

The Case for Anarchism

Guy A. Aldred

1906

Contents

I	3
II.	5
III.	5
IV.	6

I.

The prophet of despair is ever with us ; and to him there is no silver lining to any cloud, no promise of sunshine after the storm, no people so fair and upright as to be able to act honorably unless force or fear are brought to bear upon them. To him the whole social horizon is shrouded in darkness, and not a ray of freedom's sun is there to separate cloud from cloud. Humanity is inherently bad, and is for ever doomed to 'be divided into dominated and dominators. Governments based on fraud and coercion, a representative system founded on legislative corruption, a poverty to offer the contrast to an equally immoral bestial luxury: these things are the ends of all being, the tombs of all aspirations, the alpha and omega of the social serf's existence. To dream of a society not founded on the "law of constructive murder," of a social state in which all are brethren and peace and good fellowship prevail, of a society founded on truth and freedom, is to become an enemy of the society that is, and to be regarded as a dreamer of the most fanatical type. And in the eyes of your "practical" and "business man," no less so than in the eyes of any other prophet of despair, to dream of anything other than of personal success or Mammon is an unforgivable offense, socially, like unto the theological sin oi blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

What these deprecators of idealism fail to realize is that all social progress turns upon the continual striving of the individual and the community after something better, the continual being and becoming of the whole of Nature, the eternal discontent underlying the most practical of human endeavor. It follows, therefore, from a recognition of this fact that no serious argument can be urged against the propaganda of the Communist on the score of his idealism. For, if by idealism be understood the yearning after some state of society or of individual being, and the molding of the present to realize your dream in the future, then surely there is a touch of the impracticability of idealism about the operation of Wall Street and Stock Exchange financiers. And yet they realize their dreams. Why, then, if the socially maleficent dream of the millionaire can be realized, cannot the socially beneficent dream of the Communist be realized? Is it that behind the forces of Nature there exists an omnipotent power for evil, and that not God, but Devil, reigns o'er all? If so, whence the sweet fragrance of the flowers, the artistic culture of the race, the rich verdure of the fields, the impressive heights of mountain ranges, the beauties of the undulating plains, the luxury of Nature's foliage? Does not the evil in Nature counteract the good? Is it not obvious to the student that the whole of being is reducible to no explanation that turns upon the existence of either moral or immoral conscious sources of being, hut' that the basis of all physical and social activity is an immoral tendency to be?

If this be granted, as needs it reasonably must, then we are faced with the fact of man not merely being a social animal, but also a selfish one; the development of the selfish instinct being of such a kind as to increasingly occasion the production of those types of character which serve to give an ethical turn to the survival of the fittest, and to make for a state of society in which the purest and ethically fittest can survive. This assertion is founded on no mere Anarchist dream, but is the substance of the well-reasoned address on "Evolution and Ethics" which Professor Huxley delivered as the Romanes Lecture for 1893. And even though this distinguished scientist and veteran philosopher confessed that "strict Anarchy may be the highest conceivable grade of perfection oi social existence," no one will accuse him of basing his expositions of ethical evolution on romantic musings, or on data other than that which he had submitted to severe analysis. Nor is it necessary to rely on Huxley's testimony. It is sufficient that we trace up the evolution of species, watch the development of the social spirit in man, examine the basis

of “duty,” and read pages of history. All these studies will but serve to vindicate the truth of Huxley’s contention.

What, then, is man as we know him in the highest stage of actual and potential development? What is his relation as actual or potential being, respectively to his present environment and Communist state of society? Let us see.

Man as we know him, in the highest actual stage of development, loves learning, yearns after truth, and identifies his personal happiness with the realization and maintenance of his ideals. The vast number of artists, poets, philosophers, and scientists who have suffered penury and persecution for their principles prove this. The numerous pioneers of Freethought and social liberty who have been burned at the stake, murdered by the Inquisition, racked, tortured, hanged and strangled, bear a like testimony. The willingness of the mother to suffer for her children lends further testimony to the inherent social idealism of the individual. Whilst the fact that those who would prey on their fellows do so in the name of justice, of spirituality, and of truth, supplies the final emphasis. Hence we see humanity is not ruled, at bottom, by coercion, nor by fear. nor yet by injustice. That these things should exist but means that ignorance abounds. Let ignorance be removed, and it will be seen that knowledge is virtue as well as power. Knowledge spells justice. freedom, happiness. But neither justice, nor freedom, nor happiness can exist where the many are dominated by the few. For, self-contained as each individual should be, loyal unto the internal canons of thought as opposed to external authority, man is, nevertheless, so far as his sense implied and social existence is concerned, a part of the social organism, an ethical unit, and an intellectual cellular activity acting and reacting upon the society of which he is a part, and upon: the cellular activities to which he is related. Each of these activities or social atoms is dominated by the will to be, adaptation to and of the being. Hence we find that adaptation to and of the environments is continual, those organisms surviving longest which adapt themselves the more readily to their environment.

This process of development tends to become an ethical one and to identify individual ability and power to survive with the evolution of the social instinct and desire to serve. It follows, most distinctly, that capitalist environment not only favors, but creates the Communist.

Our right to live, is conditioned by the intellectual and economic forces which surround us. These forces demand that each organism shall perform certain social functions in order to maintain its own right to existence. To exhibit vitality the primordial law of life. But it is impossible to obey this law, without which being cannot be manifested, unless we harmonize with our environment. It is impossible to live and to impoverish. The law of life is that, only by enriching our environment, by rendering it more vital and depriving it of death and decay, can we survive. Only by nourishing can we gather nourishment. Selfishness teaches us to discharge duties as well as to preserve rights.

The logical expression of this selfishness of the individual is the doing of good because it is good. We incline to abolish suffering because pain to others occasions agony for ourselves. We are impelled to produce the best of which we are capable because our natures demand thoroughness in the discharge of those functions for which our organisms are fitted. Equally, we are compelled to take from the community all that is necessary to the maintenance of our being, because the welfare of all requires that the individual craving or appetite should be satisfied. Thus rights involve duties and duties proclaim rights.

Idiosyncrasies vary and cannot be crushed. Men and women insist on discovering hobbies with which to amuse themselves after having sweated for a master. Does it not follow that, in a

free society, not only would each work for all, but each would toil with earnest devotion at that which 'best suited and expressed his or her temperament? There would exist, in consequence, not merely a purer and freer society, not only happier and nobler individuals, but a practical individualism, a sound and sane collectivism. The forms and modes of productivity and distribution would tend to good food, healthy living, decent clothing, and equal intellectual and moral liberty for all. Hence the thoroughness of production and distribution would be co-existent with a minimum of labor and a maximum of pleasure. Liberty would co-exist with social service, because the power to dictate and the desire to invade would be abolished.

It may be said that this is mere theory. Quite so. But what if it is only theory? Have we not reasoned together logically from data scientifically collected? All the data relevant to the problem under discussion has been considered. None has been ignored or overlooked. There exists no facts which militate either against the basic assumptions or main contentions of the theory.

Communist theory, is but an anticipation in thought of what will occur inevitably in reality. It is a correct outlining of the future.

II.

Had there been no pioneers who died for Truth, Communism would be impossible of realization. If none had been burned for Liberty, then there could be no Anarchy. Were there no mother-love, then the Earth would not "be our common mother, and the sun would not shine to give warmth and light to us all. But there is an idealism of the past and of the present which conditions the future. There have been Brunos and Spinozas and Chicago Martyrs. Isaiah has triumphed over Moses. Within the most depraved breast, there does exist a spark of chivalry which often consumes the entire being of the outcast sinner; there dwells many a virtuous inclination which the surrounding world of respectability conspires to crush and to decline. Modern society seems to thrive on an acquired taste for sordid criminality. But even society is moved, at its respectable worst, by something noble: than an instinct and aptitude for crime.

The world is governed even to-day by its impulse towards liberty and love. "Truth" and "Honor" are not empty sounds, but the dearest of the world's ideals. So much we know. Then let us be logical and recognize that the Free Society of which we dream is something beyond a mere possibility. It is not a vain imagining of the better things that might be. But the inevitable goal of our social revolution.

III.

With the advent of capitalism, theological speculation entered upon its period of decline. The dark serpent of theological superstition lost its hold over the minds of children and adults. Influenced by its growing sense of power over nature, humanity lost its fear of god. The world ceased to be a battle-ground for unknown divinities. It was a mystery wonder land no more. It became a realm of established fact and experience, of scientific investigation and regulated discovery. Its philosophy, in consequence, became utilitarian.

Underlying all social progress is the first law of Nature, the law of self-preservation. So long as man could safely live unto himself, he paid little attention to the wants of his fellows. Experience

taught him the folly of isolation. He realized that, from time to time, he ran risks of being deprived of his existence. Alone, he sometimes lacked the means to sustain his being. Each day convinced him of his ever-increasing indebtedness to his fellows. He consented to recognize his obligations and so became a social animal. But it was self-interest which dictated his growth in wisdom and in understanding and in moral righteousness. Selfishness lies at the moot of all social and industrial development.

The apparent growth in the Altruistic mode of expressing our individual selfishness tends to belie the primary selfishness of our individual desires. Thus we find in the tribal state a slow decay in the massacring of prisoners of war in order to turn them to account as slaves. Chattel slavery gives way to free slavery when the economic interests demand the change. To retain power a dominant class ever concedes advantages no those under the yoke of its oppression.

Altruism plays no part in the march of industrial progress. The utilitarian instinct or self-preservation desire is the deciding factor. Not a dualistic crossing of Altruism and Egotism, but a naturally evolved egoism explains the nature of the individual's progress in Communistic inclinations.

IV.

The nature of a species can be changed completely as a result of the modifications resulting from the passage through a series of environments. But only the expression is modified in the case of the effect of factors operative in the environment on the nature of an individual member of the species. By adding to or subtracting from the ethical factors in a human beings environment, it is possible to divert his inclinations from one channel to another. Meantime, economic conditions are tending constantly to alter the individual's attitude towards abstract ideas. Hence, in our maturity, we respond not only to intellectual truth but also to the ever-increasing pressure of economic interest. Our rectitude is modified by the action and reaction which exists between the idealism of philosophy and the determinism of industrial conditions.

In the fact of this action and re-action so existing is to be found the cause of our present chaos and uncertainty in all revolutionary propaganda. Our only emancipation from the resulting apparent confusion will be found in the intellectual and economic destinies which constitute the logic shaping the ends of communities as well as of individuals. Whilst individually, man may be said by virtue of his heredity to largely mold his environment to his own ends, the ideals and inclinations of the race are molded by external conditions. Hence, socially a creature of circumstances, man is individually a free being capable of influencing his environment, as also of adapting it to his own ends. Only in so far, as he is a member of a society which recognizes his natural freedom can he identify his interests with that of society. Only in proportion as he realizes the influence society exercises in the molding of the character of the race can he consciously contribute to the securement of his own freedom and that of his posterity, along the lines of least resistance. Hence the natural evolution of man, his place in society and his attitude towards abstract problems which have often supplied an excuse for reaction, only serve to emphasize humanity's potential capacity for Communism. Mankind's present activity is a certain promise of its inevitable arrival at that state of society which shall witness the combination of absolute individual liberty with the greatest amount of social order. With the many coerced by the few,

the only “order” existent at present is that of disorder. With all enjoying the advantages of a social order based on an enlightened social expression of individual happiness.

In order that we might understand this phase of our subject, it is well to note Spencer’s contribution to the consideration of society as a social organism. Referring to the individual as a unit in society, he notes the tribal tendency to a small aggregation of individual units, augmenting insensibly in mass. At first, the communities thus formed seem structureless, so simple is the nature of their structure. In the course of their development, however, they become more and more complex, and the mutual dependence of their component parts or units becomes more and more firmly established, until at last the life of each unit is only made possible by the consent and activity of the remaining parts. To complete his analogy, Spencer shows that the life of society is interdependent of, and far more prolonged than the lives of any of its component units, which are conceived only to grow, work, reproduce and die, while the body politic, which is composed of them, survives generation after generation, increasing in mass, in completeness of structure and in functional activity. This is society as we know it. the state in which the individual is made by schoolmaster and nurse, by priest and politician, a unit existing merely for the well-being, not of the whole organism. but of the consumptive or parasitical portion of the organism. Or, to vary our conception, in which the working section enjoys sufficient food to keep the central stomach of the organism in activity, whilst the vitals of the organism are being eaten away by the parasitic growths living in luxury on its activity.

Up to the point named the analogy between society and biological organism would seem to be complete. But the comparison entirely breaks down in that the body cells are of no importance in themselves, but are only of value in so far as they contribute to the well-being of the whole; whilst, in the case of the ‘State, it having no corporate consciousness, its existence is only of importance in so far as it contributes to the happiness of the individual. In the case of the animal, it is well that the directive power should be central, inasmuch as the cellular consciousness is common to all, and therefore central. But as the consciousness in society of its units is individual, the directive force must be individual, and hence all central authority is artificial and an impertinent imposition. Only by the operation of internal canons of thought, only by the individual’s growth in the direction of social feeling, by virtue of his own experience and observation, can he learn to identify his own interests with that of the community’s well-being. A central authority, devoid of conscious control, cannot do this, for there exist no nervous tissues to convey the results of central legislative effort to all parts of the body politic and inspire the units with legislative vitality. Moral suasion, educative endeavor, rational conviction—these are the only forces which will contribute to this desirable end. Inasmuch as Anarchist society alone can develop these forces, Anarchists need have no fear of submitting their principles to analysis in the mental laboratory of reason.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Guy A. Aldred
The Case for Anarchism
1906

Original text from RevoltLib.com, 2021.

theanarchistlibrary.org