

Pandemic, Authority and Freedom

Some contributors to Non Fides

March 30, 2020

“Freedom can only be the whole of freedom; a piece of freedom is not freedom.”

Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*

With the spread of the pandemic, the wing of death passes over each and every one of us, at the same time as we all find ourselves under a state management as authoritarian as it is disorderly. In the generalized alienation of everything on which we had until now the capacity, even if it were illusory, to decide what happens to ourselves (but is taking the metro to work really a decision we make ourselves?), these are now functions that appear to us as the obvious exercise of a fundamental individual freedom that find themselves prevented, controlled, criminalized (going out of the house, buying bread, going to see one's relatives, meeting, kissing, loving each other, etc) and the “barrier gestures” regulate even the daily and intimate behavior of the confined ones.

This common situation is dangerously redoubled for all those who are held in confinement, prisoners in jails or detention centres, homeless people parked in despicable conditions, patients in psychiatric hospitals and EPHADs (Residential Institutions for Dependent Elderly People), locked up by and with the authority of the State, at its total mercy, without visits, without outside eyes, but also those who find themselves confined in forms of daily authority of proximity, at the mercy of an abusive spouse or abusive parents who currently have no other outlet than the family unit.

It is not yet clear what will remain of this deadly period of “health emergency”, neither in terms of legislative provisions, nor in terms of social imaginations and behaviour.

Faced with this unprecedented situation, some people are already lost in inversions worthy of the worst post-situationism, the virus becoming our “saviour” for the clever kids from *Lundi Matin*, or “the defense of a sick body, the forced cessation of an overheated Earth, the antibody of a lost world” in an article entitled *Pandemonium* from the journal *Véloce*. These pseudo-nihilist and messianic assertions are pitiful, stuck in this world in the place where one can least think, reflect, act, struggle. If one spares oneself from pushing them to their consequently fascist conclusion (“*viva la muerte*”, “*me ne frego*”), they are only justified by a personal, bourgeois and childish need for reassurance which obviously prevents one from facing the situation, except to think that constituting “clusters of good life” is something other than an alternative which no longer even minimally opposes the demands of power, since it corresponds in all respect...In this

despicable Monologue of the Virus (which is reminiscent of the perhaps even more despicable *The Real War*), it is always this religious and para-fascist rhetoric of redemption, of good against evil that becomes the healthy against the sick, or the opposite, since one thinks oneself, in good Mandarin, safe from any possibility of contradiction.

If we leave these (non) anecdotal recesses of a para-physical metaphysics that reads Pascal backwards (and Heidegger upside down...), the first reflex is obviously to appeal to exercise these “freedoms” that seem to be slipping away day by day, to refuse the pressing constraints of the moment. Thus, we see, here and there, calls to picnic, to party, to brave the measures of confinement. Going out to get out and not for one of the reasons indicated on the boxes of the authorization form to print, tick and sign to certify one’s legitimate intentions in front of the cops, is already a bravado, and yes, we will have to fight toe to toe against these measures that seek to lock us up and control us in unheard of proportions.

However, friends and comrades, wouldn’t this unbearable situation be precisely the moment when we are at the foot of the wall, forced (if we want to face it at all), to reflect on “*the meaning we want to give to life and to our activities*” (see the text *Is There Life Before Death?*).

If the state (always democratic, it is worth remembering) becomes so authoritarian that it prevents us from jogging or putting what we want in our shopping baskets, is it really jogging and running that we have to do to oppose it? Is it really a question of “*having and keeping control of our lives*” understood as the fact that “*everyone has the choice to expose themselves or not, to take risks but above all to take care of themselves as they see fit*”?¹

Does our freedom lie in those little pieces of “*freedom of choice*” that are usually left to us and have now been taken away? is exercising one’s freedom really choosing “*freely*” to catch or spread the virus “*as one pleases*”, to cure oneself “*as one pleases*”? Isn’t it a profoundly liberal and obviously capricious dividualism to oppose the control and confinement measures now in force to one’s little “*freedom*” to do what one wants with their hair?

It could become interesting again today, for anyone interested in the anarchist project and its history, but also well beyond, to remember its historical individualist anarchist current, inspired in particular by the German philosopher Max Stirner, who gave freedom a definition quite different from its liberal and democratic meaning of today, cut to size in kit and form and conjugated to excess, sometimes even among anarchists: “*All you want is freedom. Why do you haggle for a little more or a little less freedom? Freedom can only be a whole freedom; a piece of freedom is not freedom. You doubt that total freedom, the freedom of all, is something to be acquired, you even consider it madness to desire it only? So stop chasing the ghost and turn your effort towards something better than the unattainable.*”²

Those who find themselves grappling with the worst realities of these measures show this forcefully: it is revolt, struggle and solidarity that are equal to this widespread authoritarian hold. Mutinies and revolts in prisons and detention centres, rent strikes, strikes by those who are forced to work and subjected to the spread of the virus, and here we will disseminate texts and proposals that go in this direction.

Freedom is much more than what the State can take away from us, give us, take away and give back to us again. Freedom is struggle and revolt.

¹ Excerpt from a text entitled *Against Generalized Confinement*, whose protest against police controls is, of course, justified.

² Max Stirner, *The Unique and It’s Property*, Part Two, I The Unique.

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