews who understand Judaism to be our essence, Judaism coincides for us with an objective direction towards fulfillment. The more fully and purely and saturated with reality we express this about our nature and urges and knowledge and preparation, the more closely they will come to us from all nations and teach us in loving community that the ancient things that we raise from our souls are the way of emerging humanity is that the tradition of our tortured and longing hearts is nothing other than the revolution and regeneration of humanity. Like a wild cry across the world and like a barely whispering voice in our innermost being, a voice inevitably tells us that the Jew can only be redeemed at the same time as humanity and

that it is one and the same: towards the Messiah in exile and dispersion to wait and to be the Messiah of the nations.

To be a nation means to have an office; and where my office is, there is my fatherland. Have we, the separated ones, discovered as our Judaism the service of transforming society, of founding a new people and, above all, a new humanity; have we found that, in searching for our inner being, we have encountered the boundless and barrier-breaking renewal of the peoples by stripping away superficial relationships of violence and establishing a genuine, joyful, loving community; have we, amazed and delighted, raised to light, as the most ancient thing sunk within us, nothing other than all the tremendously powerful and intimate driving forces of purification who, who has reached this point, who, therefore, who has escaped dullness, sees himself before his eyes and holds himself in his hand as one, should and will, who would not want to recognize the world as the place of his work and the present as his world, in which he must work?

No real person can see himself as merely a bridge for future generations, as preparation, as seed and dung; he wants to be and achieve something himself. It may be that the mother tongue of any descendants sprung from my loins will be Hebrew; that does not affect me, my language and that of my children is German. I sense my Jewishness in my facial expressions, in my facial expression, my posture, my appearance, and so these signs give me the certainty that it lives in everything I begin and am. But far more—insofar as there is more than Chamisso the Frenchman was a German poet, I, who am a Jew, am a German. German Jew or Russian Jew - I find these expressions to be wrong, just as Jewish German or Russian. I know of no relationship of dependency or adjectivity; I accept and am fate as it is, and my Germanness and Judaism do each other no harm and much for the benefit of each other. Just as two brothers, a firstborn and a Benjamin, are loved by a mother

not in the same way but to the same degree, and just as these two brothers live together in harmony, where they touch each other and also where each goes his own way, so I experience this strange and familiar coexistence as something delicious and know nothing primary or secondary in this relationship. I have never felt the need to simplify myself or to unify myself by denying myself; I accept the complex that I am and hope to be one in even more diverse ways than I know.

But since I am now living and working, and therefore also am now a Jew and do what it is my duty to do, I cannot want to prepare myself internally for something, cannot find the will within myself to make a new arrangement that would extinguish or inhibit a part of my being.

Others are from a different origin and have other things to describe. They can do so as honestly as has happened here. Still others are now trying to teach us that we are half-hearted and a product of mixed race and that we must bow in humility before the Eastern Jews, the true Jews. Those who are so weakened that they think they deny themselves the right to exist should not be stopped. We, in our uniqueness and diversity, will recognize our Eastern brothers as also diverse, albeit in different degrees. There are no Russian or Polish Jews, but there are those who are fed at least three nationalities: for they, the Easterners, are Jews and are Bukos or Poles or Lithuanians and are Germans of a special kind (Middle High German, Yiddish-German) at the same time. Despite all the persecution and privation, the Jews from the Bußland feel homeless and miserable when they live with us, not only and often not primarily because they miss the Jewish customs they are used to among us, but because they miss the Russian environment, the specifically Russian kindness and gentleness; and if they could not have the Russian cigarette and the samovar and many of the facilities of Russian community life with us, they would not be able to endure living with us.