Carl Schmitt, Reader of Bakunin

Jean-Christophe Angaut

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Summary

Mentioned several times although none of his writings are cited, Bakunin occupies a particular place in some of Carl Schmitt's main texts (Political Theology, Dictatorship, The Concept of Politics). The themes that Schmitt chooses to identify in Bakunin (Satanism, naturalism, the religious nature of authority, the refusal of mediation), if they are an indication of a precise knowledge of the work of the Russian revolutionary, also allow him to be placed in a term-by-term opposition with the theorists of the counter-revolution. The attentive reading that Schmitt seems to have made of Bakunin's texts should not hide the fact that in the work of the German theorist, Bakunin is above all a figure: that of the Russian anarchist, the enemy par excellence who pretends to finish with politics. Apparently adventitious, the convocation of this partially mythical figure touches on a central theme in Schmitt's work, that of the conception of politics.

To study the reading of one author by another is not only to ask the question of the accuracy of this reading, of the degree of understanding or misunderstanding that it manifests, it is also to study the role that it plays in the theoretical device set up by the one who proposes this reading. As regards Carl Schmitt's relationship to Bakunin, and more generally to anarchism, these two questions are all the more acute since Schmitt often refers to Bakunin and to the current of thought of which he is supposed to be the representative (anarchism, always considered in conjunction with revolutionary syndicalism), without ever expressly quoting a single text by him. To question the Schmittian reading of Bakunin is therefore to ask three questions from the outset. A factual question: did Schmitt read Bakunin? A question of history of philosophy: does what Schmitt writes about Bakunin faithfully reproduce the characteristics of his thought? My answer to these first two questions will determine the third one: if it is clear indeed that Schmitt has a rather precise knowledge of certain aspects of Bakunin's theoretical work, the mentions he makes of it do not enter into an approach of historian of ideas or philosophy. Hence this third question: what role does the figure of Bakuninian anarchism play in Schmitt? We will see that asking this question amounts to questioning Schmitt's own political mythology.

I propose, on the basis of the different Bakuninian themes that are highlighted by Schmitt's texts, to show first of all to what extent it is possible to extend Schmitt's reading of Bakunin, before questioning this reading around the central problem that constitutes the conception of politics in the two authors. This amounts to asking the following two questions: first, what does the Schmittian reading contribute to our knowledge of Bakunin's anarchism; second, what does this reading tell us about Schmitt himself?

It should be noted, however, that the list of Schmitt's writings in which the figure of Bakunin plays a role goes beyond the list of writings in which Bakunin's name appears. The latter is essentially reduced to three texts: Political Theology, Parliamentarism and Democracy and Theory of the Partisan. Insofar as in each of these three texts Bakunin is mentioned as the representative figure of anarchism, studying Schmit's reading of Bakunin implies questioning the status of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in all of Schmitt's work, and thus extending the corpus to a text such as The Concept of Politics (Begriff des Politischen, curiously translated into French under the title La notion de politique), which is studded with references to anarchism.

The Parallel Between Counter-Revolution and Anarchism

Whether in the Political Theology of 1922 or in Parliamentarism and Democracy (1923), the figure of Bakunin is summoned in a striking parallel between the theorists of counter-revolution (Donoso Cortés, Joseph de Maistre and, to a lesser extent, Louis de Bonald) and those of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism (Proudhon, Bakunin and Sorel). Chapter 4 of Political Theology,[1] devoted to "the philosophy of the State in the counter-revolution", shows that the latter shares with anarchism a cardinal proposition concerning the absolute character of all government and identifies among the theorists of the counter-revolution a rise in power of the notion of decision (which smoulders under formulas of the type "either/or"), in the sense that it would be a question of deciding at the same time between Catholicism and atheism and between absolute power and anarchy. For Schmitt, these theories manifest a refusal of dialectics, insofar as the latter mediates opposites, and they are instead based on binary oppositions (the most suggestive of which is the opposition between God and the Devil).

The counter-revolution starts from the premise that all government is absolute: the sovereign is the one who makes the decision, which cannot be challenged by any other instance, otherwise this instance would itself become the holder of sovereignty. There is thus a link between the concepts of sovereignty and decision, and between these concepts and the absolute character of power. But Schmitt immediately points out that this premise is shared by anarchism, the only difference between anarchism and counter-revolution being their assessment of human nature: "Every political idea takes a position in one way or another on the 'nature' of man and presupposes that he is either 'good by nature' or 'bad by nature'. And Schmitt adds: "For consciously atheistic anarchists, man is decidedly good, and all evil is the consequence of theological thought and its derivatives, which contain all representations of authority, the state and power" (p. 65).

In contrast to this conception of the good human nature, a theorist like Cortés exaggerates to the point of madness the malignity and baseness of man, because for him it is a question of political decision: an absolute government must be based on this axiom. Paradoxically, Cortés manifests for this very reason a much greater respect for anarchist socialism than for bourgeois liberalism: the bourgeoisie is that class that discusses, its "essence is negotiation, conservative half-measures" (p. 71), hence the contempt with which he treats it and "his respect for anarchist and atheist socialism, to which he confers a diabolical dimension. If Cortés respects anarchism, it is because he considers it as his real enemy, the one to which he opposes on an axiom concerning the human nature and that leads to a political consequence radically opposite to the one he defends. On this occasion, Schmitt evokes the Satanism of the time and speaks of a "strong intellectual principle" whose "literary expression is the elevation to the throne of Satan" (ibid.).

It is in this context that the figure of Bakunin appears:

> *It is only with Bakunin that the fight against theology enters the uncompromising logic of an absolute naturalism. Certainly he too wants to "spread Satan", and he holds this mission to be the only revolution worthy of the name.*

But Schmitt immediately adds:

> *[…] Bakunin's intellectual importance rests on his representation of life, which produces of itself and from itself, thanks to its natural correctness, the right forms. For him there*

[1] C. Schmitt, Théologie politique, trad. J.-L. Schlegel, Paris, Gallimard, 1988.

> *is consequently nothing negative nor evil, if it is not the theological doctrine of God and sin, which labels the man as bad to have a pretext to his desire of domination and his will of power. (p. 72).*

In de Maistre, Schmitt then points out:

> *[…] the opposites, authority and anarchy, oppose each other with total determination and constitute the obvious antithesis mentioned above: when de Maistre says that all government is necessarily absolute, an anarchist literally says the same thing; simply, thanks to his axiom of the good man and corrupt power, he draws the opposite practical conclusion: all power must be fought, because all power is dictatorship. (p. 74).*

The opposition between anarchism and counter-revolution thus brings into play two elements, on the one hand a premise, common to both currents, on the absolute nature of any form of government, on the other hand an axiom, which comes to determine the political position, on human nature. The counter-revolution holds man to be evil, and for this reason asserts that all government must necessarily be absolute. Anarchism would hold man to be naturally good, and would therefore assert that all political authority, insofar as it thwarts the free development of mankind, is bad and must necessarily be destroyed. This approach is worth considering, as it differs from the commonplaces that are usually found in anarchist thought. In particular, what Schmitt says about anarchism shows a good knowledge of the themes that structure the thought of its main supposed representative, Bakunin. For my part, I will retain four of them: naturalism, Satanism, the theological scheme of authority and the question of conflictuality.

The Bakuninian Themes of the Schmittian Reading

Naturalism

What are we to make of Schmittian's assertion that Bakunin's intellectual importance rests on his naturalistic representation of life? Obviously, this does not mean that Bakunin is important in the intellectual field because of his qualities as a scholar or naturalist — titles that he never claimed and that it would be difficult to attribute to him anyway. From the middle of the 1860s, in manuscripts that he would take up or develop in his later writings, Bakunin exposes that the whole universe is subject to an ascending movement, which sees the solidarity inherent in the different species developing within it, a movement that has human freedom as its culminating point. In this, he not only announces some of the most striking formulas of the anarchism of the end of the 19th century (for example that of Élisée Reclus according to which humanity is nothing other than nature becoming aware of itself), but he is part of a tradition of philosophy of nature that he could read in Schelling, and especially in Hegel, even if precisely, the fact of reinscribing humanity in nature consists in taking the opposite of the Hegelian conception according to which the nature is nothing else than the idea become foreign to itself, and which introduces of this fact a radical discontinuity between the nature and the spirit. Bakuninian anarchism, not the least of its peculiarities, claims a cosmic dimension and a naturalistic anchorage that it does not share with any other political doctrine, and there is little doubt that it is this aspect that pushed Schmitt to give it such importance. Against the background of a materialist system of the world based on

the notion of solidarity, Bakunin could oppose the dogma of free will and emphasize that freedom could not be considered as an individual starting point, but always as a collective product. For Bakunin, nature itself leads to anarchy — which announces another formula of Reclus, according to which anarchy is the highest expression of order.

Satanism

Secondly, one finds in Bakunin's writings, following Proudhon, multiple praises of Satan, as a mythical representative of a principle that is opposed to the principle, both theological and political, of authority. Bakunin's praise of Satan goes far beyond the framework of anti-religious polemic. Thus, when he defends the Paris Commune against the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini, Bakunin identifies it with Satan, insofar as it is the exact negation of the Mazzinian God.[2] If Schmitt is justified in speaking about this strong intellectual principle, it is because the Satanic theme, in Bakunin, is only the tapered point of the two other themes that underlie it, on the one hand the link between theology and politics, on the other the question of the decision between two principles that it is impossible to mediate, which leads to a theory of conflict. On these last two points, we will see that it is possible to extend the reading outlined by Schmitt.

Bakunin's Satanism, if we want to call it that, is based on a radicalization of a theme exposed in Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, that of the anthropological roots of religion. From this work, Bakunin draws the proposition that the idea of God is a misanthropic idea that rests on "systematic contempt for humanity," and even for the entire natural world. This contempt is strictly proportional to the adoration of God, since God is enriched by the spoils of humanity. Therefore, to affirm the existence of God "is to proclaim the decay of the world and the permanent slavery of humanity.[3] Bakunin's philosophy is an anti-theologism and results in praise of Satan because it takes the opposite view of these assertions and proclaims that humanity can be the source of the true and the just, thus restoring to man and nature what they have been stripped of.

Sacrifice is for Bakunin the concrete outcome of this systematic contempt for humanity which constitutes the basis of all religion, and particularly of the Christian religion. By attacking the idea of God, Bakunin is interested in the culmination of the anthropomorphic inversion described by Feuerbach. As a struggle against the idea of God, anti-theologism consists in showing that divine justice is nothing but the negative of human justice, just as love of God means hatred of men and respect for heaven means contempt for the earth:

> *The action of religion does not consist only in this, that it takes from the earth the natural riches and powers and from man his faculties and virtues, as he discovers them in his historical development, in order to transform them in heaven into so many divine attributes or beings. In effecting this transformation, it radically changes the nature of these powers and qualities, it distorts and corrupts them, giving them a direction diametrically opposed to their primitive direction.*[4]

This is particularly the case with justice:

[2] M. Bakounine, Œuvres complètes, Paris, Champ libre, 1974–1982, vol. I, p. 45 et p. 254.

[3] M. Bakounine, Fragments sur la franc-maçonnerie, Fragment E, respectivement p. 2 et p. 6, dans Œuvres complètes, cédérom, Amsterdam, IISG, 2000.

[4] M. Bakounine, Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme, dans Œuvres, vol. I, Paris, Stock, 1980, p. 166–167.

> *Justice itself, this future mother of equality, once transported by religious fantasy to the heavenly regions and transformed into divine justice, immediately falls back to earth in the theological form of grace, and embracing always and everywhere the side of the strongest, sows among men only violence, privileges, monopolies, and all the monstrous inequalities consecrated by historical law.*[5]

The Bakuninian anti-theologism has thus political motivations. In the anthropomorphic projection described by Feuerbach, a process of authorization intervenes by which man renounces being the author of his acts, in order to be only the actor. This process of authorization allows certain men to consecrate their temporary domination by claiming to be authorized by God to govern their fellow men. One should therefore not misunderstand the moral side of Bakunin's anti-theologism: it is a question for him of taking the opposite view, not of all religious prescriptions, but of the principle on which they are founded, insofar as this principle consists in denying the capacity of humanity to be the author of its own progress. Of this principle, which dispossesses man of all capacity, God is the ideal incarnation, and this is why Bakunin considers that the very idea of human morality constitutes an absolute negation of the idea of God.

Bakunin can then echo, without quoting them, Proudhon's noisy formulas, the most famous of which is this one: "Man [...] is so constituted in his reason and in his conscience that, if he takes himself seriously, he is forced to renounce faith, to reject it as bad and harmful, and to declare that, for him, God is evil.[6] Man is endowed with a reason and a conscience. The first allows access to truth, the second access to justice. To take man seriously is to take seriously the idea that he is capable of reaching the true with the forces of his own reason and the just by the light of his conscience. This independence in the search for the true and the just being considered as the good God can thus be denounced as the evil. Bakunin does not claim otherwise when he underlines that all theology postulates the bad nature of man and the harmful character of his freedom.[7]

While inspired by Proudhon, the multiplication of the praises of Satan under the pen of Bakunin then takes on an original significance. One of the most cheerful drafts of The Knuto-German Empire and the Social Revolution praises in Satan "the emancipating genius of humanity", or "the only really sympathetic and intelligent figure in the Bible"[8] because he invited men to stand up and taste the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[9] The meaning of the fable is transparent: moral autonomy is forbidden to humanity, which will have to regulate its existence on the basis of divine prescriptions, transmitted by the priests, and the exclusion of Satan in the Bible must be interpreted as the fantastic expression of the reciprocal exclusion between God and freedom.

Around this last theme, Bakunin constructs a kind of moral proof of the non-existence of God by showing that the very requirement of the emancipation of humanity leads to the negation of

[5] Ibid., p. 167–168.

[6] P.-J. Proudhon, Jésus et les origines du christianisme, dans Écrits sur la religion, Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1959, p. 526.

[7] M. Bakounine, Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme, édition citée, p. 193 : pour la théologie, « la liberté humaine ne produit pas le bien, mais le mal, l'homme est mauvais de sa nature ».

[8] M. Bakounine, Œuvres complètes, vol. VIII, p. 473.

[9] Bakounine estime en outre que Satan s'est comporté « en révolutionnaire expérimenté », s'adressant à la femme pour conquérir le cœur de l'homme (ibid.).

the divinity. The formulation of this proof is particularly illuminating for the Schmittian reading of Bakunin:

> *Unless [...] we want the slavery and degradation of men [...], we cannot, we must not make the slightest concession either to the God of theology or to the God of metaphysics. For in this mystical alphabet, whoever begins by saying A must inevitably end by saying Z, and whoever wants to adore God must, without having any puerile illusions, bravely renounce his freedom and his humanity:*
> *If God is, man is a slave; yet man can, must be free, therefore God does not exist.*
> *I defy anyone to leave this circle; and now let us choose.*[10]

We will have to come back to this dramatic alternative, which Bakunin did not cease to renew from the middle of the 1860s, insofar as it seems to make it possible to prolong the Schmittian parallel between anarchism and counter-revolution. If one compares it to the preceding texts which already contain this formula,[11] the interest of the 1871 text that we have just read lies in its clearly more affirmed moral coloration. First of all, Bakunin focuses on the question of freedom, which implies that the question of access to truth is now inscribed in the more general question of emancipation. Secondly, the idea of God is contradicted not only by the possibility for humanity to emancipate itself, but also by emancipation as a requirement. For this reason, we are justified in speaking of a moral proof. To turn a Kantian formula on its head, we would say that the non-existence of God constitutes a postulate of practical reason: whoever claims to work for his own emancipation and that of humanity must be aware of the choice that is presented to him. Any true emancipation will consist in an active negation of the existence of God, insofar as the latter presents itself as the hypostasis and personification of the principle of authority. It is important to retain that independently of the arguments that the sciences of nature can provide him, atheism, for Bakunin, is a practical attitude which results from a choice. But this choice is itself inscribed in an alternative that strongly recalls those that Bakunin constructs on the political ground: the choice of atheism intersects with that of the revolution, hence Bakunin's paradoxical agreement with Mazzini when the latter spots in the Paris Commune and the International a satanic inspiration. The satanic theme thus suggests two directions: the recognition of the theological scheme of authority and the impossibility of mediating the two principles in struggle (authoritarian principle and libertarian principle), which leads to the necessity of their confrontation.

The Theological Scheme of Authority

With respect to the theological scheme of authority, Schmitt's statements in Political Theology must be read in conjunction with a passage from Federalism, Socialism and Anti-theologism, Bakunin's first attempt at a systematic presentation of his ideas in the winter of 1867–1868. In this text, Bakunin underlines that the State and theology have in common the postulation of the intrinsically evil nature of man. The roles are thus divided: theology explains why man is evil, the

[10] Ibid., p. 99.

[11] Voir les Fragments sur la franc-maçonnerie de l'été 1865 (Fragments A et E), où elle est dirigée contre les francs-maçons qui voudraient concilier l'existence de Dieu avec celle de la liberté humaine. Voir aussi Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme, p. 101, dont ces pages de L'Empire sont une reprise presque littérale.

State draws the practical consequences and oppresses by claiming to defend the citizens against each other. Hence Bakunin's conclusion:

> *Is it not a remarkable thing that this similarity between theology — this science of the Church, and politics — this theory of the State, that this meeting of two orders of thoughts and facts apparently so contrary, in the same conviction: that of the necessity of the immolation of human freedom to moralize men and to transform them, according to the one — into saints, according to the other — into virtuous citizens. — As for us, we do not marvel at this in any way, because we are convinced [...] that politics and theology are two sisters coming from the same origin and pursuing the same goal under different names; and that every State is an earthly church, as every church [...] is nothing but a heavenly State.*[12]

This statement verifies Schmitt's analysis of the fundamental anthropological position which would be that not so much of anarchism (the postulate of good nature) as of counter-revolution. What does Bakunin tell us in this extract? That politics, doctrine of legitimization of the State, and theology share the postulate of the bad human nature, of the inaptitude of humanity to reach by itself morality and progress, and consequently of the necessity of religious and political authorities that come to educate, moralize, and force humanity to progress. One would thus find under the pen of Bakunin an announcement of the analysis of the counter-revolution that Schmitt will produce about fifty years later.

This point calls for two remarks, however. The first concerns this anthropological axiom that Schmitt thinks he can find in Bakunin. Indeed, Bakunin does not exactly formulate things in terms of good and bad nature: there is not on the one hand the reaction, which affirms that man is bad and must constantly be corrected and kept on a leash in order not to sin, and on the other hand the revolution, which affirms that all evil comes from the State and the Church. For Bakunin, who is less a moralist than a philosopher of history or an evolutionist, the question is posed in terms of capacities: is humanity capable of reaching by itself (meaning by this, without any recourse to transcendence, whether it be the theological one of a God or the political one of the State) a development of its capacities, an increase in its power to act, which designates the only true good? The problem is thus not so much for Bakunin to know if man is good or bad, but if man is capable of educating himself. This point will be important when we question the Bakuninian status of politics.

The second remark concerns the notion of political theology. For Schmitt, in the work that bears this title, there would be no political theology among the anarchists, and the latter term would only serve as anathema to discredit the enemy. Recent commentators on Schmitt have had the merit of looking for what he could be referring to, and they generally refer to Bakunin's text directed against Mazzini's Political Theology. That this expression has a polemical, and undoubtedly even insulting, turn in Bakunin's mind is hardly in doubt.[13] On the other hand, it is not clear why the polemical use of a notion would exclude its theoretical use. But the theological-political scheme plays a decisive role in Bakunin, since it designates the principle that is the exact opposite

[12] M. Bakounine, Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme, p. 194 (Bakounine souligne).

[13] Voir sur ce point J.-C. Monod, La querelle de la sécularisation. De Hegel à Blumenberg, Paris, Vrin, 2002. L'auteur mentionne (p. 195) La théologie politique de Mazzini, mais à la suite de Schmitt, il estime que l'idée de théologie politique n'a chez Bakounine qu'une valeur polémique.

of the one on which the Russian revolutionary intends to found his philosophy of emancipation and his political practice. In Bakunin, the process that gives birth to the instituted authorities and consecrates them is from part to part a religious process: there is a real theological scheme of authority.

The Relationship to Conflictuality

It is on this basis that we meet the Bakuninian conception of conflictuality. The theorists of the counter-revolution are not the only ones to insist on the question of the decision, on the necessity to decide between two fundamental options. For Bakunin too, the choice is between absolute power and anarchy. In the texts that seek to link the religious question to politics, Bakunin enjoins his readers, as we have seen, to decide between two fundamental options, one that defends the existence of God and leads to the necessity of the enslavement of humanity, the other that denies the existence of God and leads to the necessity of its emancipation. For Bakunin, there is no tenable intermediate solution. The parallel drawn by Schmitt in the first Political Theology between anarchism and counter-revolution can again be extended, especially since the refusal to mediate the extremes and the affirmation of the necessity of their confrontation constitute two constant traits of the way in which Bakunin relates to political relations.

The text that argues this position in the most developed way is also the one that inaugurates Bakunin's political career — at the same time that it closes his philosophical period. It is the 1842 article "The Reaction in Germany", which is part of the internal debates of the Hegelian left.[14] In this article, Bakunin attacks that part of the Reaction that pretends to reconcile the extremes and he shows, following the destiny of the category of opposition in Hegel's Logic, that all opposition, insofar as it is opposition of the positive and the negative, must necessarily lead to a contradiction, which itself will have no other outcome than the mutual ruin of the two contradictory terms, the negative absorbing the positive and transforming itself in its turn into a new positivity, richer in determinations. It is not so much a question of Bakunin refusing any mediation between the opposites as of underlining that there is only mediation possible in the struggle: to conciliation, which consists of bringing in an authority transcending the opposition in order to preserve it in the state, to prevent its development and thus to allow the maintenance of the status quo, Bakunin opposes this true mediation, immanent to the opposition, which constitutes the struggle between the opposites — in short, the revolutionary struggle. And as with Cortés, the attacks are concentrated against the party of the middle ground: the fanatical reactionaries deserve respect, because they stick to the purity of their principle.

Although it was formulated several decades before its author expressly claimed to be anarchist, this conception of the ways in which the emancipation of humanity is possible will have extensions, not only in Bakunin, but in all anarchist thought, which Schmitt was undoubtedly aware of. Thus, the notion of direct action, as it was elaborated at the end of the 19th century, designates an action carried out directly by those concerned, independently of any state mediation (for example, an expropriating general strike, carried out by those concerned and which consists in directly setting up another mode of production, is a direct action; an assassination which claims to challenge the state power in order to prepare its conquest is not a direct action). The Bakuninian conception of conflictuality, insofar as it refuses any mediation understood as

[14] Voir ma traduction de ce texte dans J.-C. Angaut, Bakounine jeune hégélien. La philosophie et son dehors, Lyon, ENS Éditions, 2007.

conciliation, imposes from then on that one is interested in the status of politics in Bakunin, a status which is the fundamental problematic of the passages that Schmitt dedicates to him.

The Status of Politics: Bakunin as Enemy

Bakunin, Theorist of the Immediate Use of Violence?

Parliamentarism and Democracy, in its chapter 5, places Bakunin's anarchism among the "irrational theories of the immediate use of violence", alongside Sorel's revolutionary syndicalism. For Schmitt, any theory of the direct use of violence rests on a philosophy of irrationality, on "a theory of immediate concrete life"[15]: in this passage, it is the revolutionary syndicalism theorized by Sorel that is targeted, which is why this "theory of immediate concrete life" is brought closer to Bergson's philosophy, but Schmitt's remarks on this subject only prolong those contained in Political Theology concerning Bakunin's naturalism. The question of the status of politics in Schmit's reading of Bakunin can be approached from this question of the immediate use of violence. The immediate use of violence means above all two things: that political practice is conceived essentially in its negative dimension, or that there is only a negative revolutionary politics; that the destructive action, which constitutes the negative or political part of revolutionary action, does not resort to any mediation to be exercised, and in particular not to the mediation of the state.

Some remarks on the way Bakunin poses the question of revolutionary violence in his anarchist programs are necessary here. For Bakunin, it is true that revolution is a violent event and that the liquidation of the established order cannot be achieved peacefully. But it is still necessary to agree on the nature of this violence. Indeed, even in the texts that he did not intend to publish (for example in his secret society programs), Bakunin explicitly proscribed the use of violence against people, which he considered as something counter-revolutionary when it was consciously planned. That violence against people is exercised on the occasion of revolutionary events, especially against those who embody the order that is about to be overthrown, is something inevitable (the violence of the revolutionary fact has something irreducible), but the task of revolutionaries is precisely to contain this violence in order to turn it into violence against institutions. It is an almost constant affirmation in Bakunin that a true revolution is primarily directed against the order of things rather than against the order of people. For example, it is very important that a peasant revolt be accompanied by the burning of property titles, rather than the lynching of large landowners. In this respect, and in this respect only, it is possible to see in Bakunin a theorist of the immediate use of violence — even if this contradicts an imagery that retains of anarchism only the political use of the bomb and the revolver.

We can then return to the passage of Parliamentarism and Democracy that contains the most striking formula about Bakunin. This text takes up anew the symmetry, already advanced by Political Theology the year before, between Cortés, who makes of the anarchist a satanic figure, and Proudhon, who sees in the Catholic a great fanatical inquisitor, and considers that we have here the two true enemies and that all the rest is only half measures. But three years later, in a note added to the second edition of this text, Schmitt specifies that this opposition only applies

[15] C. Schmitt, Parlementarisme et démocratie, trad. J.-L. Schlegel, Paris, Seuil, 1988, p. 83.

"within the framework of Western cultural traditions. […] It is only with the Russians, especially with Bakunin, that the actual enemy of all the received ideas of European culture appears.[16]

Bakunin's Antipolitics

Why does Bakunin constitute for Schmitt the figure par excellence of the enemy — a formula that is not insignificant for a theory where the discrimination of friend and enemy becomes the distinctive criterion of the political, making the political an autonomous field among all human activities? This can be understood from the Bakuninian status of the political and from passages in the two Political Theologies (that of 1922 and that of 1969). For Schmitt, there is undeniably a superiority of the counter-revolutionary position over the anarchist position. Not only is Schmitt politically closer to Catholic reaction than to the violently atheistic Bakuninian anarchism, but he also considers the theories of counter-revolution to be politically stronger, more coherent, more consistent, both theoretically and practically, than their anarchist opponent.

On the occasion of the Franco-German war of 1870–1871, Bakunin sketches a politics against politics which consists in the immediate action (i.e. not mediated by the State) of the people, action which coincides according to him with the social revolution. The philosophical and political stake of the texts that surround Bakunin's commitment on the occasion of this conflict is at the time to think of a national defense that does without the regular forces of the State, which is why Bakunin, at the time of the Franco-German war of 1870, pronounces himself in favor of the war of partisans. This option does not escape Schmitt who briefly evokes the figure of Bakunin in his Theory of the partisan: because he refuses the mediation of the State, Bakunin perceived the importance of the figure of the partisan, as a modern fighter.

The union that takes shape in the texts of 1870 between social revolution and national regeneration is only possible because Bakunin believes that patriotism is not limited to the cult of the state organization but thinks that the nation, rid of the state structure, remains a natural and historical fact. In the Letter to a Frenchman, he affirms thus: "Apart from the artificial organization of the state, there is in a nation only the people; therefore France can only be saved by the immediate, non-political action of the people."[17] The problem is then that the population, "returned to possession of itself," in the words of the red poster posted in Lyon on the eve of the attempted insurrection of September 1870, takes in hand its own defense as a nation.

This use of the concept of politics is not a hapax in the texts written by Bakunin at this time. In the last part of the Letter to a Frenchman, devoted to the "consequences of a Prussian triumph over socialism," Bakunin suggests that "economic emancipation" must bring with it "the political emancipation of the proletariat, or rather its emancipation from politics.[18] Even more explicitly, the manuscript that Bakunin wrote in Marseille after the failure of the Lyon insurrection considers that the social revolution and the political revolution are inseparable, but that the latter must be radically reinterpreted:

> *The political revolution, contemporary and really inseparable from the social revolution, of which it will be, so to speak, the expression or negative manifestation, will no longer be a transformation, but a grandiose liquidation of the State, and the radical abolition*

[16] Ibid., note p. 87.
[17] M. Bakounine, Œuvres complètes, vol. VII, p. 20 (Bakounine souligne).
[18] Ibid., p. 97 (Bakounine souligne).

of all those political and legal institutions, whose object is the enslavement of popular labor to the exploitation of the privileged classes.[19]

The political revolution thus corresponds to the negative part of the social revolution, insofar as the latter means emancipation from all official authority and must eventually allow the extinction of all forms of domination. Revolutionary politics can only be a negative politics, an anti-political politics. Bakunin thus enters this category of theorists for whom "the qualifier of politics" can be "assimilated [...] to that of the state, or at least put in relation to the state", according to the expression used by Schmitt in The Concept of Politics.[20]

Insofar as Bakunin seems here, for once, to insist on the precision of the terms, the following propositions can be taken as operative: politics is assimilable to the state; politics is an activity that relates to the state; officially or positively, it is the use of the state to guarantee the privileges of a minority at the expense of the majority; negatively, or in a revolutionary sense, it signifies the destruction of the state.[21]

It is therefore easier to understand the attack on anarchism that Schmitt's first Political Theology contains:

> *Any claim to a decision is necessarily bad for the anarchist, because the right is self-evident if one does not disturb the immanence of life with such claims. Naturally, this radical antithesis obliges him to decide decisively against the decision. [...] For the greatest anarchist of the 19th century, Bakunin, we arrive at the strange paradox that he had to become theoretically the theologian of the anti-theological and, in practice, the dictator of an anti-dictatorship.* (p. 74–75)

Once again, one can only underline the relevance of these analyses, which echo three characteristics of Bakuninian anarchism: first, the prevalence of the anti-theological theme, which I will not return to, but also Bakunin's attachment to the religious component of the revolution. For Bakunin, the revolution is religious in the sense that it supposes that those who set it in motion are penetrated by libertarian principles, in the same way that believers are impregnated by the belief in God. And third, this analysis points to the fundamental question of dictatorship — and this point is all the more striking because Schmitt, at the time he was writing this text, could not have had access to Bakunin's texts specifically devoted to this question.

The question of dictatorship constitutes indeed the theoretical and practical horizon of the relations between Bakunin and the young Serge Netchaïev. In the letter of rupture that he addressed to him in June 1870, and which became known only in the 1960s, Bakunin exposes to his young companion his own conception of dictatorship, which does not consist in opposing dictatorship and revolution, but rather in opposing occult dictatorship and official dictatorship. For Bakunin, secret societies are destined to exercise an occult dictatorship among revolutionaries, which can be represented in the following way: in an assembly, the members of the secret society can advance revolutionary ideas according to a concerted strategy (in this way, they dictate, but in an unofficial way, to this assembly its positions), without ever appearing to be an

[19] Ibid., p. 200.

[20] C. Schmitt, La notion de politique, trad. M.-L. Steinhauser, Paris, Flammarion, 1992, p. 58.

[21] Sur ce point comme sur tant d'autres, Bakounine doit être rapproché de Proudhon qui, dans ses Carnets de 1852, confiait : « Je fais de la politique pour la tuer et en finir avec la politique » (cité par P. Chanial, « Justice et contrat dans la république des associations de Proudhon », Corpus, n° 47, 2004, p. 113).

established dictatorship. It is clear that this role of the dictatorship runs the risk of contradicting Bakuninian anarchism and that it expresses at the same time the limit of the latter's belief in revolutionary spontaneity. The only guarantee that secret societies provide against their institutionalization is their program, which historical experience has accustomed us to consider insufficient. But Bakunin never gave up forming secret societies, even if they evolved over time. From the middle of the 1860s until his entry into the International in 1868, the secret societies clearly express Bakunin's skepticism towards the political capacities of the people, whether in their working class or peasant component: the revolutionary initiative rightfully belongs to the "little church of liberty" that constitutes the revolutionary minority of the privileged classes. This position, Bakunin corrects it as soon as he experiences, within the International, the capacities of self-organization of the working class, but this does not push him for all that to renounce to form secret societies, whose existence is justified according to him by the necessity to initiate a revolutionary movement, which engages, we will come back to it, the question of the decision, fundamental in the Bakuninian anarchism read by Schmitt.

In Schmitt's view, Bakunin thus appears as both the exemplary and limiting figure (exemplary because limiting) of anarchism, understood as a doctrine that proposes to violently end political domination. More widely, anarchism is considered to be part of those theories that intend to substitute to political domination the objectivity of economic necessity:

> *Nothing is more modern today than the struggle against politics. American financiers, industrial technicians, Marxist socialists and anarcho-syndicalist revolutionaries unite their forces with the slogan that the non-objective domination of politics over the objectivity of economic life must be eliminated.* (p. 73).

The bottom of the Schmittian proposal is thus the following: Bakuninian anarchism is this paradoxical political doctrine that wants to end politics politically, or more exactly, that, in order to end politics effectively, must itself become political.

This interpretation is presented in the introduction to the second Political Theology in 1969:

> *For atheists, anarchists, and positivist scientists, all political theology [...] has long been reduced to nothing from a scientific point of view. They use the term only for polemical purposes, as a ready-made formula or an insult, to express their total and categorical negation. But the pleasure of the negation is a creative pleasure; it is able to produce from a nothingness what is denied, and to bring it dialectically to the existence.* (p. 83).

The end of this statement is a disguised quotation of the conclusion of the 1842 article, "Reaction in Germany": the destruction of the old order was itself the bearer of a new historical positivity and "the passion for destruction is at the same time a creative passion."[22] Ironically, this statement was taken up by Schmitt to mean that the will to put an end to all political domination could only be effective if it was a criterion for discriminating between friend and foe, and thus the source of a new politicization.

We must now take note of the fact that Bakunin constitutes for Schmitt the figure of the enemy par excellence because he embodies such a will to finish with politics. Anarchism must then be analyzed as the extreme component of a historical tendency to depoliticization.

[22] M. Bakounine, « La Réaction en Allemagne », dans J.-C. Angaut, Bakounine jeune hégélien, p. 136.

Anarchism and Depoliticization

The status of politics is at the center of Schmitt's interest in anarchism. The references to the Russian revolutionary with which his work is strewn all tend to make him a kind of extreme figure of liberalism, understood as depoliticization of the world. Bakunin appears as the most representative theorist of anarchism as a struggle against politics. The identification by Schmitt of a naturalist core in Bakunin, which underlies his attack against politics, legitimizes according to him that one brings the Russian theoretician closer to liberalism, of which he constitutes in a way the extreme form. Anarchism and liberalism would indeed start from the same anthropological postulate, that of the natural goodness of man, to arrive at the radical negation of the State or to put it at the service of society.[23] But the interest of anarchism, for Schmitt, lies precisely in its extreme form, which makes it the ultimate truth of liberalism.

However, this "radical antithesis" that Schmitt believes to be present in anarchism should be questioned, since it is more a construction that stems from Schmitt's conception of politics. Indeed, an author like Bakunin does not so much reject the decision as its transcendent character, not dictatorship but its instituted character. On the contrary, Bakunin does not cease insisting on the necessity for the oppressed to take collective decisions, to reappropriate their destiny by fighting against any authority of decision which would be external to them. This is the subject of the fascinating texts that he dedicates to his experience as a militant of the International in Geneva. One can then make two criticisms of Bakunin: either reproach him for not going far enough in this direction, or exclude by principle the postulate on which his position rests, namely the capacity of the oppressed to self-organize (in short, deny the first recital of the statutes of the International, which affirms that the emancipation of the proletariat will be the work of the proletarians themselves). If one formulates the first criticism (the one that the anarchist tradition addressed in particular to Bakunin's secret societies), one rejects in a decided way, not the fact of the decision itself, but the separation of an instance of transcendent decision and its theological consecration, in which Bakunin is a thinker of political immanence. If Schmitt is always careful to distinguish the political from the state (without specifying, moreover, what a non-state policy would be), the contradiction that he believes to detect in Bakunin, and which is in fact only an apparent paradox, manifests the constant reaffirmation, in the German theorist, of an authoritarian conception of the decision which links it to the question of sovereignty and is similar to a petition of principle.

The limits of Schmittian argumentation on anarchism are due to its too great politicity, to the fact that it is based on a conception of politics as a simple discrimination of friend and enemy, which would found its autonomy. But it is precisely this autonomy of the political field that Bakunin rejects. Politics, when it is a revolutionary politics, an anti-political politics, has no meaning except as it relates to history. The "radical antithesis" that Schmitt identifies can only be achieved by detaching political activity, which is essentially negative in Bakunin's case, from its historical background. The political anthropology to which Schmitt refers the point of view of the anarchist theorist on the political is moreover quite reductive. Indeed, Bakunin never maintains that man would be naturally good. Bakunin's naturalist optimism concerns the evolution of humanity. Because humanity is by nature a species that evolves and progresses, one cannot be limited to an evaluation of the good or bad nature of the individuals that compose it. But political activity only has meaning in reference to a history that is supposed to represent the progressive

[23] C. Schmitt, La notion de politique, p. 103–104.

accomplishment of humanity, which is essentially a process of humanization of humanity. To give meaning to anarchist politics, it is thus necessary an analysis of the evolution of humanity and of the place that history holds in it.

Finally, the logic of inversion and symmetry used in Political Theology and Parliamentarianism and Democracy has its limits, which Schmitt deliberately ignores when he considers that the problem for Bakunin comes down to the merely psychological problem of the desire for domination, or that the theological doctrine of sin is the only evil. These simplifications indicate that the figure of Bakunin in Schmitt is above all a theoretical construction that can conveniently be contrasted with theories that make the discrimination of friend and enemy the distinctive criterion of politics.

Bakunin: A Schmittian Political Myth

To conclude, we must return to the status of Bakuninian anarchism in Schmitt's thought and to the assimilation of Bakunin to a kind of extreme figure of liberalism, which would ultimately lead to the reduction of social unity to a purely technical entity.

Bakunin's socialism cannot be restricted to a reorganization of society on strictly economic grounds, so that "there would be social unity […] only insofar as the tenants of the same building, the gas subscribers connected to the same factory, or the travelers on the same bus constitute a social unity,"[24] according to the formula used by Schmitt in The Concept of Politics. The role played by an instance such as the commune in Bakunin's programmatic writings[25] makes it possible to affirm the irreducibility of the social to the economic. It is the commune, a social entity before being political, which recognizes the status of associations to the production cooperatives, with the political rights which result from it. It is the commune which takes charge of the education of the individuals, thanks to the expenses released by the inheritance fund, and one finds in Bakunin's socialism a sketch of educational project which, while sticking to the level of principles, engages the understanding by the Russian theorist of the development of the individual and his conception of the relations between family and society. There is in Bakunin the recognition of a spontaneity of the social which manifests itself by the self-organization. From then on, the reduction of politics to the state does not mean absence of decision in the evolution of societies, but refusal of a separate authority which would aim only at its own conservation. A "good politics" that does not say its name is present in Bakunin, beyond the state, that of the self-organization of society.

Therefore, how can we evaluate the importance of Bakuninian anarchism in Schmitt's writings other than as a theoretical construction that allows us to target the enemy? A rarely emphasized Russophobic dimension overdetermines the choice of the Russian revolutionary as a figure of the radical enemy and is part of Schmitt's own political myths, where Russophobia frequently competes with anti-communism, to the point that it is sometimes difficult to know whether one is the basis of the other, or the reverse. Bakunin is interesting for Schmitt, because he is not only an anarchist, but also Russian. In this, he is supposed to be radically foreign to European culture, he is an Oriental, so his anarchism is supposed to be more authentic than Proudhon's, or even Marx's socialism, both of which are still too marked by bourgeois thought.

[24] Ibid., p. 100.

[25] Le plus développé est le Catéchisme révolutionnaire de 1866, paru dans les Œuvres complètes de Bakounine, édition citée.

One could finally say of the figure of Bakunin in Schmitt that it constitutes the incarnation of the impossible depoliticization of the human world. Thinking of the Nietzschean distinction between passive and active nihilism, one could see at work in Schmitt two figures of depoliticization: a passive depoliticization, of which liberalism would be the vector, and an active depoliticization, of which Bakuninian anarchism would provide the best illustration, insofar as it carries the project of ending all political domination. The question posed by the Schmittian reading of Bakunin is therefore that of a redefinition of the political, which allows us to think it beyond domination.

Jean-Christophe Angaut
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