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Skepticism

Sophie Zaikowska

June 1912

Reading is a useful thing. But, above all, we must learn how to think for ourselves, observe, draw lessons from our own experience. We should only read as much as our brain can process. If not, we risk, always following someone else's thoughts, not to have any of our own ideas any more. Echoing words, but without meaning, coming from a well-known author, can sometimes blind us if we are not careful. In a word, let's be sceptical, even towards the authorised thinkers who discuss at length about scepticism.

I must say I have little taste for metaphysics. Does Truth exist? What is Truth? What is Absolute? I don't care! I happily leave the trouble to answer these questions to those who have more time on their hands than I do. But whether absolute truth exists or not, I know that, through experiment and patience, studious men, who more modestly worked on exact sciences, have found a few truths, which appear true, which can be sensed and help us make our lives easier. And that is enough for me. They observed, among other things, that a life form which becomes parasitical atrophies. This is why our famous authors, philosophers and propagandists, who live from their writings and leave the trouble to ensure their existence to manual labourers, sometimes ramble.

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Propagandists, who left the workshop, the office, or the building site, who no longer live a worker's life, do not realise fully workers' misery, the oppression which a proud being feels to be subjected every day to the gaze of a boss. Their revolt diminishes and patiently they wait for the faraway Revolution and the future Society.

Since they don't ground their arguments in real living conditions, philosophers, Metaphysicians have always been nefarious to the advancement of humankind. They obscured many brains, misled the judgement of many people – even people who were no fools – but who got entangled in the nets of their sentences. In philosophy, as in poetry: the least clear it sounds, the most beautiful it is, the more awesome it seems! A friend served me this blunder, which he deems an “admirable definition”: “a man of action is a brute who believes in the reality of things.” It is an extract from T. de Gaultier's book “The Universal Fiction”.

Everything is not fiction however. There are some things which are real in this world. The need for food, for love are not fictional, since the impossibility to satisfy them cause us great suffering and leads us to disease and to death. These needs could, should be fully satisfied, it is man's foolishness – a very real thing too, sadly enough! – which prevents this.

Doubt is necessary, it encourages critique. If men doubted more, they wouldn't be ready to follow the first magician they see. They would be more conscious, more themselves. Their thought would develop more clearly. Doubt does not necessarily makes people eunuchs. And the action that it provokes is better thought out, lasts longer than the action of enthusiasts.

The sworn sceptics who were the old nihilists were very positive people. Their demands could be summed up like this: as perfect egoists, they wished for conditions which allowed the integral development of the individual, physical and intellectual. Refined as they were, they also wanted intelligent partners.

Since every law, institution, or prejudice hinders the complete development of the individual, they critiqued everything they saw

around them; they understood that patching up was worthless, so they wished to destroy everything.

Their critiques caused actions of a great energy, which their sons, today's Russian revolutionaries, continue to this day.

Unfortunately, although just as energetic, the young ones follow a different way of thinking. They gave up egoism, a natural feeling, and they no longer fight for themselves, but for the people, for mankind, they have no more compass. And I am thinking of the small grey bird of one of Gorki's short stories, who sings that further away, beyond the swamps and forests, the sun shines, the air is pure, there is freedom. That is vague.

And everything is just as vague in Gorki's writings, very popular writer amongst revolutionaries. In vain can we try to find a precise theory or idea in all this. Is he a socialist? Is he an anarchist? What does he want really? Since if need be he would be content with a constitution.

We can see the old Kropotkin, in his book, "Fields, Factories, Workshops", wonder at the fact that in London you can find incredibly cheap violets and grapes in the middle of winter.

And this other anarchist, Bogroff, Stolypin's executioner, by period a snitch and a faithful comrade, because he has needs of luxury, gambling and women, why did he not think as an egoist, like the old Nihilists, about the development of his own individuality first of all?

The true successors, the real inheritors of the old Nihilists, are certainly the individualist anarchists, in theory as in methods of action.

Anarchist socialists, libertarians, have a tendency to group, to act as an organised mass. The larger the organisation, the less the individual feels accountable, less efforts they have to make. In order to achieve a set task, the preparation work is huge and risks of missing the goal which the initiators had set themselves, since, in order to have a lot of people, they call on many comrades who don't have exactly the same ideas, and for it to work, everyone

plays down their own. Under the pretence of calming down feuds, they end up avoiding any discussion of theory. They become like Gorki's little grey bird, with a lot of good will, a big heart, which they would tear from their chests, like Danko, so that the light of it would shine above people, lead them and inflame them. All of this, sadly, like in the resolution of the Gorki short story once again, is of little use, since the people still wander in the dark woods, in the swamps, where the air is unbreathable.

Individualists rely mainly on themselves. They reason their needs, avoid anything superfluous, which allows them to save money. Also when they wish to do something, they can. It is to individual effort, for example, that we owe Fraigneux's "l'Affranchi", Zisly's "La Vie Naturelle" and our free tribune.

And still, is there anyone more sceptical than the Reims comrade who launched the provincial and little-known "Vie Anarchiste"? Zisly and his half-dozen wildists would have waited long to publish their journal if they counted on an eighth of the "Temps Nouveaux Groups" created to support a newspaper the life of which is exhaling in a whimpering and ongoing agony. Fraigneux and his stencil does by himself the work of a hundred of the illuminated believers in the future society. There are many anarchists dispersed into groups, federations, and what newspapers do they have? What would they not have if they thought like Fraigneux that it is better to act now, to march with those who are marching, rather than stop and wait for the others?

The sceptic only believes in the reality which presents itself to them, which is manifest, evident, they are sceptic about what is not certain. They ignore the millions of individuals who have only ideas, those ones have no influence on them, they doubt of their reality, they don't see them as existing since they are only potential. But their scepticism stops when an idea is manifested by an action; only the positive convinces them, and the only way to kill scepticism is to act. Most individuals are ghosts of individuals, and the

sceptics observe this, often even when they are considering their own person.