

*Bulletin of the*  
BAKUNIN  
LIBRARY



Number 2



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# BAKUNIN LIBRARY



*Number 2*

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The Bakunin Library is a project to translate the major works of Bakunin into English. Print volumes will be released by Corvus Editions and PM Press. Updates and digital texts are available at:

**[bakuninlibrary.org](http://bakuninlibrary.org)**



## Library update: April 2016

[June *update*: See the posts on “Strategies of Interpretation” and “Strategies of Presentation” for some additional information on the edition.]

The hardest thing about assembling an *edition* like the Bakunin Library is knowing when you can safely stop planning and exploring, and finally settle down to the work itself. Ideally, it would have been wonderful to take ten years to work through everything and then prepare the reader as a summary volume. But it’s been necessary to be realistic about where the English-speaking community is with respect to Bakunin and about my most useful role as an editor of the edition.

We still have a lot to learn, and a bit to unlearn, about Bakunin. Under those circumstances, my greatest strengths are arguably not as an expert, either regarding Bakunin or the early anarchist period within which he worked, but as an advanced scout of sorts. I recognized that early on, while working hard to also patch up the gaps in my expertise, and I think the approach has served the project well. This blog was launched just about four years ago. By the end of October, 2012 I had settled on the project of “an anarcho-collectivist view of collectivist anarchism” and sketched out six essential volumes for the Library. Since then, the exact design and number of the volumes has fluctuated a bit, as I have delved deeper in Bakunin’s works and dealt with the messy logistics of actually organizing texts into volumes, but the project is still essentially an expansion of Guillaume’s edition. The number of volumes proposed has crept back up again to the ten I proposed in July, 2012, but very differently arranged, taking into account the helpful advice of some colleagues overseas. Here is the current, and probably final, rearrangement of the Bakunin Library:

1. *God and the State* (an expanded edition)
2. *A Partisan of Life: Selected Writings of Mikhail Bakunin* (featuring key texts and significant variants of familiar material)
3. 1864-66: “Principles and Organization of the International Revolutionary Society” (the “Revolutionary Catechism,” etc), together with the “Fragments concerning Freemasonry” (which anticipates many of the concerns of “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism”) and perhaps also an earlier “catechism.”
4. 1867-68: “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,” together with Bakunin’s speeches from the League of Peace and Liberty, correspondence, etc.

5. 1868-69: A volume documenting the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy
6. 1868-72: A volume specifically dedicated to Bakunin's involvement in the International prior to the complete break with Marx
7. 1870-71: The "Letter to a Frenchman," "The Political Situation in France," and correspondence relating to the Paris Commune and the Franco-Prussian War
8. 1870-71: *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*, with the "Writing against Marx," etc.
9. 1871-72: *The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International*, including the unpublished second part
10. 1873-75: A volume dealing with the anti-authoritarian international, the Jura Federation and Bakunin's final writings

This is essentially the plan I announced last July, with the major difference that I have decided that James Guillaume's *The International: Documents and Recollections* cannot practically be part of the project. The *Collectivism Reader* is progressing nicely and I am leaving open the option of translating some other works by Guillaume, Schwitzguébel, etc., but I decided that a serious edition of Guillaume's documentary history would demand more scholarly care and attention than I can guarantee it with the resources available.

I currently expect to spread the production of the Library over the next ten years and to proceed *roughly* in chronological order. Several volumes are already partially prepared. Some, like *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*, are larger and more demanding in scholarly terms. It would be nice to time the Paris Commune volume with the upcoming anniversary. And chronological order is a little jumbled in the middle volumes anyway, so expect a bit of jumping around, but also expect that the constant criterion will be making sure that each volume is really finished before we bring it to press.

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I'm currently putting the finishing touches on the manuscript for the expanded edition of *God and the State*. I wanted a chance to celebrate the best of the previous translations and clear up some "old business," before kicking the Bakunin Library in earnest, so I've gathered the most useful bits I could find on the genesis and initial reception of the text. The contents will include:

- Introduction to the Expanded Edition—Shawn P. Wilbur
- Introductory Remark—Max Nettlau
- Preface—Carlo Cafiero and Elisée Reclus



- *God and the State* (Revised translation, 1910)—Mikhail Bakunin (Benjamin R. Tucker, et al, translators)
- Extracts from unpublished manuscripts—Bakunin (Nettlau, translator)
- Appendix to the Commonweal edition—Nettlau
- Biographical accounts—Nettlau and Tucker
- Bakunin in “Liberty” and “Truth”—Tucker and Marie Le Compte
- Note on the Bakunin Library—Wilbur

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Things may remain a bit quiet on the translations front for the next few months, as the *Reader* comes together, but I expect I’ll start posting some bits from *Knouto-Germanic Empire* soon, along with more of the “Fragments concerning Freemasonry.”

# Strategies of Interpretation

## I.

### Engaging with the Texts.

Don't let anyone tell you that organizing a multi-volume *edition* is easy. It's not. And organizing an *anarchist edition*, for an anarchist audience and taking into account even some basic anarchist theory, is much more complicated. I thought I understood all that pretty well when I took on the Bakunin Library project, but there's nothing like living through the inevitable trial and error to remind you of the difference between theoretical and practical understanding. In general, I'm of a mind to follow Proudhon's lead with regard to mistakes and "measure my valor by the number of my contusions," but you only get to do that if, after you pick yourself up and dust yourself off, you at least make an effort not to stumble in the same way twice. So, in the wake of a couple of missed deadlines and in anticipation of the next set of hurdles, I'm going to take the time now to sketch out some basic principles of strategy for the Bakunin Library—and I'm going to try to make these interventions general enough that they can serve as principles for thinking about *anarchist editions* more generally.

My sense is that any consistent edition has to be based on at least two sorts of coherent strategy: a *strategy of interpretation* and a *strategy of presentation*. It is necessary, first, to have a general sense of the collected works as a whole, even if, as in the case of Bakunin's works, that whole is a bit fragmentary or incomplete. And then it is necessary to have a clear sense of the purpose or purposes the edition is to serve, so that all of its elements can be carefully constructed with that purpose or purposes in the mind. I want to tackle the *strategy of interpretation* here and then address *strategies of presentation* in later posts.

When I talk about *strategies* of interpretation, I'm not talking about interpreting specific texts. In some ways, that is a matter of what I'm calling *presentation*. Instead, I'm talking about the groundwork that has to be established before the work of interpretation can really proceed. So it's important to understand that we're specifically talking about strategies for the *edition*, which are necessarily going to arise out of a lot of preliminary strategizing, reading, interpreting, revision of strategy, etc. There is, finally, a point at which all of that comparatively fluid, exploratory work has to yield something more stable, concrete and shareable, if the edition is going to be useful to its readers. When it is a question of a decade-long project, like the publishing phase of the Bakunin Library, it's important to make good, clear decisions at this stage.

So let's try to establish a solid foundation and ask really basic questions. Why, to start, would we bother to produce a multi-volume edition of works by someone dead for 140 years now? What is the use of a Bakunin (or a Proudhon, or any of the major "classical" figures of the tradition) in our present context? It's a question that most of us can't answer very specifically, since we've done without most of the works that might make up our edition for at least as long as people have been using the word "anarchism." We start with not much more than an awareness that there are gaps in our history and some curiosity about what they may contain. But let's try to answer the question more generally:

What kinds of uses might the works behind these famous names serve now? In what ways might we relate to these pioneering figures?

Are we, for example, treating a body of work as a source of isolated quotations that might confirm our own positions or are we really treating it as a body of work, from a thinker with at least some claim to special knowledge or expertise? There's not a lot of middle ground, as I think we can see if we look at a specific example.

Let's say that we want to address the thorny question of "the authority of the bootmaker." If we want to cite Bakunin, we have to concern ourselves with at least three elements in "God and the State." First, there are the resounding critiques of authority, including statements limiting legitimate authority specifically to the care and education of the youngest children, who have not yet, in the terms of Bakunin's discussion, fully moved from the animal to the human realm. Then there are the statements about those kinds of authority that Bakunin does not reject (or perhaps *spurn*, depending on how we approach the translation of *repousser*.) Finally, there is the discussion of the essential elements of human nature and development, which is specifically invoked in the discussion of education and probably provides the best means of reconciling the apparent contradictions in the first two elements. When we check the original text, it is clear that the terms remains consistent, so we really do have to account for the fact that Bakunin says that he both *does* and *does not* reject, or *spurn*, authority.

The interpretive choices are fairly simple:

We might decide that Bakunin was at least partially *incoherent*, at which point we could presumably pick some bits we like, but it isn't clear why we would bother citing Bakunin. Anarchists have arguably adopted this approach fairly often.

We might decide that he was *inconsistent*, and perhaps choose to believe that either *autorité* or *repousser* should be translated differently in different instances, distinguishing between *political authority* and *expertise* or between different forms of rejection. In this case, we might find other elements in the text, or perhaps in other

texts, that bolster our interpretation. Certainly, some degree of interpretation of this sort is difficult to avoid, particularly with translated works. But I think we are safe in saying that this sort of interpretation fairly quickly moves from the realm of translation or interpretation to that of collaboration. There is a point at which we begin to simply attempt to salvage texts for our own purposes. Existing English translations of Bakunin's works sometimes exhibit a desire to make the translations "more clear" than the origins, without the editorial collaborations necessarily being well-marked. In a few cases, the attempts to clarify make it almost impossible to tell which of Bakunin's texts was the original source of the material.

We can, however, delay that moment when we abandon the ideal of translation or interpretation, at least until we feel we have really exhausted the content of the original texts. So, for example, any attempt to make sense of "God and the State" that does not at least attempt to incorporate the material on how *animality*, *reason* and *revolt* drive human development has probably failed in some fairly basic sense. And if we want to lay claim to the conclusions of the work, or at least choose among the possibilities, but reject or ignore the underlying argument about nature and its laws, we are back in a place where it is unclear why citing Bakunin is appropriate. This sort of analysis and interpretation is more difficult, of course, and English readers seldom have the luxury of working with even whole fragments, let alone all the additional information available from the manuscripts of the French-language Collected Works.

This third strategy involves treating Bakunin as if he was, to use language familiar from "God and the State," a kind of *savant*. That leaves us to navigate our way through the difficulties of assessing the authority of an illustrious anti-authoritarian, but this is a case where perhaps taking the work seriously helps us to negotiate the difficulties. After all, what Bakunin says about the authority of the *savant* in "God and the State" is really applicable to virtually every instance where we attempt to take one another seriously. There is always a gap between the knowledge, experience and expertise of different individuals, and every instance involving the exchange of knowledge or the application of influence requires us to verify what we can and then opt to "bow" or not, as Bakunin put it, to the rest. From the point of view of principles, there is no threshold below which authority becomes legitimate. We can only try to balance the real gains that arise from our diversity against the real dangers of authority.

There are, of course, interpretive strategies that might grant even greater authority to the work in question, but even if our ideological interests would allow them in this case, the state of the manuscripts

probably doesn't. The range of strategies appropriate to our edition seems fairly limited.

A project like the Bakunin Library naturally starts with the exploration of at least the possibility that much of what Bakunin left us contained useful insights not yet fully exhausted by the traditions that have claimed descent or drawn inspiration from his thought. And it only continues if that working hypothesis turns out to be valid. The fact that even very familiar fragments like "God and the State" seem to have depths unplumbed by much of the popular commentary on them is one good early indication that further assuming *incoherence* is not an adequate strategy and assuming *inconsistency* still threatens to lead us astray. That seems to leave us the *strategy* of approaching the works as coherent and consistent, *not because they will be so in each case, but because we don't know how to rule out the possibility.*

To clarify a bit, I want borrow a notion from my analysis of Proudhon, whose work I have described as "more consistent than complete," meaning that where it lacks clarity, the problem is as often as not that complex relationships between concepts and partial analyses have not been spelled out. With Bakunin, who drew inspiration from both Marx and Proudhon, as well as directly from the philosophy he studied in his youth, the likelihood of apparent logical contradictions actually being unmarked dialectical or antinomic tensions is quite high. If we acknowledge that he was a thinker of large, complex thoughts and a writer who enjoyed very few of the conditions conducive to composing extended theoretical works, we have probably identified the most important dynamic in the works we have inherited. Starting from that set of insights, we are inclined to treat the "incompleteness" of Bakunin's works not in terms of any lack of ideas, but in terms of an imbalance between the driving desire to express big, important thoughts and the time and space free to do so. What is likely is that Bakunin's ideas seldom had the proper conditions to fully flower, so if we are to really understand where he might have been headed intellectually, we are often forced to take our cues from half-opened buds.

If that is our approach, then each unfinished text or fugitive fragment is, at least potentially, a glimpse at the portions of Bakunin's project we cannot observe in the major works. Variants gain new importance and we are forced to acknowledge that many of Bakunin's works are really variants of one another, to at least some degree. The rather *bakuninian* upside to all of this is that the very nature of the work Bakunin left forces us to abandon any notion of him as an infallible *savant* or writer of political scripture. Much of the work of comparing opinions and exploring alternatives, which Bakunin recommended in "God in the State," is actually incorporated as part of the work itself in his writings.

It has taken about four years to come to terms with Bakunin's work in a way that seemed adequate to the purposes we had proposed. And if you have asked me in early May how I felt about the progress, I would have said I felt really confident that not only were we ready to move forward steadily, but that we were ready to do so with a surer, more interesting strategy than I had really dared hope for. The kinds of clarification that have become possible as the content of Bakunin's work began to provide inspiration for its presentation have not just been a pleasant surprise, but have also forced a sort of quantum leap in the potential utility of the edition. At no time since then have I really changed my opinion about any of that, but that didn't mean that the new "God and the State" came together on the anticipated timeline.

There was still a bit of work to be done.

## II.

### Engaging with the Contexts.

I thought that I was pretty well prepared when I sat down to put together the expanded, critical edition of "God and the State." After all, it was initially just a sort of retrospective collection and a teaser for the eventual publication of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*, of which it is a part. I suppose I envisioned it as a chance to wrap up some old business, before moving on to new things.

I have a lot of admiration for the quality of the translations from *Liberty* and am fascinated by the range of anarchist tendencies that ultimately contributed to the publication and translation of "God and the State." And I have long wanted to gather up all the pieces for a really complete edition, if only because it would be nice to have one source for understanding all the various twists and turns of that story. It's hard to foresee any future in which "God and the State" does not remain a key anarchist text.

At the same time, I've always found the text a bit frustrating and the uses to which it is often put within the anarchist movement even more so. So the possibility of at least providing a more complete alternative has been very attractive to me. If there is no question of supplanting "God and the State," at least its notorious incompleteness could be better contextualized, both with the forthcoming translation of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire* and with the expanded edition of the text itself.

In preparation for the new edition of "God and the State," I did my own check of the translation, purchased the microfilm containing the other early English translation, which ran in *Truth*, made myself at least generally familiar with all the pieces of *The Knouto-Germanic*

*Empire*, tracked down and translated correspondence related to the publication process, and then finally sat down to do a close reading of the text itself—something I had not done in quite a few years. The background research made it clear that what I had thought of as a sort of loose collaboration across tendencies was probably at least as well understood as a series of struggles over Bakunin’s legacy, with some of the conflicts being very serious. And then when I started to work through the text, line by line, I was very pleasantly surprised at how much better it all seemed than I remembered it. Obviously, there are difficulties with the text, not least the apparent contradictions, but most of them were fairly easy to address.

I very quickly got a lot more enthusiastic about the new edition, but, at the same time, I was puzzled why I had been left so unimpressed by past readings. Ultimately, I was surprised to find that much of the commentary, and even some of the introduction to the original edition, was fairly well designed to lower readers’ expectations. James Guillaume came to believe that the text should not be reprinted in separate form, calling it a “mutilated and shaken-up fragment.” But he also believed that Reclus and Cafiero must have known where the fragment came from, so when we what might well have been recognized as a portion of Bakunin’s most extensive work presented as “really a fragment of a letter or report,” this “little literary artifice” (as Guillaume suggested it must be) seems remarkably dismissive.

The truth is that I really was pretty well prepared by the time these 11th-hour complications arose. The Reader was largely assembled and the rest of the volumes planned. I was able to bring a lot of the lessons of my work on Proudhon to bear, including a translation strategy. I was even beginning to articulate the complicated relationship between the existing translations, some of which had enjoyed “careers” stretching over a century, and the new translations. The draft introductions to the first two volumes both made use of a quote by Frank Mintz (“Every commentator on Bakunin makes a choice.”), which has been driving a lot of my thinking. But I was probably still thinking too simply about the choices available. And at some point that bit of Marx’s “18th Brumaire” came back to me:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

Maybe “nightmare” is a little strong for what tradition has done to Bakunin in the English-speaking world, where we have gone on as if we knew him, while perhaps even the fragments of work we possessed

were presented in ways that did not show them off in the best light. But it's a fair assessment of the days I spent staring at the manuscript of the new edition of "God and the State," trying to figure out what didn't yet look right to me.

In the end, what I needed to do was to abandon the notion that we could just simply present a new edition of Bakunin—essentially a *new Bakunin*—and imagine that the conversation could start there, or even continue in any very useful fashion. Some common ground was needed, even if it was contested ground like "God and the State." That realization led to some clarifications of the approach to the texts, particularly where the question of Bakunin-as-*savant* was concerned, and pretty quickly "God and the State" had moved from afterthought to centerpiece in the Bakunin Library—while my panic turned to satisfaction, despite some missed deadlines.

Without getting too deep into the details, what I realized was that, if the Bakunin Library was to be useful to more than just the sort of specialists and scholars accustomed to dealing with questions of interpretation, it was not going to be enough to try to meet Bakunin in his own works. It was going to be necessary to attempt to bring *that* Bakunin to an audience with existing investments the Bakunin represented by the existing translations.

To clarify what that involves, it will be necessary to turn to the question of *strategies of presentation*.



## Strategies of Presentation

Beneath all the (hopefully useful) chatter, the strategy of interpretation I'm pursuing has three main elements:

1. To treat the body of Bakunin's works as rich and relatively coherent, suffering much more from various kinds of incompleteness than from inconsistency;
2. To remind ourselves of the long periods during which we, particularly in the English-speaking world, have not always adhered to that kind of strategy; and
3. To look to Bakunin's own texts for inspiration when trying to solve the problems posed by their notoriously untidy state.
- 4.

So what are the consequences of those strategic commitments, when it comes to assembling the Bakunin Library?

### Selecting the Texts

By choosing to approach Bakunin's work not just as a mass of fragments and variants, but as a mass of fragment and variants which might all yield useful insight into Bakunin's overall project, we throw things wide open with regard to the texts we might include in the edition. That means that a lot of texts need to be considered, but it doesn't necessarily mean that a lot of texts need to be included. It has always been a part of the plan that this edition not be strictly a scholarly edition. And if it is to be useful to more than just experts, or would-be experts, some restraint is called for, in order to avoid drowning readers in the deep waters of a body of work that is, despite all its potential utility, more than a bit of a mess.

Because the goal is in some sense an *anarchist edition*, there has been no attempt to deal with the earliest works (although we haven't ruled out circling back to those at some later date.) But there is no real agreement about the date at which we might call Bakunin an anarchist, so the strategy has been to start early enough in the 1860s that at least some of the texts will appear as a contrast to the later texts, in periods where Bakunin had at least claimed to be an anarchist in some sense.

Because the work of translation is ultimately falling on a fairly small number of shoulders, it has also made sense not to retranslate works like the *Confession* or *Statism and Anarchy*, which exist in complete, relatively faithful translations.

There have been several plans for the volumes in the edition, organized chronologically or in relation to Bakunin's organizational affiliations. They have actually varied less than one might expect,

given the range of works to choose from. And this is in part because one of the obvious tasks that needed to be accomplished is the completion of a number of partial translation of key texts. That work alone dictated most of the volumes we have ultimately included in the plan for the edition, with the rest of the contents chosen from related texts, variants and correspondence, in order to complement those familiar, but not fully familiar, writings. Readers who come to the edition with a knowledge of the existing collections will have a familiar place to start and new readers will still cover the familiar ground, if in an enlarged context.

### Translating the Texts

Working with texts by Proudhon, Déjacque and others, I've developed a strategy for *exploratory* translation that I usually signal with the label "working translation." Early in my research on Proudhon, I recognized that there were clarifications in the translation that I was just not yet prepared to make, so the natural strategy was to leave some parts of the translations a bit literal, in the sense that I made some extra effort to preserve patterns of keyword usage. If, for example, it remained a bit of a mystery just what Proudhon was up to when he talked about "property" and "possession," it was easy enough to at least preserve the patterns. And if things became clearer later, then translations could be adjusted.

The potential complexity of the questions is demonstrated by a problem like the translation of *anarchie* in Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution*. In his translation, Robinson attempted to distinguish between what we might call technical and non-technical uses of the term, translating the terms as *anarchy* where it seemed to refer to Proudhon's preferred social arrangements and *disorder* or *chaos* where it refers to it did not. That might have been a laudable strategy at the time, were it not for the places where Proudhon himself referred to "anarchy in all of its senses," posing questions that the translation leaves us unable to address, since the various senses have been translated differently. But we can certainly think of examples where the clarity would call for an approach like Robinson's. It is simply a matter of being able to distinguish between instances where there might be some more-or-less technical sense of a term that should be maintained and those where there is nothing of the sort at stake. With large bodies of work, of course, it is necessary to make these calculations on a fairly large scale, so in the case of Proudhon it has been necessary to do a lot of reading and rereading in order to get a general sense of his habits of word-use. But there aren't many surprises of the sort we find in *The General Idea*.

Working with Bakunin's works is rather different than working with Proudhon's. There is, of course, the unpolished character of much of the work. There is also Bakunin's tendency, whether from inclination or the demands of writing in languages other than his native tongue, to express himself in fairly plain language. When we consider a case like the passage on "the authority of the bootmaker," the original French text is no clearer than any of the English translations. In one sentence Bakunin is saying "no authority" (*autorité*) and in the next he seems to have changed his mind. When we look for clarification about the "rejection" of authority, in both positive and negative cases, we find the same verb (*repousser*) consistently. It is tempting, when faced with this apparent contradiction, to try to fix it where it occurs, but there is nothing in the language that justifies any clarification in the translation itself. We can footnote the problem, pointing back to the other portions of the text that present possible tools for resolving it. But, in terms of translation, what is important is actually that the problem be clearly marked in the language itself.

The strategy of not just retaining, but even highlighting the problems in the text is simply another part of reducing the amount of work that readers have to do in order to come to terms with the material. One of the things that I want readers to understand when they engage with the Bakunin Library translations is that they are getting as close to the "whole fragment" as we could manage, so that those with the skills to consult the original, untranslated texts won't feel that they *have to* and those without can have some faith that the collaboration and interpretation has been kept to the absolute minimum. Again, a real translation cannot be clearer than the original. So, while attempting to avoid the clumsiness of literal translation and respecting the real wit and power of Bakunin's more finished prose, it will be necessary to use a version of the "working translations" strategy in the edition. And sometimes the amount of smoothing and clarification that is possible will be limited.

Fortunately, the relative simplicity of Bakunin's prose means that the instances where things have to be left really rough will be few.

### Framing and Interpretation

As the editor of the edition, and for reasons that should already be fairly clear, my interpretive ambitions are pretty modest. Each volume will require the establishment of specific contexts, including the development of Bakunin's ideas through the various volumes, and there will be a certain amount of annotation necessary to highlight potential problems in the texts. But I understand the Bakunin Library primarily as a means of producing new interpretations, rather than an

interpretive account on its own. There will be instances where we have inherited interpretations that probably need to be questioned, but in those cases I hope to address the difficulties by discussing issues of translation, editing choices in previous translations, etc.

Naturally, spending all the time required wrestling with Bakunin's ideas has inspired, and will undoubtedly continue to inspire, lot of thoughts regarding the interpretation of his works, not all of which will fit in a relatively neutral footnote or an aside in an introduction. I am considering the possibility of pursuing some of these ideas in a separate volume or volumes, perhaps with other scholars who have expressed an interest in contributing to the edition. But I am also planning to conclude each volume with some open-ended, exploratory remarks on the material. And the logistics of publishing *The Knouto-Germanic Empire* may commit us to two volumes, in which case it might make sense to include more interpretive material in what is all so certainly going to be the centerpiece of the edition.

This particular approach to the material will undoubtedly not satisfy everyone, but I don't think there is an approach that would be universally useful. What this set of strategies seems likely to guarantee is an edition that is broadly useful to anarchists and non-anarchists alike, regardless of their ideological or organizational commitments and interpretive presuppositions.

## READING “GOD AND THE STATE”

### The Three Lives of “God and the State”

I have been thinking about “God and the State” in terms of a choice between two texts: the fragment, “God and the State,” and the incomplete work from which it was drawn, “The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution.” This is the choice proposed by James Guillaume, when he suggested that the publication of the latter should be the occasion for no longer publishing in the former. But, if Guillaume’s suspicions were correct and Reclus and Cafiero knew what they were publishing, and engaged in a bit of “literary artifice” when they presented it as a fragment, what we have is the abandonment of the full text, which was being published piece by piece, for the decontextualized fragment.

I think there are good reasons to believe that Reclus was aware of the source of the fragment and that he made a choice roughly opposite to that of Guillaume. And that opposition is probably just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the complex history of conflicts among those who had a hand in presenting Bakunin’s work to future generations. But I also think that there is a third text that has to be considered: “God and the State” as presented by Max Nettlau, with its remarkable collection of introductions, afterwords, explanations and such.

It is that text that really interests me, particularly as the years have multiplied its far-flung appendices. There were undoubtedly reasons why Nettlau would not have been as explicit as Guillaume in emphasizing the conflicts, but they are probably not reasons that concern us much now. So it is possible, and almost certainly useful, to “complete” Nettlau’s work by gathering evidence of the conflicts and using that body of work as a starting place for the Bakunin Library.

This is perhaps a small insight, but I will admit that I feel more comfortable finding myself more completely in the camp of Nettlau, who was a fine theorist of *anarchy*, than in that of Guillaume, who considered the term “Proudhonian” and redolent of “rhetoric and bad taste.”

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### The “Authority” of the Bootmaker

I’ve remarked elsewhere on the curious phenomenon of self-proclaimed anarchists who are much more comfortable with the language of governmentalism and authority than they are with the concept of *anarchy*. It is curious, but it is far from inexplicable. After all, some of the most famous pioneers of anarchist thought muddled

those waters rather enthusiastically at times. Over the years, I have spent quite a bit of time working through Proudhon's complicated engagements with property, the State, anarchy and other terms. There are potentially cautionary tales there regarding just about any strategy we might take with these complex and contested terms.

I want to come back in a later post to some of the reasons that anarchist rhetoric has tended to be so convoluted, but we don't have to look much farther than the declaration that "property is theft," and its various aftermaths, to recognize that it has been so. And Proudhon certainly wasn't the only offender in this regard. When we look at Bakunin, we often find Proudhon's familiar provocations repeated in even more provocative, and sometimes baffling, forms. If we had to pick a phrase in Bakunin's work that was his "property is theft"—one that gets at important concerns, but perhaps not in the most immediately helpful manner—perhaps "the authority of the bootmaker" would be a good choice. Certainly, the work from which it comes, *God and the State*, is just full of rhetoric that seems designed to provoke and confuse.

There are, of course, other good reasons to try to understand exactly what is being said in the discussion of this "authority of the bootmaker," to which Bakunin admits he must "bow," with the most prominent of those being the idea that Bakunin is arguing for a variety of "legitimate authority," and doing so in a work where he defines his position as explicitly "anarchist," thus making at least Bakunin's "anarchism" (square-quoted, since the term itself is not Bakunin's) something other than anti-authoritarian.

Is that what Bakunin is arguing? Let's take a careful look at the relevant passages:

Perhaps, too, while speaking of *liberty* as something very respectable and very dear in their eyes, they give the term a meaning quite different from the conception entertained by us, materialists and Revolutionary Socialists. Indeed, they never speak of it without immediately adding another word, *authority* — a word and a thing which we detest with all our heart.

Perhaps Bakunin considers "a word and a thing which we detest with all our heart" to be legitimate, but, if so, we pretty obviously need an explanation. So let's back up to the beginning of the text—itsself just a section of Bakunin's great, unfinished work, *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*—and see who Bakunin is talking about.

Who is right, the idealists or the materialists? The question, once stated in this way, hesitation becomes impossible. Undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists right. Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history.

It is the idealists who can't talk about liberty without talking about authority.

And, Bakunin has already told us, the idealists are wrong.

Indeed, they are so wrong that Bakunin gets distracted by his anger at their wrongness and has to apologize for the distraction a few paragraphs into the fragment, before returning to his main argument about the fundamental elements of human being:

Three elements or, if you like, three fundamental principles constitute the essential conditions of all human development, collective or individual, in history:

1. *human animality;*
2. *thought; and*
3. *rebellion.*

To the first properly corresponds *social and private economy*; to the second, *science*; to the third, *liberty*.

This argument, Bakunin assures us, enrages the idealists as much as the idealists anger him. And he takes some time to assure the reader that his materialism is not some mechanical theory of what the idealists might call "vile matter." And it is in the course of his discussion of the debate concerning these three elements or conditions that he finally comes to address the question of authority.

What is authority? Is it the inevitable power of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds? Indeed, against these laws revolt is not only forbidden — it is even impossible. We may misunderstand them or not know them at all, but we cannot disobey them; because they constitute the basis and fundamental conditions of our existence; they envelop us, penetrate us, regulate all our movements, thoughts, and acts; even when we believe that we disobey them, we only show their omnipotence.

His approach, however, is a bit roundabout. Rather than talking about what the idealists consider to be authority, he asks a question, in which we see a possible materialist definition. But this is an authority that would presumably eliminate one of those “essential conditions of all human development, collective or individual,” since revolt against it is impossible. Instead of liberty, it seems to offer an inescapable slavery.

Yes, we are absolutely the slaves of these laws. But in such slavery there is no humiliation, or, rather, it is not slavery at all. For slavery supposes an external master, a legislator outside of him whom he commands, while these laws are not outside of us; they are inherent in us; they constitute our being, our whole being, physically — intellectually, and morally: we live, we breathe, we act, we think, we wish only through these laws. Without them we are nothing, *we are not*. Whence, then, could we derive the power and the wish to rebel against them?

Obviously, there are rhetorical maneuvers underway. The “slavery,” it turns out, “is not slavery at all.” The “laws” we cannot break are internal to us.

This actually puts us on familiar ground, provided we have paid some attention to Proudhon. The final section of *What is Property?* includes a description of “liberty, the third form of society,” and in that description we find that:

Liberty is anarchy, because it does not admit the government of the will, but only the authority of the law; that is, of necessity.

And we are reminded that, however much Proudhon agonized over the vocabulary he used to discuss forms of property, he often simply redefined the language of authority in ways that suited his anti-authoritarian project. Now, having recognized this connection between Bakunin’s thought and that of Proudhon, some of what follows will hold few surprises for those who have read the latter.

In his relation to natural laws but one liberty is possible to man — that of recognizing and applying them on an ever-extending scale in conformity with the object of collective and individual emancipation or humanization which he pursues. These laws, once recognized, exercise an authority which is never disputed by the mass of men. One must, for instance, be at bottom either a fool or a theologian or at least



a metaphysician, jurist, or bourgeois economist to rebel against the law by which twice two make four. One must have faith to imagine that fire will not burn nor water drown, except, indeed, recourse be had to some subterfuge founded in its turn on some other natural law. But these revolts, or, rather, these attempts at or foolish fancies of an impossible revolt, are decidedly, the exception; for, in general, it may be said that the mass of men, in their daily lives, acknowledge the government of common sense — that is, of the sum of the natural laws generally recognized — in an almost absolute fashion.

This “government of common sense” seems to parallel Proudhon’s thoughts (again, from *What is Property?*)

All questions of legislation and politics are matters of science, not of opinion. The legislative power belongs only to the reason, methodically recognized and demonstrated. To attribute to any power whatever the right of veto or of sanction, is the last degree of tyranny. Justice and legality are two things as independent of our approval as is mathematical truth. To compel, they need only to be known; to be known, they need only to be considered and studied. What, then, is the nation, if it is not the sovereign,—if it is not the source of the legislative power?

The nation is the guardian of the law—the nation is the EXECUTIVE POWER. Every citizen may assert: “This is true; that is just;” but his opinion controls no one but himself. That the truth which he proclaims may become a law, it must be recognized. Now, what is it to recognize a law? It is to verify a mathematical or a metaphysical calculation; it is to repeat an experiment, to observe a phenomenon, to establish a fact. Only the nation has the right to say, “Be it known and decreed.”

I confess that this is an overturning of received ideas, and that I seem to be attempting to revolutionize our political system; but I beg the reader to consider that, having begun with a paradox, I must, if I reason correctly, meet with paradoxes at every step, and must end with paradoxes. For the rest, I do not see how the liberty of citizens would be endangered by entrusting to their hands, instead of the pen of the legislator, the sword of the law. The executive power, belonging properly to the will, cannot be confided to too many proxies. That is the true sovereignty of the nation.

There are some interesting tensions here. Both Bakunin and Proudhon insist on a place for “law” in their understanding of liberty, but it isn’t clear that what we conventionally think of as “legal order” is included. Their conception of law is limited to that which we cannot rebel against. This would seem to clear the decks of all governmental, statute law. But that sweeping away is easier said than done. In practice, even obeying the law of necessity may not be as easy as it might seem. To know the law requires science, but science is a work-in-progress and it has adversaries in the advocates and beneficiaries of other sorts of law.

The great misfortune is that a large number of natural laws, already established as such by science, remain unknown to the masses, thanks to the watchfulness of these tutelary governments that exist, as we know, only for the good of the people. There is another difficulty — namely, that the major portion of the natural laws connected with the development of human society, which are quite as necessary, invariable, fatal, as the laws that govern the physical world, have not been duly established and recognized by science itself.

That concern with “tutelary government” (*gouvernement tutélaire*) is an extremely common one in the early anarchist literature. Tutelage is guardianship, a paternal power over a people presumably unable to govern or “realize” itself. And that presumption of “external realization” was the thing that Proudhon opposed quite consistently (except, alas, where actual paternity was involved.)

Once they shall have been recognized by science, and then from science, by means of an extensive system of popular education and instruction, shall have passed into the consciousness of all, the question of liberty will be entirely solved. The most stubborn authorities must admit that then there will be no need either of political organization or direction or legislation, three things which, whether they emanate from the will of the sovereign or from the vote of a parliament elected by universal suffrage, and even should they conform to the system of natural laws — which has never been the case and never will be the case — are always equally fatal and hostile to the liberty of the masses from the very fact that they impose upon them a system of external and therefore despotic laws.

This last bit is wonderfully strong stuff. Even if a governmental legal order was in conformity with the laws of nature, presumably imposing only what is imposed by necessity—what cannot ultimately not be imposed—it would be “fatal and hostile” to liberty. It seems that even the inevitable can’t be accepted second-hand. If there is really something to “the authority of the bootmaker,” this is obviously a hurdle it will have to get over.

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual.

We are now in pretty deep waters, with a rather peculiar set of observations about *authority*. It is *detestable*, we have been told, and perhaps it is, at the same time (and in its materialist form), *equal to necessity*. It is a “slavery” that “is not really slavery.” It is “despotic” if it does not come from within, but can’t be opposed in any event, since (in some sense) it does.

Let’s suppose that all of this is true, to some extent at least. Should we be surprised, or nod our heads sagely, as if this is exactly what we expected? Whatever our actual reaction, we probably have to circle back around (if we haven’t already) to Bakunin’s statements about human development and its conditions, and try to work out how this rather conflicted account of authority might fit in that development. Earlier in *God and the State*, he had said:

Yes, our first ancestors, our Adams and our Eves, were, if not gorillas, very near relatives of gorillas, omnivorous, intelligent and ferocious beasts, endowed in a higher degree than the animals of another species with two precious faculties — *the power to think* and *the desire to rebel*.

That’s our starting point, and we are currently somewhere down the long, possibly interminable road of human progress. We remain *animals*, but *human* animals and we set off down the road to ever-greater humanity by exercising some combination of *thought* and *rebellion*. Bakunin’s pleasure in the fact that the Biblical story of the Fall makes this argument for him is obvious, but, let’s face it, triadic conceptions of human nature with Biblical references were hardly new by the time he got around to presenting his version of things. There’s no need to dig too deep into the antecedents here, but there are certainly echoes of Pierre Leroux and Charles Fourier here—as there are so many other places in the early anarchist literature. What

probably is necessary is to emphasize the extent to which some kind of internal tension between the constituent elements of human nature is to be expected in 19th century socialist writing. “Universal antagonism” and “justice” (in the form of balance) were, for Proudhon, “the fundamental laws of the universe.” We’ve already seen some of the ways that, for Bakunin, *animality* could come into conflict with *reason* and *revolt*. When we pick up the argument again, and Bakunin explores the shortcomings of “the government of science,” we can pick up more of the dynamic between those three elements.

Suppose a learned academy, composed of the most illustrious representatives of science; suppose this academy charged with legislation for and the organization of society, and that, inspired only by the purest love of truth, it frames none but laws in absolute harmony with the latest discoveries of science. Well, I maintain, for my part, that such legislation and such organization would be a monstrosity, and that for two reasons: first, that human science is always and necessarily imperfect, and that, comparing what it has discovered with what remains to be discovered, we may say that it is still in its cradle. So that were we to try to force the practical life of men, collective as well as individual, into strict and exclusive conformity with the latest data of science, we should condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a bed of Procrustes, which would soon end by dislocating and stifling them, life ever remaining an infinitely greater thing than science.

The second reason is this: a society which should obey legislation emanating from a scientific academy, not because it understood itself the rational character of this legislation (in which case the existence of the academy would become useless), but because this legislation, emanating from the academy, was imposed in the name of a science which it venerated without comprehending — such a society would be a society, not of men, but of brutes. It would be a second edition of those missions in Paraguay which submitted so long to the government of the Jesuits. It would surely and rapidly descend to the lowest stage of idiocy.

But there is still a third reason which would render such a government impossible — namely that a scientific academy invested with a sovereignty, so to speak, absolute, even if it were composed of the most illustrious men, would infallibly and soon end in its own moral and intellectual corruption. Even today, with the few privileges allowed them, such is the

history of all academies. The greatest scientific genius, from the moment that he becomes an academician, an officially licensed *savant*, inevitably lapses into sluggishness. He loses his spontaneity, his revolutionary hardihood, and that troublesome and savage energy characteristic of the grandest geniuses, ever called to destroy old tottering worlds and lay the foundations of new. He undoubtedly gains in politeness, in utilitarian and practical wisdom, what he loses in power of thought. In a word, he becomes corrupted.

Reason is not something that can be attained second-hand, but it is also not something that can be maintained if it is mixed with authority, if it is exercised against revolt.

It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men. The privileged man, whether politically or economically, is a man deprived in mind and heart. That is a social law which admits of no exception, and is as applicable to entire nations as to classes, corporations, and individuals. It is the law of equality, the supreme condition of liberty and humanity. The principal object of this treatise is precisely to demonstrate this truth in all the manifestations of human life.

A scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon end by devoting itself no longer to science at all, but to quite another affair; and that affair, as in the case of all established powers, would be its own eternal perpetuation by rendering the society confided to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction.

But that which is true of scientific academies is also true of all constituent and legislative assemblies, even those chosen by universal suffrage. In the latter case they may renew their composition, it is true, but this does not prevent the formation in a few years' time of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not in law, who, devoting themselves exclusively to the direction of the public affairs of a country, finally form a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy. Witness the United States of America and Switzerland.

Both privilege and obedience are presented as deadly to science and to human development. And when Bakunin finally draws the conclusions from this section, they are perhaps even stronger than we might expect from the opening question:

Consequently, no external legislation and no authority — one, for that matter, being inseparable from the other, and both tending to the servitude of society and the degradation of the legislators themselves.

“No authority.” That seems clear enough. We’ve had a glimpse of what anarchists might look to *instead of* authority, but there doesn’t seem to be much room left for authority itself.

And then this happens:

Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from me such a thought. In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer. For such or such special knowledge I apply to such or such a *savant*. But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect nor the *savant* to impose his authority upon me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, their knowledge, reserving always my incontestable right of criticism censure. I do not content myself with consulting authority in any special branch; I consult several; I compare their opinions, and choose that which seems to me the soundest. But I recognize no infallible authority, even in special questions; consequently, whatever respect I may have for the honesty and the sincerity of such or such an individual, I have no absolute faith in any person. Such a faith would be fatal to my reason, to my liberty, and even to the success of my undertakings; it would immediately transform me into a stupid slave, an instrument of the will and interests of others.

When we attempt to follow this real twist, in the context of the full fragment, all sorts of questions come to mind. First of all, it isn’t entirely clear that the bootmaker is in the same category as the *savant* (scientist, learned individual, expert.) Elsewhere in the text, Bakunin makes a distinction between science, which “cannot go outside of the sphere of abstractions,” and art, which “is, as it were, the return of abstraction to life.” Indeed, science is characterized as “the perpetual immolation of life, fugitive, temporary, but real, on the altar of eternal abstractions,” and this sets up Bakunin’s famous declaration:

What I preach then is, to a certain extent, *the revolt of life against science*, or rather against the *government of science*, not to destroy science — that would be high treason

to humanity — but to remand it to its place so that it can never leave it again.

Here, it is *animality* and *revolt* rising up against *reason*—at least when reason seems to have exceeded its share of the work. It is tempting to think that bootmakers fare better than scientists because they are, in some sense, as much artists as *savants*. But I'm not sure there's anything in Bakunin's text that let's us pursue that approach. Another question is whether Bakunin has not himself simply made a blunder here, confusing *expertise* with *authority*, letting the rhetorical play get the better of him. It happened at times, I am inclined to think. There is a passage, still down the page a bit, where Bakunin insists on referring to the practices of revolutionary socialists as the beliefs of "our church." Proudhon's masterwork, *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, certainly might have suggested a contrast, but Bakunin's language seems to take it all too far.

What Bakunin says about the "authority of the bootmaker" is all quite level-headed, and roughly what you would expect him to say if he simply refused to grant any "authority" at all in the case. He is clear that he will use his *reason*, to whatever extent he can, and then use the reason of others to reduce his chances of error. He is wary. He understands that acquiescence is a grave danger. And yet, he says, he "bows."

If I bow before the authority of the specialists and avow my readiness to follow, to a certain extent and as long as may seem to me necessary, their indications and even their directions, it is because their authority is imposed upon me by no one, neither by men nor by God. Otherwise I would repel them with horror, and bid the devil take their counsels, their directions, and their services, certain that they would make me pay, by the loss of my liberty and self-respect, for such scraps of truth, wrapped in a multitude of lies, as they might give me.

At least Bakunin, in "bowing" to the bootmaker, obviously still *detests* the the act of submission to authority. And here the fact that we are ultimately talking about concessions as small as trusting in skilled tradespeople becomes interesting. Bakunin doesn't make the distinction we might expect between the bootmaker and the savant, so perhaps the scale of the act of submission is not so important. If the most perfect legislation is "fatal" if we have to take it second-hand, then we don't seem to be in a situation where there is much room for "legitimate authority," despite Bakunin's assurance that he would never even think of *rejecting* all authority.

What, in any event, does it mean to “reject all authority”? Let’s look at the French text:

“S’ensuit-il que je repousse toute autorité ? Loin de moi cette pensée.”

“To reject” is certainly one of the ways to translate *repousser*. There are several others. *Rejeter* means to reject, but perhaps more in the sense that one would reject, or *throw back*, a fish that was too small for eating. *Refuser* is also sometimes translated as “to reject,” often in the sense of *turning down* an offer, although it may have a variety of other uses. *Écarter* has the sense of *pushing to the side*. But *repousser* is perhaps a little more active and aggressive; it sometimes means to *spurn*, but also to *repel*, to *push away*. This is the verb Bakunin used when he said “I would repel them with horror, and bid the devil take their counsels...” Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that it is precisely Bakunin’s sense of revulsion concerning authority that makes *repousser* the right choice here. The reading has the advantage of presenting Bakunin as consistent in his attitude toward authority, even if his eventual capitulation to it has to be explained. He assures us that he is not compelled to submit, “neither by men, nor by God.”

I bow before the authority of special men because it is imposed upon me by my own reason. I am conscious of my inability to grasp, in all its details and positive developments, any very large portion of human knowledge. The greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of the division and association of labor. I receive and I give — such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.

In the end, it appears that, rather than bowing to “special men” or their “authority,” Bakunin bows to “human life,” to his own limitations as a human animal. He bows to the inevitable, which we know is the only law he will recognize. And if our reading of the nuances is not entirely incorrect, we have no reason, I think, to imagine that he bows, even to necessity, with particularly good grace. At the limits of his knowledge, *life*, *reason* and *rebellion* should, we expect, all be brought to bear. In the absence of “fixed and constant authority,” developing humanity might at least aspire to less of both authority and subordination.



In the remainder of the section I'm quoting here, which ends with the declaration that he and those around him are, in a particular sense, "anarchists," Bakunin alternates between gratitude to the *savants* of the "special sciences" and new declamations against authority, with a recognition of the "absolute authority of science" (but not "the absolute, universal, and infallible authority of men of science.") It isn't clear if it all *quite* adds up. I suppose that one can weight those various elements of the text as you see fit, but, for me, it is very hard to make the usual leap from the views presented here to a denial that anarchism is, in principle, not just *anti-authoritarian*, but *resolutely so*. If we are forced by the law of necessity to bow to authority in small ways, in the context of that "continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination," it cannot be, it seems to me, in any way that involves abandoning our *animality*, our *reason* or our tendency to *revolt*. Indeed, it would seem to me that it is when we are faced with our own limits that all of these elements need to be most actively involved. That means rebelling, if only inwardly, when we have to take even the bootmaker on faith, and bringing all our energies into play as the stakes rise. We can, of course, be gracious, as Bakunin was, and feel gratitude for the "special" knowledges that come from our specific characters and aptitudes. But every time we start to get too warm and fuzzy about even the "very restricted authority of the representatives of special sciences," I suspect our best bet is to remember that if there is such a thing as "legitimate authority," our only real access to it is still from within, from the force of necessity, expressed through our own human animality, even if it is only expressed through our limits.

Not that our limits, Bakunin reminds us, are all bad:

This same reason forbids me, then, to recognize a fixed, constant, and universal authority, because there is no universal man, no man capable of grasping in that wealth of detail, without which the application of science to life is impossible, all the sciences, all the branches of social life. And if such universality could ever be realized in a single man, and if he wished to take advantage thereof to impose his authority upon us, it would be necessary to drive this man out of society, because his authority would inevitably reduce all the others to slavery and imbecility. I do not think that society ought to maltreat men of genius as it has done hitherto; but neither do I think it should indulge them too far, still less accord them any privileges or exclusive rights whatsoever; and that for three reasons: first, because it would often mistake a charlatan for a man of genius; second, because, through such a system of privileges, it might

transform into a charlatan even a real man of genius, demoralize him, and degrade him; and, finally, because it would establish a master over itself.

The rest of the selection speaks, I think, largely for itself.

To sum up. We recognize, then, the absolute authority of science, because the sole object of science is the mental reproduction, as well-considered and systematic as possible, of the natural laws inherent in the material, intellectual, and moral life of both the physical and the social worlds, these two worlds constituting, in fact, but one and the same natural world. Outside of this only legitimate authority, legitimate because rational and in harmony with human liberty, we declare all other authorities false, arbitrary and fatal.

We recognize the absolute authority of science, but we reject the infallibility and universality of the *savant*. In our church — if I may be permitted to use for a moment an expression which I so detest: Church and State are my two *bêtes noires* — in our church, as in the Protestant church, we have a chief, an invisible Christ, science; and, like the Protestants, more logical even than the Protestants, we will suffer neither pope, nor council, nor conclaves of infallible cardinals, nor bishops, nor even priests. Our Christ differs from the Protestant and Christian Christ in this — that the latter is a personal being, ours impersonal; the Christian Christ, already completed in an eternal past, presents himself as a perfect being, while the completion and perfection of our Christ, science, are ever in the future: which is equivalent to saying that they will never be realized. Therefore, in recognizing *absolute science* as the only absolute authority, we in no way compromise our liberty.

I mean by the words “absolute science,” which would reproduce ideally, to its fullest extent and in all its infinite detail, the universe, the system or coordination of all the natural laws manifested by the incessant development of the world. It is evident that such a science, the sublime object of all the efforts of the human mind, will never be fully and absolutely realized. Our Christ, then, will remain eternally unfinished, which must considerably take down the pride of his licensed representatives among us. Against that God the Son in whose name they assume to impose upon us their insolent and pedantic authority, we appeal to God the Father, who is the real world, real life, of which he (the Son)

is only a too imperfect expression, whilst we real beings, living, working, struggling, loving, aspiring, enjoying, and suffering, are its immediate representatives.

But, while rejecting the absolute, universal, and infallible authority of men of science, we willingly bow before the respectable, although relative, quite temporary, and very restricted authority of the representatives of special sciences, asking nothing better than to consult them by turns, and very grateful for such precious information as they may extend to us, on condition of their willingness to receive from us on occasions when, and concerning matters about which, we are more learned than they. In general, we ask nothing better than to see men endowed with great knowledge, great experience, great minds, and, above all, great hearts, exercise over us a natural and legitimate influence, freely accepted, and never imposed in the name of any official authority whatsoever, celestial or terrestrial. We accept all natural authorities and all influences of fact, but none of right; for every authority or every influence of right, officially imposed as such, becoming directly an oppression and a falsehood, would inevitably impose upon us, as I believe I have sufficiently shown, slavery and absurdity.

In a word, we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them.

This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists.

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### Bakunin and Proudhon / Authority and Anarchy

If (in the passage from *God and the State* discussed in the last section) Bakunin has not simply changed the meaning of the word “authority” from one paragraph to the next, as he moves from his general critique to his consideration of “the authority of the bootmaker,” then we presumably have a case in which authority must indeed be *rejected* when considered in general, but cannot be *spurned* or *simply pushed away* (*repoussé*) in the messy realm of practice, where the limits of our knowledge and the limitations of our animality confront us on a regular basis. We find ourselves forced to reject authority and not spurn it because these same limitations apply to all human beings. So we are forced to accept, however reluctantly, apparent authority on a temporary basis and we seek to limit the

damage by seeking confirmation from other sources. That's "life," Bakunin tells us: alternating instances of command and subordination, imposed but never legitimated by our material conditions and offset as much as possible by the division and association of labors.

This should all really look quite familiar. Think of Proudhon's developing thought on the question of property. Only a couple of years had passed after his declaration that "property is theft" when, in his *Arguments to the Public Prosecutor of the Right of Property*, he argued that the way to neutralize property was to generalize it. His mock-reassurance to the members of the jury is probably one of the funniest things he ever wrote:

I have only written one thing in my life, gentlemen jurors, and I will tell you that thing right away, so there is no question: *Property is robbery*. And do you know what I have concluded from that? In order to abolish that species of robbery, it is necessary to universalize it. I am, you see, gentlemen, as conservative as you; and whoever would tell you the contrary, would prove by that alone that they have understood nothing of my books, and, I would say, nothing of the things of this world.

And, of course, as we see so many places in his work, the answer to injustice is equal distribution and balance, even when it is a question of distributing and balancing potential evils:

Thus, profit, interest, the right of increase, property or suzerainty, is a usurpation, a theft, as Diderot said, more than a century ago, and yet society could live only with the aid of that theft, which will no longer be one, as soon as by *the* irresistible force of institutions it will become general, and which will cease completely when an integral education has rendered all the citizens equal in merit and in dignity.

The claim that "society could live only with the aid of that theft" should probably be read, in Bakunin's language, as a recognition of conditions imposed by our individual limitations.

So, perhaps, rather than an instance of Bakunin's sloppiness or a "legitimate" exception to our general anti-authoritarian stance, we are looking at a clue to something fundamental about the anarchist project. Anarchism is, after all, the ongoing and ever more rigorous application of an anti-authoritarian ideal to conditions that are anything but in harmony or sympathy to it. The question becomes: What does the advance of that project look like? How does we oppose

authority in practical terms? Proudhon framed the project in terms of “the elimination of the absolute.” Now, the character of the *absolute* is that it does not mix and mingle, does not offer itself up for comparisons and second opinions, and encourages us to make the leap (in the terms we’ve been using here) from *necessity* to *legitimacy*. But the *necessary* is (in those terms) just *the stuff we have to deal with, right here and right now*. If we cannot simply push it away, without leaving the realm of good or common sense, we need not give it any power not imposed by very specific, generally transitory circumstances.

The anarchist project, then, would not be some doomed opposition to the inevitable, but a matter of knowing the very narrow limits of any particular inevitability. This is perhaps some of what Proudhon was getting at when, in the “Study on Ideas” in *Justice*, he said:

I intend to suppress none of the things of which I have made such a resolute critique. I flatter myself that I do only two things: that is, first, to teach you put each thing in its place, after having purged it of the absolute and balanced it with other things; then, to show you that the things that you know, and that you have such fear of losing, are not the only ones that exist, and that there are considerably more of which you still must take account.

The various parts of this program are in large parts simply different sides of the same act. When we really “put each thing in its place,” the spell of the absolute is necessarily broken. As we identify that “place” in time and space, other times and spaces, other things, naturally emerge as alternatives. Anarchy emerges less in the form—or formlessness—of specific institutions, but in the practical application of a perspective that refuses to linger too long or grant too much significance to any of the things the world presents to us. And that restless perspective—something like Fourier’s *papillon* passion—is probably nothing more than a sane response to the real conditions of what Bakunin called our *human animality*.

## TRANSLATIONS

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Fragment of a letter (c. 1835-1840)

True thought and feeling transmit harmony by means of chords, so if you want to know the truth, do not resort to deception. Deceit is vain; it disappears before the all-knowing eye like the wave before the rock!

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Text addressed to Aleksandra, Liubov, Tatiana and Varvara  
Aleksandrovna Bakunina (November, 1835)

Heaven is within us, and it is within ourselves that we must live—that two souls can meet is happiness; that they may not meet is not yet misfortune.

The heaven that we have within us is eternal.

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Fragment on life and spirit (1837)

No 1

### My Notes

September 4, 1837

Yes, life is sheer happiness; to live means to understand, to understand life; evil does not exist, all is good; only limitation is evil, the limitation of the spiritual vision. Everything that exists is the life of the spirit, everything is penetrated by the spirit, nothing exists apart from the spirit. The spirit is absolute knowledge, absolute liberty, absolute love, and especially absolute felicity. The natural man, like everything that is natural, is the finite and limited moment of that absolute life. He is still not free, but he contains the potential for unlimited liberty, for unlimited felicity. That potential resides in the consciousness. Man is the conscious creature. The consciousness is the emancipation, the return of the spirit from the infinite and from limited definition into its infinite essence. The degree of consciousness of the man is his degree of liberty, his degree of humanity, of love, and consequently, his degree of happiness. The side of his liberty, of his consciousness is good, happiness. His limited, unconscious side is evil, misfortune. Evil and misfortune only exist for the finite, limited consciousness, and yet that some consciousness contains the possibility and the necessity of emancipation. So evil does not exist and all is good; life is sheer happiness.

Hegel said that only thought distinguishes the man from the animal. That difference is infinite, and it makes man an independent, eternal creature. The natural individual is subject to the same implacable necessity, to the same slavery all everything that is natural. He is a mortal creature; he is a slave; he is nothing even as an individual. He has reality only in the species and is subject to the necessary laws of that species. But consciousness frees him from that necessity, renders him independent, free and eternal. Man in himself is always free and eternal, as a consciousness, as a concept of that spirit that will develop in his life. But for himself, he can be in part a slave; he can be a finite man. The finite man is the one who is still not entirely imbued with the spirit of independence, the one in whom there still persists some spontaneous aspects that the spirit has still not illuminated. It is these aspects that make him finite, by limiting the horizon of his spiritual eye; now, every limitation is evil, misfortune, separation from God. The dark sides of the man hinder him, prevent him from merging with God, making him a slave of contingency. Chance is the lie, the shadow; chance does not exist in a life that is real and true; everything in that life is holy necessity, divine grace. Chance is powerless in the face of true reality; only the shadows, only the interests and the ghostly desires of the man are subject to chance. Chance hampers the liberty of the finite man; chance is the dark, somber side of his life. Consciousness is emancipation from [natural] spontaneity, the illumination by the spirit of human nature. The less conscious the man, the more he is subject to chance; the more conscious he is, the more he is independent from it. Only the ghostly is killed by chance, and the ghostly must die. The shadows is destroyed by the shadow, and therein resides the liberation of the man.

Everything lives; everything is animated by the spirit. Reality is only dead for the dead eye. Reality is the eternal life of God. The thoughtless man also lives in that reality, but he is not conscious of it, for him everything is dead, he sees death everywhere because his consciousness has still not come into being. The more living the man is, the more he is imbued with the spirit of independence, the more reality is living for him, the more it is close to him. What is real is rational. The spirit is the absolute power, the source of all power. Reality is its life, and everywhere reality is all-powerful as will and thing of the spirit. The finite man is cut off from God; he is cut off from reality by the shadows, by his defect of immediacy; for him reality and good are not identical; for him good and evil are separated. He can be a moral man, he is not a religious man, and because he is a slave of reality, he fears it, he hates it. Whoever hates reality and does not know it hates and does not know God. Reality is the divine will. In poetry, in religion and finally in philosophy is accomplished the great

act of the reconciliation of man with God. The religious man feels, believes that the divine will is the absolute, unique good, and he says: "Let them be done", he says that, although he does not understand the reason why the divine will is in reality the real happiness and why it is uniquely in it that finite satisfaction exists. The moral point of view is the division of good from evil, the separation of man from God, and consequently from reality. For him evil is as essential as good. He fears evil, he is troubled, and a ceaseless struggle between good and evil, between happiness and misfortune takes place within him. Evil does not exist for the religious man: for him it is the shadow, the death, the limitation vanquished by the revelation of the Christ. The religious man feels his individual powerlessness, because he knows that all power comes from God, and he awaits illumination, grace from Him. Grace purifies the man of the influence of the shadow, it disperses the fog that separates him from the sun.

Philosophy, as the independent development and purification of thought, is a human science, for it issues directly from man and it is a divine science because it contains the power of grace: human purification from the phantoms and its union with God. The man who has traversed all three of these spheres of development and education is a perfect man, and all-powerful; for him, reality is the absolute good, the divine will is his conscious will.

Genius is the living consciousness of contemporary reality.

[...]

Nature does not pass, it contains the entire totality of the negation, time is within it and not outside it, so it has no power over it, it performs as a power over the realizations and the realities of nature, isolated and subjective, which are one-sided and do not contain the notion of totality of the negation; that is why time is all-powerful over them, they are born of time and unfold in time. The human personality, the human subject, as an isolated realization of nature, is subject to that same law of time, they pass in the same manner. But it contains the entire totality of the negation, as an entirely abstract equality Self = Self [Moi = Moi], and in that equality they are outside of time and time is within them; it manifests its power over the contingent and non-corresponding definitions of that pure equality, and in that regard, time is the abstract basis of the external life of nature as well as the internal life of the Spirit. And it seems to me that the isolated realizations of nature concern the totality of nature in exactly the same manner as the contingent, unilateral qualities or definitions of the subject concern the pure subject.



## Speech on the 17th Anniversary of the Polish Revolution

[Speech delivered November 29, 1847 and published in *La Réforme*, December 14, 1847.]

Gentlemen,

This is a very solemn moment for me. I am Russian, and I come into the midst of this large assembly, which has gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Polish revolution, whose very presence here is a sort of challenge, a threat, like a curse thrown the face of all the oppressors of Poland; - I come here, gentlemen, animated by a profound love and unalterable respect for my homeland.

I am not unaware of how unpopular Russia is in Europe. The Polish regard it, and perhaps not without reason, as one of the principal causes of all their misfortunes. Independent men of other countries see in the rapid development of its power an always-increasing danger to the liberty of nations. Everywhere the name *Russians* appears as a synonym of brutal oppression and shameful slavery. A Russian, in the opinion of Europe, is nothing but a vile instrument of conquest in the hands of the most odious and most dangerous despotism.

Gentlemen, it is not in order to exonerate Russia of the crimes of which it is accused, it is not in order to deny the truth that I have come to this rostrum. I would not attempt the impossible. The truth becomes more necessary than every to my homeland.

Well, yes, we are still an enslaved people! Among us there is no liberty, no respect for human dignity. It is the monstrous despotism, with no impediment to its caprices, without limits on its action. No rights, no justice, no recourse against the arbitrary will; we have nothing of that which constitutes the dignity and pride of nations. It is impossible to imagine a position more unfortunate and more humiliating.

Externally, our position is no less deplorable. Passive executors of a thought that is foreign to us, of a will that is as contrary to our interests as it is to our honor, we are feared, hated, I would even almost say scorned, for we are regarded everywhere as the enemies of civilization and humanity. Our masters use our arms to enchain the world, to enslave the nations, and each of their successes is a new shame added to our history.

Without speaking of Poland, where since 1772, and especially since 1831, we dishonor ourselves each day with atrocious acts of violence, nameless infamies, - what a miserable role we have been made to play in Germany, in Italy, in Spain, even in France, everywhere our destructive influence has even been able to penetrate.

Since 1815, has there been a single noble cause that we have not battled, a bad cause that we have not supported, a single great political iniquity of which we have not been the instigators or accomplices? - By a truly deplorable fatality, of which is itself the first victims, Russia, since its arrival at the rank of a power of the first order, has become an encouragement for crime and a threat for all the sacred interests of humanity!

Thanks to that execrable politics of our sovereigns, Russia, in the official sense of that word, signifies slave and executioner!

You see, gentlemen, I have a perfect knowledge of my position; and I present myself here as Russian, not although I am Russian, but because I am Russian. I come with the deep sense of responsibility that weighs on me, as well as on all the other individual of my country, for the honor of individuals is inseparable from the national honor: without that responsibility, without that intimate union between the nations and their governments, between the individuals and the nations, there would be neither homeland, nor nation.

I have never, gentlemen, felt that responsibility, that solidarity in the crime as painfully as in this moment; for the anniversary that you celebrate today, for you, gentlemen, it is a great memory, the memory of a holy insurrection and a heroic struggle, the memory of one of the finest eras of your national life. You have all witness that magnificent public surge, you have taken part in that struggle, you have been the actors and the heroes. In that sacred war you seem to have exerted, spread, exhausted all that the great Polish soul contained of enthusiasm, of devotion, of strength and of patriotism! Weigh down under the numbers, you finally succumbed. But the memory of that eternally memorable era remains written in flaming characters in your hearts; but you have all emerged regenerated from that war: regenerated and strong, hardened against the temptations of misfortune, against the pains of exile, full of pride in your past, full of faith in your future!

The anniversary of November 29, gentlemen, is for you not only a great memory, it is also the guarantee of an imminent deliverance, of an impending return to your country.

For me, as a Russian, it is the anniversary of a shame; yes, of a great national shame! I say it frankly: the war of 1831 was, on our part, an absurd, criminal, fratricidal war. It was not only an unjust attack on a neighboring nation, it was a monstrous offense against the liberty of a brother. It was more, gentlemen: on the part of my country, it was a political suicide. - That war was undertaken in the interest of the Russian despotism, not that of the Russian nation; for these two interests are absolutely opposed. The emancipation of Poland was our salvation: with you free, we would have been as well; you could not overturn the thrown of the King of Poland without

shaking that of the emperor of Russia... - Children of the same race, our destinies are inseparable and our cause must be common.

You understood that well when you inscribed on your revolutionary flags these Russian words: *za nachou i za vachou volnost*, "For our liberty and for yours!" You have understood it well when, in the most critical moment of the struggle, braving the fury of Nicolas, all of Warsaw gathered one day, inspired by a great fraternal thought, in order to render a solemn, public homage, to our heroes, to our martyrs of 1825, to PESTEL, to RYLEEFF, to MOURAWIEFF-APOSTEL, BESTOUGEFF-RUMIN and KOHOFFSKY, - hanged at Saint-Petersburg for having been the first citizens Russia!

Ah! Gentlemen, you have neglected nothing in order to convince us of your sympathetic dispositions, in order to touch our hearts, in order to pull us from our fatal blindness. Vain attempts! Wasted efforts! Soldiers of the czar, deaf to your appeal, seeing, understanding nothing, we have marched against you, - and the crime has been perpetrated.

Gentlemen, of all the oppressors, of all the enemies of your country, it is we who have most earned your curses and your hatred.

And yet it is not only as a repentant Russian that I come here. I dare to proclaim in your presence my love and respect for my country. I dare more, gentlemen. I dare to urge you to an alliance with Russia.

I need to explain myself.

About a year ago, it was, I believe, after the massacres in Galicia, a Polish nobleman, in a very eloquent and now famous letter, addressed to M. the prince of Metternich, made a strange proposition to you. Carried away no doubt by a hatred, and a very legitimate one at that, against the Austrians, he enlisted you to nothing less than submitting to the czar, surrendering yourselves body and soul, fully, without conditions or reservations; he advised you to freely desire what you have until now only been made to suffer, and he promised you that, in compensation, as soon as you ceased to portray yourselves as slaves, your master, despite himself, would become your brother.

Your brother, gentlemen. Do you hear? The emperor Nicolas would become your brother!

The oppressor, the bitterest enemy, the personal enemy of Poland, the executioner of so many victims, the abductor of your liberty, the one who pursues you with an infernal perseverance, as much from hatred and instinct as from politics, - would you accept him as your brother?

Each of you would prefer to perish, I know it well; - each of you would rather see Poland perish than consent to such a monstrous alliance.

But tolerate, just for a moment, this impossible conjecture. Do you know, gentlemen, what the surest means would be for you to do

much evil to Russia? It would be to submit to the czar. He would find in that a sanction for his politics and such a strength that nothing, from now on, could stop him. Woe to us if that anti-national politics prevailed over all the obstacles that still oppose its complete realization! And the first, the greatest of these obstacles, is incontestably Poland, it is the desperate resistance of this heroic people that saves us by combating us.

Yes, it is because you are the enemies of the Emperor Nicolas, the enemies of the official Russia, that you are naturally, even without desiring it, the friends of the Russian people!

In Europe, we generally believe, I know, that we form an indivisible whole with our government; that we feel very fortunate under the reign of Nicolas; that he and his system, oppressive within and invasive without, are the perfect expression of our national genius.

It is not the case at all.

No, gentlemen, the Russian people are not happy! I say it with joy, with pride. For, if happiness was possible for them in the state of abjection into which they find themselves plunged, they would be the most cowardly, most vile people in the world. We are also governed by a foreign hand, by a sovereign of German origin, who will never understand the needs nor the character of the Russian people, and whose government, a singular mix of Mongol brutality and Prussian pedantry, completely excludes the national element. So that, deprived of all political rights, we do not have even that natural, we might say patriarchal, liberty enjoyed by the less civilized peoples, which at least allows a man to rest his heart in a native milieu and abandon himself fully to the instincts of his race. No, we have none of all that: no natural gesture, no free movement is allowed us. We are almost forbidden to live, for every life implies a certain independence, and we are only the inanimate cogs of that monstrous machine of oppression and conquest that we call the Russian Empire. Well! gentlemen, suppose a soul in a machine, and perhaps then you will form an idea of the immensity of our sufferings. No shame, no torture is spared us, and we have all the misfortunes of Poland, without the honor.

Without honor, I have said, and I uphold that expression for everything that is governmental, official, political, in Russia.

A weak, exhausted nation could have need of lies in order to maintain the miserable remains of an existence that is fading away. But Russia is not in that situation, thank God! The nature of that people is corrupted only on the surface: vigorous, powerful and young, it has only to overturn the obstacles with which it has been surrounded, in order to show itself in all its primitive beauty, in order to develop all its unknown treasures, to show the world finally that it is not in the name of brutal force, as it is generally thought, but rather

in the name of all that is most noble and most sacred in the lives of nations, that it is in the name of humanity, in the name of liberty, that the Russian people have the right to exist.

Gentlemen, Russia is not only unfortunate, it is discontented as well, it is at the end of its patience. Do you know what is whispered in the court of Saint-Petersburg itself? Do you know what those close to the emperor, the favorites, even the ministers think? That the reign of Nicolas is that of Louis XV. Everyone senses the storm, a terrible, imminent storm, which frightens many people, but which the nation summons with joy.

The internal affairs of the country go horribly wrong. It is a complete anarchy, with all the semblance of order. Beneath the exterior of an excessively rigorous hierarchical formality is hidden some hideous wounds; our administration, our justice, our finances, are so many lies: lies to mislead foreign opinion, lies to lull the sense of security and conscience of the sovereign, who plays along all the more willingly, as he is frightened by the real state of things. Finally, there is the organization on a large scale, an organization, we might say, studied and learned in iniquity, barbarism and pillage: for all the servants of the czar, from those who occupy the highest position to the lowliest district employees, bankrupt, rob the country, commit the most flagrant injustices, the most detestable violence, without the least shame, without the least fear, in public; in the light of day, with an insolence and a brutality without example, not even taking the trouble to conceal their crimes from the indignation of the public, so sure are they that they will remain unpunished.

The emperor Nicolas indeed sometimes gives himself the appearance of wishing to arrest the progress of this frightful corruption; but how could he suppress an evil whose principal cause is within himself, in the very principle of his government? And that is the secret of his profound powerlessness for good! For this government, which appears so imposing from without, is powerless from within; nothing it does is successful, all the reforms that it attempts are immediately struck null and void. Having no foundation but the two vilest passions of the human heart, venality and fear; functioning outside of all the instincts of the nation, of all the interests, of all the vital forces of the country, the power, in Russia, weakens itself each day through its own action, and disrupts itself in a frightful manner. It twists and turns, thrashes about, and changes plans and ideas at each moment; it attempts many things at once, but accomplishes nothing. Only, it does not lack the power for evil, and it exhausts it fully, as if it wanted to hasten the moment of its own ruin. - Foreign and hostile to the country in the midst of the country itself, it is marked for an imminent fall.

Its enemies are everywhere: there is the formidable mass of the peasants, who no longer count on the emperor for their emancipation, and whose uprisings, more and more frequent every day, prove that they are tired of waiting; there is a very large intermediary class, composed of very diverse elements, an anxious, turbulent class that will throw itself passionately in the first revolutionary movement.

- There is also, and especially, that innumerable army that covers the whole surface of the empire. Nicolas, it is true, regards his soldiers as his best friends, as the most solid supports of his throne; but this is a strange illusion, which will not fail to be fatal for him. What! The supports of his throne, some men drawn from the ranks of the people, so profoundly unfortunate, men brutally snatched from their families, who are hunted down like wild beasts in the forests where they go to hide, often after maiming themselves, in order to escape recruitment; who are led in chains to their regiments, where they are condemned for twenty years, which is to say for the life of a man, to a hellish existence, beaten every day, loaded down every day with new fatigues, and dying every day of hunger! What would they do then, good God! these Russian soldiers, if, in the midst of such tortures, they could love the hand that inflicts them on them! Believe it well, gentlemen, our soldiers are the most dangerous enemies of the present order of things; those of the guard especially, who, seeing the evil at its source, can have no illusions about the unique cause of all their suffering. Our soldiers, they are the people themselves, but still more discontent; they are the people entirely disillusioned, armed, accustomed to discipline and common action. Do you want a proof of it? In all the recent peasant riots, the discharged soldiers have played the principal role.

To end this review of the enemies of power in Russia, I must finally tell you, gentlemen, that among the noble youth this is a mass of educated, generous, patriotic men, who blush at the shame and horror of our position, who are outraged at feeling they are slaves, who are all animated against the emperor and his government by an implacable hatred. Ah! Believe it well, revolutionary elements are not lacking in Russia! It stirs, grows in passion, it reckons its forces, it recognizes itself, it gathers, and the moment is not far off when the storm, a great storm, our salvation, will break!

Gentlemen, it is in the name of that new society, of that true Russian nation, that I come to propose to you an alliance.

The idea of a revolutionary alliance between Poland and Russia is not new. It had already been conceived, as you know, by the conspirators of the two countries, in 1824.

Gentlemen, the memory that I have just alluded to fills my soul with pride. The Russian conspirators were then the first to cross the abyss that seems to separate us. Taking counsel only with their

patriotism, braving the precautions that you had naturally set up against all who bore the name Russian, they came to you first, without mistrust, without ulterior motives; - they came to you to propose a common action against our common enemy, against our only enemy.

You will forgive me, gentlemen, this moment of involuntary pride. A Russian who loves his country cannot speak dispassionately of these men; they are our purest glory, - and I am happy to be able to proclaim it frankly in this midst of this great and noble assembly, in the midst of this Polish assembly, - they are our saints, our heroes, the martyrs for our liberty, the prophets of our future! From the height of their gibbets, from the very depths of Siberia where they groan still, they have been our salvation, our light, the source of all our good inspirations, our safeguard against the cursed influences of despotism, our proof, before you and before the entire world, that Russia contains within itself all the elements of liberty and of true greatness! Shame, shame to those among us who would not recognize it!

Gentlemen, it is under the invocation of their great names, it is by leaning on their powerful authority, that I present myself to you as a brother, - and you will not reject me. I have no legal title to speak to you in this way; but, with the least bit of vain pretension, I feel that, in this solemn moment, it is the Russian nation itself that speaks to you through my mouth. I am not the only one in Russia who loves Poland, and who feels for it that enthusiastic admiration, that passionate ardor, that profound sentiment, mixed with repentance and hope, that I could never manage to express to you. The friends, known and unknown, who share my sympathies, my opinions, are numerous, and it would be easy for me to prove it, by citing facts and names to you, if I did not fear uselessly compromising many persons. It is in their names, gentlemen, it is in the name of all there is that is living, noble, in my country, that I hold out to you a fraternal hand.

Chained to one another by a fatal, inevitable destiny, by a long and dramatic history, the sad consequences of which we all suffer today, our two countries have long detested one another. But the hour of reconciliation has been struck: it is time that our disagreements end.

Our crimes against you are very great! You have much to forgive us for! But our repentance is not less, and we sense in you a power of good will that will repair all the wrongs and make you forget the past. Then our hatred will change to love, into a love that much more ardent as our hatred has been implacable.

To the extent that we remain disunited, we are mutually paralyzed; together we will be all-powerful for good. nothing could withstand our common action.

The reconciliation of Russia and Poland is an immense work, well worthy of our complete devotion. It is the emancipation of 60 million men, it is the deliverance of all the Slavic peoples who groan under a foreign yoke, and, finally, it is the fall, the final fall of despotism in Europe!

So let it come then, this great day of reconciliation, - the day when the Russians, united with you by the same sentiments, fighting for the same cause and against a common enemy, will have the right to burst with you into your Polish national tune, that hymn of Slavic liberty:

*Ieszeze Polska nie zginela!*

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A Fragment from 1848  
[with variants]

“The revolution will circle the earth!” Such was the prophetic cry that resounded in France at the end of the 18th century when the old world of lies, the world of an age-old servitude shaken by the powerful arms of an angry people, perceived the first cry. That call expressed the certainty that the revolution was a common call for all the peoples, the redemption of all the oppressed. And even more, the solidarity of men and nations in good as in evil: such is the last word of ancient civilization, but at the same time the beginning, the foundation of the morality of the new world.

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“The revolution will circle the earth!” Such was the prophetic cry that resounded in France at the end of the 18th century when the old world of lies, the world of an age-old servitude shaken by the powerful arms of an angry people, perceived the first cry. That call expressed the certainty that the revolution was a common call for all the peoples, the redemption of all the oppressed. And even more: a great principle was thus established, a principle that from that moment should dominate the history of the world and that will dominate it: the principle of *the solidarity of the human race*.

The solidarity of men and nations in good as in evil, in misfortune as in good fortune, such is the last word of ancient civilization, but at the same time the beginning, the foundation of the morality of a young, new world! It reflects the consciousness of the fact that not only does my liberty not exclude the liberty of the other, but that it is through that liberty of the other alone that my liberty can become a truth and living reality. I am what I am only among all the other men, only through that relation. The malice and stupidity of others are my own stupidity and my own stupidity. Their lack of liberty limits and



stifles my liberty. No one is completely free as long as there is a single person in the world who is a slave and, for me, to liberate myself means to liberate all the others.

From all this follows for each and all the right and even the most sacred duty to carry out a revolutionary propaganda. That propaganda is nothing other than self-preservation, the preservation of what must appear to our eyes as the utmost, the source of all morality and all truth, the preservation of our liberty.

It also follows that the highly extolled politics of non-intervention is a politics of stupidity, hypocrisy and bad faith. Whoever makes an apology for the politics of non-intervention stupid or malicious. Every being exists only to the extent that I produces a result, and to not wish to act is to renounce oneself, to not wish to be. And to not wish to be is absurd.

The liberty that disowns itself by non-intervention is at once absurd and harmful. For in not wishing to act for itself, it acts for non-liberty, it is non-liberty, which is to say absolute vileness, and it is at once lies and repulsive hypocrisy since it still dons the name and appearance of liberty.

Who invented the politics of non-intervention? Louis-Philippe. And what was its fundamental idea...

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[All working translations by Shawn P. Wilbur]

## COLLECTIVISM

Ricardo Mella, "Spain" (1897)

Time passes and, far from improving, the situation in Spain grows worse and worse. The colonial wars go badly and the hope of a swift pacification is abandoned. The exceptional state of Barcelona has not changed; the hundreds of wretches arbitrarily detained in the prisons and at Montjuich only await a bit of belated justice to set them free or else to consummate that legal crime that, taking the lives of some, will cast the others forever into the penal institutions that the mother country reserves for the best of her children.

Today, as yesterday, some ignorant proletarians march like docile sheep to the slaughter where Weiler, Polavieja and their ilk work wonderfully as executioners well paid by the reaction and the clergy.

Today, as yesterday, the inquisitorial tortures, protected by the silence of the stupefied masses, continue their triumphant career; nothing has changed.

However, thanks to the persistence of such a state of things, some disastrous effects arise. Catalonia, industrial region par excellence, see the most important of its factories close and thousands of workers are thus plunged into the most terrible poverty. Galicia, Asturias and the ancient kingdom of Léon have rapidly become depopulated, their inhabitants invading the liners bound for American and in a short time the effect of the closing of the factories and of the emigration will be felt by all of Spain, which will be devastated by the scourge of famine.

From Cuba and Philippines also come the echoes of the poverty that invades everywhere. In the colonies and the metropolis alike, life seems to flee and alone are heard the cries of suffering of those dying of hunger and the lamentations of those who cry for dear one sacrificed to a cause that matters very little to them.

We must add to all that that the mass killings and nameless cruelties inspired by the clerical reaction and executed by the military have produced a tension of mind so that one would have to be very blind not to see the cataclysm approaching, coming to put a violent end to the infamies and the massacres of the restored monarchy.

The Carlist agitation is a proof of what we claim:—as always, while the dawn of the Revolution appeared on the horizon, the gangs of Carlos VII prepare to take the field. Some armed groups have already appeared in Spain, but the reader must not believe that these individuals have been foully murdered like the republicans of Novelda. The reactionaries are wolves of the same litter; Carlists and conservatives do not consume one another.

The past civil war was fomented as much by the Carlists as by the monarchists who are our masters today, and when it did not suit either to continue it, peace was made. Today, faced with the danger, the conservatives and liberals of the restored monarchy, guided in this by a very natural instinct of self-preservation, will aid, as in the past, the partisans of absolutism.

Clericalism has taken possession of the institutions; the armies are commanded by generals belonging to the *moinocratie* [government of the monks] and the war minister is a Jesuit.

Over all that the wave advances. The insurrections de Cuba et des Philippines crowning the edifice, the Carlists on the march; the Biscayan and Catalan separatists on the alert; the republicans dethroning their leaders, impatient to hurl themselves into the revolutionary struggle that these leader block; the workers chased from the factories, promenading their misery in the streets; the Andalusian peasants pillaging the bakeries and the warehouses of wheat; the militant workers of socialism rotting in the prisons and, in an imminent future, murder consummated and hundreds of workers sent to the penal colony or deported.

Forward! There are still many men disposed to fight. If the reaction prepares, it is because it senses that the Revolution comes to give battle.

Anarchic socialism and the revolutionary spirit still survive in Spain; they will do their work and the solidarity of the other nations will not fail us.

Persecuted, imprisoned, deported, we will continue to work for the approaching Revolution.

R. MELLA.

Source: Ricardo Mella, "Espagne," *Les Temps Nouveau* 2 no. 51 (April 23, 1897): 3.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.]