

Social Individualism
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SUMMARY AND
COMMENTARIES



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Social Individualism

(Ethics, Aesthetics and Anticipation of the Anarchist Spirit)

On various occasions, I have been asked for a precise summary of my conception of a social individualism that I also call a social anarchism. In particular, concern has been expressed about the harmony between an anarchist morality of personal life in any given milieu and the modes of intervention, both individual and collective, in the developments (ultimately the revolutions) of that milieu.

People have sometimes expressed surprise that I seem to attach less importance to the action of specifically anarchist groups than to participation in the activities of various organizations, a participation not exempt from criticism and sometimes reservations. Some have believed they detected, in these individual collaborations with organizations unrelated to anarchy, a contradiction or incompatibility with the anarchist work of the individualist centers of social action that I advocate.

I attempted to answer these questions in the first article summarizing the spirit of the five books in the series and in two concluding articles. This answer is clarified by reproducing large passages from a few letters prompted by external criticism and objections from libertarian activists. I apologize for repeating myself. How can I avoid this in summarizing a theme that has remained unchanged? This is perhaps not pointless, since very often, objections are raised by readers who have not noticed that an answer is found somewhere in the five books where social individualism is defined.

C.-A. B.

Behavior and Action

(Individual Action — Collective Action)

Morals of life by oneself, for oneself and for one's neighbor

Despite teachings of all kinds that sanctify morality and claim it to be somehow innate (which is only true of the instinct of sociability) and therefore unique, I do not hesitate to affirm that an anarchist would be in an unbearable situation if he did not practice two moralities. In public, he appears to conform to everyone else's, because this is the necessary condition of his activities. In his personal life, in his relationships with those close to him, he refers to the general principles that form the basis of anarchism. To refer is not to opt. He rethinks these principles and personalizes them.

This concept of personal life is precisely an ethic of a rationalist order, but not a kind of rationalist catechism. The anarchist constructs or reconstructs an ethic tailored to his own needs. He must therefore gather the necessary materials. He will only find them in the "current" achievements of science, especially anthropology, genetics, biophysics and psychosomatics. Does this mean he must become a scientist? Not at all. He need only take the trouble to read a little and keep himself informed of the level of knowledge, assimilate what is necessary to access general rational ideas and draw some essential deductions from them. An anarchist has a taste for knowledge and an alert mind. What matters to him, however, is less learning than understanding, being trained to observe and reflect so that he knows why he adopts or rejects this or that way of being.

That being said, it remains to say a word about aesthetics, which does not concern only artists. No ethics is worth anything if it is not enlivened by sensitivity and feeling. Sensitivity and feeling escape the rational. Reason never completely controls them. We can therefore say the same of aesthetics. Although it is an object of culture, it has its source in temperament. In fact, it leads to paroxysm as well as rigor, to concerted harmony or paradox. Since it is a matter of temperament, I have nothing to say about it here other than to recall its extreme importance, not only socially, but even more so in this anarchist form of personal life where we necessarily live much within ourselves.

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The duality of a morality, of which only one aspect refers to our ethics, calls for comment. The external demands of accepted morality lead to a relativization of personal morality. It is common sense to accept it by controlling it rather than encounter misunderstandings. What would no longer be common sense would be that relativization became a palinode by lending itself to loopholes. There is an absolute safeguard to this, which lies in the observance of a constant rule of intellectual honesty and loyalty, and in a deliberate refusal to achieve.

By refusal to achieve, I mean disdain for official distinctions and indifference to social vanities, under the guise of a brazen, even insolent, self-seeking self-importance. This should not include professional promotions. It would be unrealistic to consider an anarchist a superman, immune to the natural desire for material well-being and the normal need to demonstrate his abilities.

While the faculties of invention and conception are particular qualities, all men are endowed with a competitive impulse and a spirit of competition, the latter being merely a perversion of the instinct for

emulation. Anyone who wants to call themselves an anarchist simply needs to foster within themselves a taste for healthy competition and then consciously strive to ensure that anarchism benefits from what they obtain, for example, a privileged professional position that falls to them. I say that falls to them because it is out of the question to seek or even accept a promotion that ties them down.

Postulates and action in the social

What motive, some hardcore individualists have objected, compels an anarchist to get involved in social struggles? I simply point out that man is instinctively sociable and that an individualist is never indifferent to others, whatever he may claim. He also forms affinity-based associations, and these, moreover, do not escape the control of those in power. I also point out that the individualist uses social organisms like everyone else, which implies reciprocity. It is reciprocity that justifies a judiciously conceived fundamental egoism. (See my record: "In Praise of Egoism.") Finally, the personal condition of the individualist depends, like any other condition, on his environment. He cannot detach himself from his milieu, from the struggles that manifest there and turn to his advantage or disadvantage. Some casually retort that it's simply a matter of personal self-help. It may be, but then, as far as ethics is concerned, it's a different "milieu."

What distinguishes an anarchist is the originality of his motives, an originality marked by the constraint he imposes on himself to set aside vulgar impulses without being prompted by the hope or fear of sanctions from a hereafter he does not envision. For this same reason, he rejects any ideological finalism as a factor in action. Certainly, he refers to ideas, but to ideas that correspond to what is known in the realm of the positive sciences, from which it follows that his action is situated in the immediate and that the future is merely a subject of hypotheses. He is therefore led to consider that man, according to history confirmed by genetics, has not fundamentally changed since the Paleolithic. There is little chance that eugenics would transform his genetic structure, and, moreover, he would then be someone else, and it is he, and not someone else, who concerns us. Yet, man is not stable. He obeys volitions, both good and bad, which are conditioned by the circumstances of time and place, by traditions, morals, customs and the resulting reflexes. These conditions vary more or less, slowly or suddenly, but they never cease to vary. The anarchist thinks and acts as a consequence of these two seemingly contradictory facts: the constancy of his inner being and the variations of his precepts and attitudes. Herein lies one of the reasons why a mind that is not available is not an anarchist.

This theory of variations explains both ethnic differentiations and the diversity of individual characters and personal qualities. Racisms, chauvinisms, imperialisms, authoritarianisms and caste prejudices have constantly adulterated this biological notion, in order to create and maintain moral and material situations conducive to their abuse. Reducing the conflicts that are their consequence, in all times and under all regimes, is the object of what we call human progress and what, from an anarchist perspective, we would more accurately call behavioral progress. It is indeed changes in the material order of things that result in changes in human relationships. This results, more or less, and depending on the causes of material changes, in new concepts of ethics and aesthetics. It is in the development of these new concepts that the anarchist must locate the field of action that best responds to his vocation as a launcher of ideas, of free criticism in all areas, as an educator of educators, as an agent of prospectives free from systems. This is a statement that makes one smile. Shall I oppose a few names of precursors to the smiles? Not even. One need only think of what seeds a grain of wit, if it contains a

worthy seed, will engender in the hazards of the future. The disadvantage is another. This kind of anarchism is not likely to seduce mediocre ambitions. I would not maintain that this is a real disadvantage.

Of the forms of action

One cannot launch heretical ideas without running up against the prejudices of sects and the privileges of those in power. The anarchist, who constantly encounters animadversion and ostracism, must be proud to deserve them through the rigorous actions of his or her thought, but it is possible to reduce their harmful effects by arousing esteem. This beneficial esteem is squelched by the inconsistencies of vaticinating demagogy and by systematically insulting verbalism. This only appeals to a certain category of people who, certainly, have no lack of reasons for discontent, but who have little reason to be anarchists. They distance themselves as soon as they realize that a ranting anarchism is incapable of keeping false promises.

So what can anarchists do? First, it must avoid recruiting just anyone in order to fulfill, without concessions or vain hype, its dual mission of foresight and opposition through its own unique means: rational critical thinking, satire and irony that command attention, and the complete independence of judgment afforded by its rejection of intrigue and intrigue.

As for becoming the driving force behind organized movements, it can do so by refraining from presenting them as intrinsically anarchist. There are no practical achievements without compromises that lend themselves to compromise. This risks unnecessarily bringing anarchism into disrepute. If it succeeds, a movement led with outside assistance will be attributed to anarchism by its driving force. If it fails, it will be nothing more than an accident on the fringes of anarchism. We avoid missteps by acting, according to the object and the means of each, either alone or in concert with the members of a group, by participating in various organizations (unions, leagues, cultural circles, accessible platforms and publications) and in colloquia where we strive to make anarchist views appreciated, if necessary without proclaiming it too much. More directly, under the cover of an anarchist center and through publications edited in cooperation, it is possible to intervene in “current” problems, outside of any other reference than that of anarchism, by examining these problems as they actually arise, in a given situation, with all the objectivity that neither parties, nor sects, nor even politicized unions can have. Such objectivity is enough to classify and frees us from proselytism. It is through reflection that we come to this anarchism, opposed to the law of numbers.

The Efficacy of Ideas

There is another reason not to claim to develop truly anarchist institutions in a legalistic environment and to prefer parallel organizations. An anarchist, who sees himself as a researcher before being a propagator, would find his availability hampered by the constraints involved in maintaining and developing any organization. It is easier to be supported when doctrine is not involved. But who better than a facilitator to deal with foresight? He cannot ignore that foresight presupposes hypotheses and that a hypothesis, in sociology as in science, requires confirmation by laboratory experiments. The anarchist's experiment is his own life. By introducing the realization of a thesis without a transitional

process, he would distort the method required by objectivity. This is how so many phalansterian colonies have failed.

If, on the contrary, anarchists freely launch ideas into the public eye, even if they have to dress them up and sweeten them somewhat, they compromise neither themselves nor their doctrine, and they nevertheless gain credibility, because anonymity is often relative. I repeat again what is in one of the works in the series: anarchists sow seeds in the fields of others, and it is others who, little by little, select the good seed. For us, some will say, where is the profit?

I would reply: "In the satisfaction of being an anarchist, which you are not since you ask this question."

The Proudhonian Reference

These definitions are not imaginary. I base them on an indisputable reference. Many times I had the opportunity to retort in public that anarchism was only destructive of what was becoming obsolete and that, on the other hand, it was the initiator of constructive activities. I cited federalism, trade unionism, mutualism, collective contracts, contraception, all things which, after decades, have been integrated into the social fabric without the intervention of a libertarian revolution.

It would be vain to object that these things are not what anarchists would like them to be. The fact is that they are, that they were not at the time when a Proudhon, a Robin, conceived them, and that they might still not exist if, instead of adapting them to our times, we had waited for a random revolution to perfect them.

I cannot ignore a remark that is entirely to the benefit of individualism and also of personal action. These achievements, with the exception of contraception, stem from the thinking of Proudhon alone, a Proudhon who clearly declared himself opposed to all communism, who did not stir up crowds and who did not lead anything. After him, Bakunin, who was his opposite, lost a decisive battle against Marx, while Proudhon's positive philosophy held.

Anarchism and Proselytism

It is in the spirit of this Proudhonian philosophy, and perhaps more generally in the spirit of Epicurean philosophy, that I think and say of anarchism that it is a constant and not an end or the search for an end. It is demanding. Too demanding to attract mass adherence, and for that very reason, it only incidentally appeals to ambitious individuals. It is these two facts, normally combined, that turn many libertarians away from the concept of social anarchism. It was once easy to dismiss asocial Stirnerian individualism or Rynierian individualism, classified as high poetry. Referring to Proudhon, social individualism is not defenseless.

I will say right away that its most effective defense lies in its very nature: it does not recruit. Oh! Certainly, it will only exist if it encounters men and women dedicated to it, just as others in laboratories are passionately dedicated to anonymous research in teams, just as missionary monks and nuns are in their convents. What would anarchism be worth if such activists were denied it? Depending on the circumstances, they have never been lacking. It is certainly important that these activists reach many

active sympathizers and that they effectively thwart many adversaries. It is no less important that they not be too numerous themselves. It is rare for numbers to match quality.

To define it in an image, social individualism is found at the top of belfries rather than in the comfort of chambers. It is nonetheless accessible to any open mind, even one with little knowledge. However, it is forbidden to any mediocre mind, even one with a high level of education. If it is necessary for anarchism to teach through the education of a few, it is even better for it to teach through the exemplary behavior of all. We come to it spontaneously. We deviate from it, or it deviates when there is a lack of a sure awareness of the greatness of the “self,” a self whose fraternal inclinations do not prevail at the expense of dignity.

Of this famous hateful self, I spoke in “In Praise of Egoism” of how it enriches itself only for the satisfaction of giving. This is how the Epicureans understood it. Christianity only discredited it by imposing the ineptitude of a morality of masked individuals. I will therefore refrain from writing that if anarchism is demanding, it is because it demands sacrifice. Not so! It only demands that we subordinate by preference — and only by preference — the lowest to the highest. Nothing is to be rejected in life, but the highest is paid for.

Nature and role of the centers

I have cited men of faith dedicated to their religion. I am told: “They have training seminaries, congregations that coordinate their missions. Where are your seminaries? Where are your congregations?” I would be tempted to reply, if it didn't seem like a cop-out, that individualism precludes targeted teaching and the constraints of agglomeration. This would not be entirely true. An anarchist must be trained. It is preferable that he train himself, and books provide for this. Good anarchist writers have had no other teachers. Nevertheless, he benefits from confronting his thoughts with other thoughts, from correcting a certain knowledge with other knowledge. Nor does he escape a very human need for contact. In affinity-based encounters, he enriches his sensitivity with the gifts of friendship, sensual harmonies, and the recreation of the arts. Within a community of thought, its free activities are amplified by cooperation. It is in order to satisfy these assumptions that I advocate the creation of individualist centers.

It goes without saying that such centers cannot be conceived as party sections. It is the diversity, not the conformity of opinions that conditions and constitutes their attractiveness. They provide an opportunity for encounters where solidarity is established, where everyone is enriched by each other's reflections. It is from these encounters that activities are usefully coordinated or specialized. They also serve as a testing ground for personal ideas.

Collective Action and Parallel Activities

At the local level, a center's public events are of various kinds and correspond to the resources at hand. A parallelism of propaganda is organized and allows those working in the same discipline to consult and support one another. It is normal and useful for a center with a fairly large number of members to form working groups and inform activists in order to document the propagandists.

But a center would quickly become anemic if it were merely a kind of seminar. It must also be a cultural center open to the public, either under its own name or by leading a circle competing with

conformist cultural centers. It is also intended to organize all kinds of public meetings on everything related to current sociological issues, whether political, ethical or aesthetic. External support cannot be ruled out for such events, and members of a group themselves cannot be forced to support preconceived themes. It is sufficient that the statements of each group do not deviate from objectivity. Being objective does not mean being infallible, but it does mean recognizing one's errors and correcting them. This intellectual honesty rarely leads to the same attitude among opponents. However, it does lead to a feeling of esteem for the anarchists who practice it. This is not without useful consequences for an action conducted under the guise of anarchism.

As for a certain coordination of the activities of groups, even if they are formed for a specific purpose, it finds its expression in the definition of common views on current events. This is a matter of colloquiums. It is also, in terms of fundamental concepts, a matter of congresses as soon as individualist centers form unions for the purpose of organizing, through a responsible secretariat, the cooperative publication of various publications. It is useful and possible that, outside of their own unions, members of individualist centers or the centers themselves could broaden their contacts and develop their activities by joining an anarchist federation open to all tendencies.

These practical notions are only guidelines. The tool is adapted to the individual. Above all, I wanted to show that an individualist and social center depends solely on initiatives at the local or regional level and that, while such a grouping is capable of supporting the activities of each individual, each individual retains the personal character of their behavior and the freedom to act according to their views and means, both within and outside the center.

It is important to note that while a center, or a group of centers, may support and expand the activities of an activist working according to a concept of social individualism, they are by no means a necessary condition for these activities. An individualist anarchist, as I define him, acts independently and, if necessary, does without the support of a center or group of the same kind. What matters first and foremost is his personality. He is free to manifest it, according to his particular abilities, within unions, leagues, cultural centers, and associations of all kinds. He is not prohibited from founding an association on the fringes of anarchism as long as he animates it in a spirit that does not contradict the essential ethics to which he claims to adhere.

A center is a means, only a means, and not a sectarian gathering. As such, it is adaptable to all forms of action, and its flexibility lends itself to objectives drawn from the most varied disciplines. It is sufficient that the chosen objective contribute to the promotion of the "person" in the combined realms of ethics and aesthetics, that it refers only to reality, and that the basic premise be that of constant availability.

Some will undoubtedly note that such centers are not likely to allow the organization of a specifically revolutionary movement. Why should they be? Revolution is considered today, under the influence of Marxism, as a thing in itself, when it has never been anything more than an intermittent accident (violent or peaceful, sought after or endured, technical or climatic) intervening in the process of evolution. In "Anarchism and the Real," I explained why a properly anarchist revolution is a utopia — in the classical sense of the term — or even nonsense. It is theoretically possible that things could be different with a socialist-libertarian revolution. It is then much more a question of socialism than of anarchism, with what one must expect from competitions between men of action, even libertarians. They show this clearly in their conflicts of tendencies and personalities. Moreover, more than one

rejects the anarchist aim, which does not fit well with democratism. (See below: “Letter to Maurice Fayolle.”) I would like to point out that in any revolution, the individualist anarchist is free to choose, although social, the attitude that, in his opinion, circumstances determine. If he participates, it is only to the extent that a better outcome seems possible to him, and it is toward this better outcome that his action tends without too much illusion. Otherwise, he is in no way forbidden, whatever others may think, to abstain and reserve himself for a deferred action that will be his own and not that of a movement.

I have said nothing about violence and direct action because these are matters of conscience and circumstances. Gandhi himself did not exclude violence in a certain form of self-defense. It is permissible to consider direct action, whether individual or guerrilla, against an excessively abusive dictatorship as an act of self-defense. I am only saying that this is a personal commitment and that direct action — individual or commando — must be designed in such a way as not to compromise groups or individuals who have opted for other methods.

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Anarchism and Libertarian Socialism

(Excerpt from a letter to Maurice Fayolle)

You tell me that “all social life, all organized life, requires, on the part of those who agree to enter this community... the voluntary and conscious surrender of a certain part of their freedom.” This statement is self-evident and is shared by all politicians and sociologists, from monarchists to Marxists included. No one disputes it, except for the absolute individualists, of whom I am not one. However, I understand them as soon as it comes to, as you say, “agreeing to enter a community,” because “accepting” means having freedom of choice. But these individualists only care about themselves; otherwise, they are falling foul of the rules by forming associations of egoists among themselves, according to Stirner. Here too, a contract is required, but different from that of the communist anarchists. The question is therefore, given the nuances within each general tendency, whether or not these anarchists can coexist within the same federation. I will return to this.

Let us first resolve the problem of behavior and action, not in a “chosen” association, but in “the” society which is what it is, composed of men who are what they are and in which, *nolens volens*, anarchists are included. We strive to influence the evolutions of this society (and its revolutions, which are its intermittent accidents) in order to promote an environment where the individual can enjoy maximum freedom compatible with the nature of things and develop the faculties they possess in potential. All anarchists agree on this definition. They differ on the means.

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Libertarian communists join forces to conduct propaganda and revolutionary action, the outcome of which would very likely be a possible anarchist society. Such action implies, as you point out, an accepted discipline that allows for cohesion and coherence. In truth, that would be a party. You defend yourself by specifying that in such an anarchist group, the majority does not impose its decisions on the minority. Very well. Just tell me what happens to cohesion and coherence? In practice, I've noticed that disagreements manifest themselves more between communists than between communists and individualists.

It follows from this that a libertarian society — if it were even a possibility — would be a society like any other. It would oppress its minorities according to the principle of a necessary — and no longer accepted — abandonment of a part of their freedom. There would be an inevitable constraint by reference to the common good. A familiar tune.

I am therefore more logical than the libertarian communists when I say, after and with Proudhon, that “community is the worst of tyrants.” However, since every society is a community, if I defend myself against it as an anarchist, I participate, as a stakeholder, in its activities and developments. Hence my definition of social anarchism, to which I add the clarification that anarchism is, in my opinion, a constant and not an end. I would be an opponent in a so-called libertarian society.

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To this you reply that social anarchism “is an empty formula: there is no possible synthesis between socialism and individualism.” I retort that it's quite likely that the synthesis is difficult with socialist theories. This is why I note that many libertarians are more socialist than anarchist. This fact — which

bothers you — is confirmed by this or that communist or libertarian socialist writer who does not want, or no longer wants, the anarchist ending.

On the other hand, the synthesis between the individualism of personal life and the conditions of social life is not only possible, it exists. I personally fulfilled this “empty” formula during fifty years of strictly anarchist individual life (since I sacrificed my professional interests to it) and uninterrupted social activities. I have campaigned as an anarchist for causes related to freedom, in organizations where I encountered proponents of opposing opinions. Thus, I have met on one platform with priests whom I fought on other platforms, with Marc Sangnier, whom I attacked in a book, with the capitalist Lemaigre-Dubreuil and a future Moroccan minister for the anti-colonialist cause, with François Mauriac himself, and, against the death penalty, with prelates and former ministers, not to mention the Club du Faubourg, free thought, total nudity, demography, and contraception. Didn't Louis Lecoin do the same for conscientious objection? That's a pretty well-filled void.

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It goes without saying that there is no formula that an anarchist can take literally. I am not the last to constantly qualify my positions in practice. It follows that a properly anarchist federalism constitutes an amalgam of tendencies or, more precisely, a liaison body for everything that pertains to common action and, through congresses, a means of contact, the various tendencies each carrying out their own propaganda in parallel.

The path I propose is worth what it is worth. Its advantage is that it has kept me within an anarchist philosophy of life when so many others were moving away from it.

February 1967.

Relativity of Authority and Hierarchy

(Letter to André Arru)

We must first define the meaning adopted in the use of the term anarchism. For Proudhon and the dissident federalists of the First International, it was indeed a society without government, literally: without a leader. Realities softened this view, which became the entirely theoretical object of a world to be built. The various systems envisaged (except for Stirner, who had no plan of any kind) resulted in the reconstitution of government and the state under the guise, in good faith, of other names: communes, mutualist and union associations, federated and confederated, with elected committees (parliaments), offices, and responsible secretaries (governments).¹

The experience of the revolutions of the 20th century has made it clear what the libertarian spirit would become, after a revolution accomplished according to these views. There is general agreement on this point among anarchists of the individualist persuasion and among many others. I therefore turn the page and give another meaning to the term anarchism.

I return to the etymology: *arkhè*, principle, primacy, and *arkhein*, to command, thus the command of those who have power over everything. Anarchism becomes the rejection of this command of those who are first, considered first in all things. This principle is contrary to the discriminatory hierarchy of values, diverse in their own quality and in their distribution. Anarchism reduces the function of government to the limits of its usefulness and the agents of power, each within the framework of their employment. Everything that can be done by agreement between those concerned is governed by free contracts, with the authorities only ensuring the fair execution of the contract. (Cf. “Man and Property.”) The concept of hierarchy thus appears not as a gradation but as a division, even a dispersion, of powers. Exactly the opposite of what I am accused of.

As for authority (*kratos*), it is power. One can discuss the reciprocal qualities and defects of aristocracy and democracy. Both are authority, and we agree — at least among those opposed to devotion to systems — on the illusion of a society organized, so to speak, without authority of any kind. Therefore, until further notice, authority is a fact, whatever form one gives it or endures it. We also agree, because these are observations, that if it is misused by the “*kratos*” against freedom, it is no less necessary for the defense of freedom against the outlaws, small and large, and against the aspirants to absolute “*kratos*.”

Consequently, the problem is not — at least not for long — to abolish authority, but to prevent it from being abused and desacralized. In principle, the fight against abuses is the responsibility of opposition groups (parties, unions, associations). This role is poorly fulfilled because oppositions are driven by self-interest or ambition, or by sectarian ideology. They most often tend only toward substitution. Hence social conflicts and revolutionary propaganda.

¹ According to Stirner, associations of egoists are in no way a social system. We find texts in Proudhon and Kropotkin that discuss reforming or containing the state, rather than abolishing it. I cite these texts in the works in the series.

Who can drive these oppositions in the best direction, denounce their leaders' recantations to activists, denounce the shortcomings of each, if not anarchists? This, in my opinion, is their role. This role can often be decisive, provided that a certain number of us fulfill it and that we never forget that it is with "others" that action is possible and that success can and should only bring anarchists moral satisfaction. Otherwise, we would become a party, with all the recantations that entails. We would no longer be anarchists.

To lead an action against authority, there is no need to deny it. This denial contradicts the obvious and diminishes the credibility of anarchists. It is even less appropriate to claim an anarchist revolution, which we know — if indeed we could have done so — would begin with authoritarianism. (See "Anarchism and the Real.")

Let us turn to hierarchy. Without repeating the definitions given in the books in the series, I maintain and argue that in the order of moral values, an anarchist strives to reach the top. This confers no right other than that of being respected. If we deny him, in accordance with the dogma of the absolute refusal of all authority, a superiority of moral value by allowing him only the right to assert his personality, we reduce him to the level of any individual capable of asserting himself in his own personality, that of a business climber, for example, or of pimping, or of hold-up. At best, and even then it is under the condition of a moral criterion, we arrive at the level of the ambitious of renown, or even of good reputation. So, what is the point of creating difficulties for oneself when it is so simple to be something in the benevolent societies of a hundred species? It is indeed by conviction, by reflection on ethics and by choice of one of the values of ethics that one thinks, lives and acts as an anarchist. It is therefore according to a criterion of value that one determines oneself. This does not mean an absolute superiority over other moral values. This specifies that it is a hierarchy of behaviors.

Conclusion. — Since the term hierarchy (order of the sacred) has long been used in a broad sense, there is no reason to change it. I therefore substitute the hierarchy of individuals and castes or categories with a hierarchy of capacities and values as such. Therefore, each individual, when in a position to exercise a power, whether necessary or useful, does not exercise this power as a person but as the holder of an *ad hoc* capacity. Their authority does not exceed the object of the capacity, within the limits of the responsibility its exercise entails.

In terms of moral value, the best have no powers other than those granted to them voluntarily as an example. This kind of authority is not imposed, and even less so if it is an anarchist moral value. Recognizing it in another is a manifestation of one's own character and honesty. This does not preclude noting the flaws it contains. However, it is wise not to exploit these flaws pettily. It is enough to be aware of them in order to take them into account when necessary.

April 3, 1964.

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On Anarchist Objectivism and Relativized Rationalism

(Response to a critique by André Thérive in "Écrits de Paris," April 1964)

... The essence of my position is this: anarchism is and can only be a philosophy of personal behavior (individualism) from which contingent social action of an individual nature (sociologists, artists) or of an associationist nature (unions, mutual societies, leagues) is determined. This view reduces your objection to "collectivism in things," the answer being contained in the second term of the formula: "individualism in persons."

In truth, your objection is fundamental. It concerns Christianity and that exclusively. Your astonishment regarding Proudhon, the initiator of anarchy, is incidental. It has no other reason than the comments of Georges Valois in the service of monarchist doctrine. Everything is contained within an objective anarchism. This is how the inconsolable adherents of the Fourth Republic — which disgusted me from start to finish — accuse me of pseudo-Gaullism when I note that it wasn't the "left" who decolonized and that it was a general officer who established a status for objectors.

Proudhon was the first publicist to define anarchy as refusal and no longer as the absence of government. (Godwin before him outlined the concept without clearly defining it.) If Proudhon did not found cooperation, he established the theory of mutualism, from which the anarchist Pelloutier developed syndicalism, whose leaders were anarchists. It was his definition of the "federative principle" that founded libertarian communism,² which, in my opinion, is outdated. It is to his theory of contracts that I refer (see "Man and Property") with a view to constructively opposing the excesses of the State. If Proudhon is not an anarchist, then I am not one myself. I will pass over his pornocratic rambles from before prehistory.

I return to Christianity. You mention insufficient exegeses and rationalist banalities. Two thousand years of Christian exegeses have further trivialized the Gospel themes without reducing any of the fundamental involutions, not even the trilemma of Sextus Empiricus. Exegetes today are reduced, in order to respond to new data from prehistory, protohistory and critical history, to considering the Scriptures as symbols, something Pascal foresaw. How can we refer to them then? It is significant that Father Teilhard ignores original sin. (His entire theology refers to the Gospels and to Christ.)

It is even more significant for me that my Catholic friends (among whom are worthy clergymen) leave aside the summary I provide in my book ("Anarchism and the Real") of the rational origins and sociological connections of the various religions, which is a concrete contribution to rationalism. They only retain my position regarding the absolute and its consequences, and they agree with me on morality.

Isn't this a different contribution than the definition of the survival instinct? Professor Chauchard, during a controversy, did not raise any scientific objections to me. He fell back on metaphysical positions.

I have noticed that the anti-rationalist arguments I often had to refute fell away as soon as I resolutely relativized reason, sometimes to the displeasure of sectarian rationalists. The same was true

² Indirectly, Proudhon being mutualist at not at all communist.

when I defended the much-maligned theory of chance by relating it to the law of large numbers, and since then, I have enjoyed referring this view to Father Teilhard.

In summary, the two points in my book that are praised or that offend are those that I define succinctly, even though I hold them particularly dear. Christians are offended by a morality based on intelligent egoism. This cuts through the lyricism of sacred orators. The “liberals” — toward whom you think I would readily lean — cannot sincerely accept the theory of the refusal to succeed. You will tell me that Jean Guéhenno advocated it. Yes, but not in an anarchist spirit, since he unnecessarily became an academic. A prelate understood better, who wrote to me these words: “Your anarchist is an atheist monk.” In fact, this is indeed anarchist behavior, and therefore singular.

The Rationalists and the Church

(Excerpt from a letter to a clergyman friend)

The documents I have been able to read interest me all the more because they are intended for teachers in the Church and not for non-believers. The irreconcilable nature of the way they think and judge is evident in them. This explains why each person refers to their own truth and does not easily deviate from it. Hence, strictly speaking, the obligation to respect the thoughts of others and their expressions, which implies the possibility of investigating and contradicting them.

You will not dispute that, in the past, the Church has not distinguished itself by affirming this right and demonstrating this respect. Thus, anticlericalism was made necessary. I am quite willing to see it overcome in its most acute form. A state of vigilance will persist among free minds because there will always be abusive clerical minds in all Churches, let's say in all sects.

In this regard, the papal letter on "The Common Good and the Person in the Contemporary State" (May 1964) marks a development that arouses some humor in me. I am tempted to write that, on the fringes of the divine, on the temporal plane of social philosophy, the Church is rallying to the essential principle of anarchism. When, in this letter, I read that "an accurate definition of the common good requires a constant reference to the human person," I see a parallel to the definition I give in my book: "Collectivism in things, individualism in persons." Moreover, the text as a whole clarifies the primacy of the person as we understand it.

The analysis of a study by Cardinal Béa on "the historicity of the Synoptic Gospels" hardly allows us to agree or convince each other. It is enough for me — it is enough for any rationalist mind — to be able to state why historicity is called into question.

This study clearly opposes exegeses based on the method of "the history of forms," that is, the criticism of styles, of divergences in the content of texts, of their relationship to contemporary narratives. The analysis it provides of the psychology of the time and that of the writer in that time, of the specific intentions of the editors, by which the obvious divergences between the three Gospels are mitigated, if not entirely justified, is neither lacking in interest nor in psychological truth. On the other hand, it is without historical value — whatever the author may claim — in that it is essentially based on two presuppositions. First, the *a priori* postulate that the Gospels are necessarily endowed with inerrancy because, "in addition to being the work of men, they are at the same time and principally the work and word of God himself." However, for the unbeliever, it is not a question of proving the historicity of the Gospels by the reality of God, but the reality of God by the historicity of the Gospels.

Then, this other postulate: historicity is affirmed by the testimony of contemporaries and, particularly, that of the apostles. We will note that contemporaries in general do not bear witness at all. The Romans are silent. The Sanhedrin is so little dazzled by the miracles and by the figurative words of the Man-God who came to enlighten the world that it has Jesus tortured. As for the apostles, their "testimonies" were not written, and partly by third parties (Mark and Luke), until well after Paul's preaching.

Moreover, the study does not dispute the fragility of the human testimony it seeks to place in context. Unintentionally, the author highlights its uncertainties by citing Paul himself, who did not

know Jesus, as a witness: “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” (1 Cor. 11:23) He received from the Lord! Where? When? How?

When the author of this critique criticizes rationalist exegetes for claiming that the material in the Gospels is made up of legends created by a pre-Christian popular milieu, he cites as evidence to the contrary an organization of religious groups between which the apostles maintained a liaison and ensured the maintenance of orthodoxy. The drawback of this “proof” is that it comes after Jesus’ death and refers to the Pauline texts.

None of this sufficiently explains the discrepancies observed in the accounts concerning the Resurrection. However, only the materiality of the Resurrection would prove God through the divinity of Jesus.

The following lines from the study in question will not convince me of the veracity of the Scriptures: “... Jesus sent twelve apostles to us, so that they might complement one another and so that their testimony might be not only more solid but also richer and more exhaustive, as much as possible.” Don’t you think that if Jesus was so keen for the “testimony” to be solid, rich, and exhaustive, he would have acted wisely by entrusting the apostles with the task of preserving and transmitting a text written by his own hand?

It is curious that so much was written after his death and after Paul spoke, while nothing from his time has come down to us. It is even more curious that the preaching of Jesus and then of the apostles initially neglected to inform the Romans and completely ignored the existence of the Chinese, the Americans, and the Australians. As the Pope said more or less at the Council, God’s intentions reveal themselves slowly.

In my opinion (I mean, in my opinion, nothing more) things seem to have happened as if an Essene sect, related to the reformist school revealed to us by the Dead Sea Scrolls, an enemy of the Roman occupiers and even more so of the collaborating clerics, had led an effective agitation under the leadership of a prophet who called himself or had himself called Jesus (the Jeschouah — Jehovah saves — common among the Jews.) The vindictive and hateful Sanhedrin, wanting to make an example, had seen to it that the condemned man, instead of being attached to the cross as was customary, be nailed to it, which would have caused scandal and horror. Wasn’t the centurion’s spear thrust a gesture of pity?

Thus, Jesus would have appeared to the resistant sects as an exceptional hero, and the fabrication surrounding his life and name would have developed according to a psycho-sociological process of which there are abundant examples. It was then that the learned and talented Paul, led to the reform for reasons that remain unknown, supposedly enacted the great vision and promoted the Christ myth.

The texts apply to this view in no better or worse a manner than to that of the Church. What remains incontestable is that the Christian religion, organized and defined, only begins with Paul. What is also no less debatable is that things are the same everywhere in the world, whether one believes in Christ, Vishnu, Buddha, Muhammad or the eternity of energy within oneself.

Regarding the hymn to the Aten, which scholars consider the clearest of the first monotheistic texts, I will only note that the “fact” of the monotheistic tendency is concretized in Ammon-Ra. I could not mention the Aten in my book without explaining it. This was not my purpose and it was useless to me because Aten is merely a substitute for Ra, imposed by Amenhotep IV as a political

reaction to the Theban gods. His symbol is the solar disk, which is also that of Ra. However, it is stated in a hymn to Ra that the latter is the creator god: "All men are born from his eyes and all the gods are born from the word of his mouth."

The sun evoked is therefore only concrete as the visible form of the creator god. The hymn to the Aten repeats the hymn to Ra: "You created the earth according to your desire. You alone..." It was not of a concrete star that the scribe would have written: "How excellent are your thoughts, O Lord of Eternity." If I add that the Books of the Dead taught the existence of an afterlife where happiness was promised only to the charitable, the truthful and the pious toward the dead, I will be permitted, sticking to the essentials, to maintain that the biblical symbols come from Sumer via Chaldea and that the judgments of the afterlife according to the Egyptians were not unknown to Moses. Perhaps, sticking to an uncertain dating, he did not know the hymn to the Aten, but he did know the cult devoted to Ra. In this regard, a reference to Aten is questionable. I have avoided it.³

What should be remembered from all this are the constants of human psychology, men tending to rationalize the irrational in order to satisfy their need for answers to vain whys. At least, the result was that they very early on emphasized moral behavior. They continue to emphasize it. They forget a little too much to emphasize the letter. It is this deficiency that gives meaning to our parallel activities.

September 15, 1964.

³ My correspondent disputed that Moses had substituted the one god Yahweh for the ancestral gods, the Elohim, this plural made singular by a supposed mark of excellence, the royal "we." Now, in Genesis, in the chapter "The Fall of Man," we read: "And God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us..." One of us demands that we be many. Why did we not notice this curious oversight!

The Influence of Hegel

(Note on the Origins of Anarchism)

I note in my booklet “The Democrat Before Authority” a sentence that seems ambiguous to me, and I believe it is worth clarifying. I wrote (p. 35) on the role of parties in the 20th-century revolution: “...the anti-Hegelian disciples of Bakunin and Proudhon intervening as a third party through the intermediary of syndicalism”

One might think that the actions of Bakunin and Proudhon are thus defined as anti-Hegelian *a priori*. However, we know that Bakunin was initially, according to the fashion of the time, under the influence of Hegel, from whom he later turned away. As for Proudhon, while his originality was too pronounced for Hegel's philosophy to have had a profound impact on him, he was not indifferent to Hegelianism, and Marx could boast of having infected him with it. This contamination did not go beyond the pronounced taste for thesis and antithesis, which has caused some misunderstandings. Above all, it provoked Proudhon's rejection of synthesis, which he considered an obstacle to the movement of life. This attachment to the interplay of contradictory themes, this rejection of sclerosis in systems, is precisely anarchist openness.

If I have made this kind of clarification, it is because, from the perspective of “Social Individualism,” there is no better reference than the diversity of a writer who embraces all the nuances of anarchist thought.

Revealed Scriptures

(Another letter to a clergyman friend)

When I write that the All is perhaps energy, you seem to translate: Everything is only materiality, whereas I am saying, on the contrary, that the All is spirit because absolute energy (observed and indefinable in its essence) contains the potentialities attributed to the gods or to God. It appears to me in the Absolute as God freed from his involutions and anthropomorphic contradictions.

To this view, you, like any believer in a defined God, oppose the texts of Revelation, held *a priori* to be authentic and supposedly confirmed by scientific authorities. To this I retort that in this matter, the “authorities” often depart from their specialty and are then nothing more than what they are. Father Teilhard, for example, is a geologist and an anthropologist, not a biologist. In theology, he is a poet. This in no way diminishes the interest of his work, unless one considers it an indisputable reference.

In any case, it is prudent not to seek out the correct references. I have not read that Kramer wrote that he had observed similarities with the Bible in Sumerian texts, as you make him say. He noted precedents. The essential facts recorded in Genesis are among the Sumerians; their development is apparent through Chaldean legends, and, as luck would have it, Abraham was Chaldean, from Ur, which was in Sumerian territory. When Kramer tells us how a misunderstanding due to a poor translation caused the woman to emerge from Adam’s rib, it takes a great deal of goodwill to accept Genesis as revealed Scripture. That after this Kramer — who is neither a literary critic, nor an art critic, nor a physicist — claims that the Bible shows “a creative vigor without equal in the history of the world,” he has a right to express a Christian opinion, which is only an opinion. One can prefer the Greek “miracle” of the 5th century, especially when it comes to positive sciences. It is indeed in Genesis that I read that on the first day God created the earth and light, and on the fourth day the stars, which provide this light, which would have preceded them, and the sun after its satellite around which, what is more, it would have revolved at that time. I also read that fish and birds were created like that, all at once. We do not see bacteria, coelenterates and, curiously, reptiles appear after the birds. Obviously, the Hebrews had not heard of a certain archaeopteryx, or they had misunderstood the story God had told them. In these matters, there are self-evident confirmations that are found in China as well as in Judea. It is the errors that count.

We are entitled to think that the evangelists, who did not write until several decades after the event, are as dubious as their grandfathers. A scrap of writing in Jesus’ hand would have served us better. This is a carelessness that could well denounce a trick by Lucifer. There is a touch of Mazdaism in the relationship between the Devil and the Good Lord. I also find an echo of it in rationalism, with Lupasco’s theory of antagonisms, which we encounter in Proudhon’s theory of balanced opposites, who must have borrowed it more or less from Heraclitus.

At base, human concerns are of the same order — with varying degrees of logic and, above all, illogic — in all religions and philosophies. The sun god Mythra (still Mazdaism) is the universal symbol. He was not ignored by the Greeks despite Phoebus; the Christians had to pursue him as far as Britain. Is he not ultimately the god of torchbearers of rationalists? This, and this alone, is important to anyone who tries not to live merely at ground level.

On the Equilibrium of Opposites

(Supplement to the previous letter)

The reference to Heraclitus calls for comment. While the Ionian philosopher's reputation has suffered from the obscurity of his style, he nonetheless demonstrated an extraordinary stroke of genius when he stated that nothing is, everything becomes, and that this becoming occurs through the interchanges, in a continuous movement, of identical opposites. Twentieth-century science confirms this identity when everything is reduced to the unique energy of tiny particles whose movement causes galaxies to burst, just as a drop of water does when two gases combine.

This worldview was stifled for some twenty-five centuries by the spirit-matter duality of various religions, especially Christianity. Today, it is not only in the physical order that it is reasserting itself. A universe constituted in its whole and its parts by an unstable equilibrium of identical opposites calls into question all philosophy and places the human condition in a perspective far removed from spiritualisms born solely of the imagination.

In an article published in "Contre-Courant" (May 20, 1967), I outlined the idea of an atheistic spiritualism based on unitary energy.⁴ This may be merely a figment of the imagination. It is as good as others, since it corresponds to the logic of my individualism. What is certain is that the concept of balanced opposites in continual interference, according to immutable fundamental laws, eliminates the notions of good and evil *per se*. Good and evil are such only relatively and are only possible through each other. Life and death are opposites, but it is the elements whose arrangement is modified by death that we find in the life process. Life is movement. The law of the living is therefore the incessant action of the whole being, body and mind, the action necessary for the existent to be alive. The change we call death disperses us, just as everything disperses and transforms into new states.

Husserl's phenomenology, from which emerged the absurd idea of absurdity that feeds on existentialism and which leads to certain dreamlike excesses of psychoanalysis, lags behind Heraclitus. Philosophers will agree when they have rediscovered the paths of experimental science. What is especially important to note is that this law of the balanced movement of identical opposites, by eliminating the notion of good and evil in themselves, frees theologians from a problem they have never been able to resolve. How could they have, since this problem did not exist? But then, what becomes of the God they conceive, as they conceive Him, implying this problem? The fact remains that the good and evil that men do to one another are not without the intelligent will of men themselves. If carnivorous wolves do not eat one another, it is because there is no natural imperative for us to be more foolish and ferocious than wolves. There, and there alone, lies the problem of good and evil. Its solution depends on reflective and combative reason more than on homilies.

⁴ A translation of the article has been appended to this collection. — TRANSLATOR

An Attitude of Continuity

(Theme of a conference with René Bianco and Roland Lewin)

What can we hope for from human evolution? The answer to this question determines any philosophy of action. Most ideologues — by which I mean those of often passionate good faith — believe in the continuity and expansion of an education that would fundamentally transform psychology. Fewer practitioners of the human sciences refer to the less exciting but less disappointing data of biology.

Even today, too many social activists remain dominated by 19th-century philosophy and science. Indeed, these latter promoted the revolutions of the 20th century, those of socio-political upheaval and, more so, those of laboratories. However, if Léon Daudet's quip about the stupid 19th century is nonsense, it is nonetheless a fact that the notion of intrinsically human progress, as conceived by contemporary thinkers, is no longer acceptable. Undoubtedly, progress in science and technology has exceeded expectations. The fact remains that men are not certain of being capable of mastering their inventions. In what detestable spirit do they not use them too often, and do we not sense how apt and prescient was Rabelais's apostrophe: "Science without conscience is only the ruin of the soul"? Ultimately, it could be the ruin of humanity.

This is because — as has been said in response to excessive optimists — the adaptation of morality to technological means is far from being seamless and disruptive. Unlike André Chénier's poetics, we live in new times based on ancient thoughts. One need only see, in the field of ecology, how individual molehills resist the impetus of skyscrapers, where promiscuity is better protected than in the crammed shacks. The discrepancy and the delays have a reason that must not be concealed if we wish to orient moral education according to an accurate assessment of psychological constants and to extract from these constants, at least for our own use, a definition of the attitudes that it is good to observe in social relations.

It is not my purpose to analyze in a few sentences the data of this problem, which falls within the domain of psychoanalysis (when it avoids subjectivity) and, better still, of psychosomatics. It is therefore sufficient to recall the achievements of science in these fields to situate the conditions of our mental evolution. It is indeed a question of the evolution of behaviors, not of progress. It is, of course, considerable progress in the realm of knowledge. In the realm of psychology, there is only a modification of traditional reflexes, which are far less personal than dictated by environmental influences.

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All ethics, whether individual or social, totalitarian or anarchist, stem from the idea we have of evolution. For an anarchist who distrusts illusory formulas, this idea is defined based on observations and not theories. It is an unconscious reference to religious or metaphysical motivations to believe in a psyche capable of being fundamentally transformed by an education that must be renewed each generation and by economic development which, while likely to introduce greater justice into society, will in no way affect the individuality of character. Consequently, we cannot develop a meaningful outlook on ethics without considering the people who shape society. We have always seen them shape it

to best serve their own interests or ambitions, cultivating the antics and tricks of fallacious philanthropy.

Do not the most ancient chronicles of all peoples of all time teach us that men obey emotional reflexes that outward manifestations, in accordance with prescribed morality, only disguise? Biology explains this continuity, whatever existential philosophy may say. Since, until further notice, acquired characteristics are not transmitted, our gene pool has not varied since the beginning. It therefore determines, according to the law of large numbers, an equally invariant average of the good and bad faculties of men.

Will it be said, referring for example to conditioning techniques, that the psyche escapes the rigor of this law? We do not see how. Apart from the fact that these procedures, including the use of hallucinogens, are not exactly willpower strengtheners, they cannot change in a transmissible way the constitution of the cortex, the neurons, the glands, the metabolism in a word. They have no other effect than to deteriorate and degenerate. A healthy education therefore requires that the culture of the use of each person's own faculties does not neglect to utilize, rather than suppress, the instinctive nature, the infraconscious, if you prefer. It is the nonsense of idealistic morals that discredits culture and provides pretexts for proponents of authoritarian strictness.

On the other hand, it is certain that the influence of an objective education, combined with that of a healthy environment, allows for improved attitudes in social relationships. This certainty is supported, among other things, by the experiment of raising identical twins in different environments, which allowed us to observe that the way of being of each of them reflected the characteristics of their foster homes.

I deduce from these observations that Pyrrhonian skepticism, the ancestor of anarchist circumspection, leads to a rational optimism and a propaganda campaign consistent with reality. I love and practice poetry. However, I do not agree to place the poetry of illusion above thought, and I consider the description of reality, of a behaviorism in which the totality of life is inscribed and which is thus a source of virile poetry, to be futile. If I appreciate the vertigo of summits as much as anyone else, it is when I feel my feet firmly planted on the rock. I do not relish the attraction of precipices. It will not be disputed that the failures of the doctrines of illusion discourage lucid individuals who are momentarily seduced.

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After violent revolutions conducted in line with some ideology, neither censure nor homilies can mask the consequences that follow. These are denounced in the intrigue, competition, harshness, hypocrisy, and arbitrariness of triumphant leaders and their henchmen. Structures have been disrupted, privileges have been abolished. Other privileges have been established for the benefit of individuals whose mentality mirrors that of their predecessors. This must be understood in advance and a revolution must only be expected to bring new standards into line with the means of the times, so that, all things considered, the greatest number will benefit. It is still wise to assume that this gain will be deferred.

It is from this conformity to reality that the effectiveness of educational and activist action is conceivable, with the aim of arousing desires for well-being and greater well-being that affect all individuals, to varying degrees no doubt, but with less variation through the effect of maximum

equalization of means. However, individuals will not be changed. It is their impulses that will change their focus. Socially valuing beneficial tendencies and suppressing aggression through the penalization of public disparity encourages honesty in the game of common interests. Man then appears and acts as if he were different. This is how technological progress, by enriching the community, determines a phenomenon of humanization on the mental as well as the material level.

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It is from this perspective that the oppositional action of anarchists must be oriented today, tomorrow, and always. They are destined to manifest themselves in this spirit because they are not alone, they will never be alone in resisting the organizers and profiteers of herd mentality. From philosophical or religious positions, many are inclined toward the rise of humanity, many are concerned with education, the defense of personality. Their efforts are limited — and they are aware of this — by the constraints inherent in their profession, their social status, and even by the restrictions imposed by their ideology. The most discerning are not indifferent to the outbursts of anarchists when they react to tolerated, if not accepted, misdeeds that they alone can denounce. If, by denouncing them, they are able to propose concrete corrections that are applicable in the present and not just in some undetermined future, they command attention, all the more so because they provide a pretext for others who are less free to pose problems that they themselves would not dare or be able to address. It is the deliberate disinterestedness of anarchists that gives them this effectiveness. This is why I have said, and I maintain, that their personal satisfaction lies not in success but in the enjoyment of the rationality of their ethics, in the awareness of the benefits that result, for oneself and for others, from conforming to fundamental biological drives as soon as they are selected and adapted by intelligences without metaphysical screens.

In this sense, and from an anarchist perspective, I emphasize the importance of an egoism linked, on the one hand, to the instinct of self-preservation and, on the other, to a conception of mutual aid and reciprocity, which, far from being antithetical to it, is its blossoming. (See my recording: “In Praise of Egoism.”⁵)

To those who claim, not without disdain, that this ethic of behavior is just behaviorism, I respond by emphasizing what I said above about evanescent poetry, which is most often infertile. It is excellent that this ethic refers to scientific data, but it goes further. The conception of an essential “self” that seeks to expand and surpass itself results in a *de facto* altruism that is neither metaphysical nor moralizing.

The guarantee against the disappointments that lead so many young virtual beings, so many potential forces, to abandonment lies in a deliberate, precisely anarchist, will of thoughtful skepticism toward ideologies. It is based, however, on a certainty about the intrinsic dynamism of evolutions that are constantly promoted by the dissatisfactions and curiosities inherent in humankind.

Without being exceptional, the qualities required by anarchism are not the most widely shared. This is why an anarchist, if he knows himself to be, if he wants to be a promoter, if he frees himself from vain concerns about finality, is assured of finding within himself the justification and reward for

⁵ A translation of the text has been appended to this collection. — TRANSLATOR

his steadfastness. It is good, and perhaps necessary, that the instrument of his activities be a sieve rather than a megaphone.

September 1967.

The Sustainability of Anarchism

(Concluding summary)

I am reminded that some libertarian communists or socialists, who claim to be revolutionaries in the politico-social sense of the term, have renounced or demand that those of their tendency renounce what they call the anarchist label. That anarchist label, from their perspective, conceals a very questionable sort of anarchism. They are disturbed by it and disturb still more the propagation of a specifically anarchist philosophy.

In the current political climate, the libertarian socialists are — with the Trotskyists and other small varieties of revolutionaries — oppositional elements within a movement more generally related to communism. Now, all communism is by nature a matter of herds and herding, and thus the opposite of anarchism. That is what Proudhon saw very clearly in his encounter with Marx. I have noted somewhere that communism collectivizes persons at the same time as things.

Anarchism is not a label. It is the proper name of an evolving philosophy that defines an ethic and aesthetic of individual life, whatever the society we live in at a given time. Its scientific sources date back to Democritus and Anaxagoras, its moral science to our Epicurus, its method of understanding facts, its attitude toward the facts, to the skepticism of Pyrrho. It is thus more ancient than Christianity, which has not been able to destroy it and which has borrowed a great deal from it by means of stoic interventions. It is by means of interference of this sort that the anarchist philosophy passes from the individual to the social. Rigorous with regard to the mode of individual life, it concerns itself, as a critical method, with the reality of the present. It is a humanism active in living social relations and, with regard to the social to come, it promotes potential ideas and not systems. As a result, it claims to be revolutionary, but deeply so.

The autonomy of thought, for an anarchist, is without restriction. In this sense, the anarchist is entirely individualist. The critical and cultural expression of their thought calls, on the contrary, for a free association with other anarchists. However, in a society organized according to the psycho-social definitions of the times and places, the positive activities of all anarchists can only be related to existing circumstances. They are effective only in the form of interventions within organizations with progressive motives and, in concert with those organizations, against conservative or reactionary associations. It is in this way that the individualist is in fact social while avoiding catechized socialism.

That notion — among others — reconciles the secondary differences, normally abundant in an anarchist milieu, as soon as we envision action as a kind of persistent harassment of the real and not as a means of achieving some preconceived—consequently limiting and, to say the least, unpredictable — system. We have known too many revolutions in our century to be ignorant of their contingency and to be unaware that the anarchist remains unsatisfied by them when he is not permanently muzzled — if not liquidated. The crowd and its ringleaders, whatever name they assume, are not anarchists.

The fact remains that a harassing action makes sense and has effect only if it is reflective, supported by references and attentive investigations. That demands, besides a minimum of intercollaboration, labor, gratuity, honesty in judgment and attacks. What we combat is not necessarily of bad quality any more than we are of excellent quality in all things. Such an attitude is less easy to hold than that of a

demagoguery of anti-everything or of the splendor of the multitudes. It demands, along with character, a certain detachment from contingencies. But, when related to the constants of an anarchist philosophy, it has duration on its side and, as a result, an efficacy over time. It confers, in the present, the satisfaction of constructing our own personalities and of feeling that we exist by and for ourselves, with the other who is our brother or sister.

APPENDIX:

The Rationalist Echo:

An Atheist Spiritualism

Humans are concerned, from a perspective of immortality, with the nature of the spirit, which they conceive only as the intrinsic element of their personality, of which the corporeal elements are merely the Support. Although 20th-century science has denounced the futility of the spirit-matter dualism, the fact remains that we want to be animated by what is called the soul, in the literal sense of the term, a soul particular to each one, and it is important that it be immortal, while preserving its particularity. Everyone, except atheists, thinks this way, including deists.

Why torment ourselves so much with a problem that must be imaginary, since we can only find imagined solutions to it? While it fascinates the intellect, it is foreign to rational thought. Intelligence would undoubtedly benefit from not becoming overly passionate. It would avoid encountering irreconcilable contradictions. I am speaking of contradictions, not antagonisms, which are the balanced modalities of energy in motion. In fact, the problem of the spirit is the problem of God, and the problem of God is probably only that of energy. But this is not the angle from which we approach it when we worry about the conditions of survival.

This is how I was led to respond to a Spiritualist friend, which I will later supplement with a perspective, addressed to others, on the emerging conceptions of an atheistic spiritualism.

“An intelligence that explores cannot become independent of thought, and thought soon becomes astonished by the inconsistencies of what you call the spirit. It is said that faith cannot reason. This is true. It is even more true that it must not reason.

“How can we discuss things based on a term as vague as spirit? Like the soul, it is breath, it is ‘anima,’ it is immaterial or fluidic (it depends on the school); sometimes it is called intelligence, or even thought (superior, of course), and what else?

“When a word has so many meanings, it is because it has no precise definition. It is permissible to discuss the mechanisms of intelligence, the formation and expression of thought. If we speak of the spirit by referring to any one of its twenty definitions, we realize that we have simply expressed a thought. I don’t say a well-founded thought, but a thought nonetheless.

“In the final analysis, for men of faith, the spirit is the breath of the gods, the indefinite force that animates, that gives life, or even God himself (pure spirit), and all of this means exactly nothing.

“Man is absolutely determined to give a name and a face to the unthinkable eternity. This is fine as long as we believe in it. We no longer believe in it once we have dismantled the psychological mechanism of the creation of the gods, from prehistory to the approaches to modern times. I return to what I have often said and sometimes written about the history of religions: man builds a mirror in which he believes he sees God, but in which he sees only his own reflection.

“Why not modestly accept knowing only what research uncovers, using only this knowledge, while dreaming of unknown or unexplained things, without striving to pretend to confer reality on these figures of our dreams? They either are or they are not. They could not be, in any case, as we imagine them. If the imagination had such power, it would easily grasp the facts thus understood and defined.

“Don’t you think that life poses enough difficulties and gives us enough worries without the need to add subjective concerns, which, far from liberating us, invent unnecessary constraints?”

It seems that man cannot avoid this subjectivity, since the literature of all times and places, from oral folk tales and legends to learned metaphysics, is nothing but a game of definitions of the indefinable.

It is surprising that so many gods populated the heavens for millennia without anyone realizing that these diverse gods had only one thing in common, which is the absolute, or, if you will, mystery. Indeed, some will tell me, Judeo-Christianity understood that God would not exist if he were not unique. Let us note immediately that this accepted assertion is inaccurate. When Yahweh supplanted the Judaic Elohim, Moses left Egypt, where Amenhotep IV attempted to impose the supremacy of the royal god Aton and where, through the combination of Ra and Ammon, the god of gods, Ammon-Ra, was finally enthroned. It is not, moreover, necessary for God to be unique. In Mazdaism, if Ormuzd, the god of good, created the world, he did not create his adversary Ahriman, the god of evil. It is obvious that this opposition is more in keeping with the reality of things than the Christian idea of a just and good God, which can only be conceived if we accept that those who love well punish well. Zarathustra was a thinker of greater common sense. He had skillfully resolved the famous problem of good and evil, which our theologians have never been able to resolve.

Thus, we encounter the incongruity of the existence of several unique gods, and we find the only common definition, which is the Absolute. Now, the Absolute is, strictly speaking, if not inconceivable, since it is named, at least elusive. It is therefore absurd to claim to know it and to give it a face. In sound logic, wouldn’t atheism be the only one: a pure religion, the religion of the Absolute? Isn’t the connection, the participation in the indefinite All, felt and accepted as such, a higher spirituality than the childish illusion of one’s reflection in a deified mirror?

That our fathers opposed matter to spirit was understandable. It was then pertinent to argue that there was no manifested thought without a material medium. In our time, when it was discovered that everything is fundamentally energy, it appeared that mind and matter were of the same essence and, consequently, different modalities of the same energy. As soon as we reflect on the data of atomistics and learn that the tiny particles that constitute a tiny atom are themselves constituted by even smaller particles, called quarks, and that the universe is made of the assembly of these quarks, besides feeling dizzy, we are justified in wondering if everything is not soul, in the literal sense of *anima*. From there, to thinking that everything is spirit!... Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. And yet, don’t we know that a cell has its own life, its choices, its reactions? That our genes have a memory?

This is indeed one of the paradoxes of our time: an atheist, far from denying the spirit, comes to find it everywhere. In fact, why should man be the only one endowed with mind? How can we

distinguish between mind and intelligence? If we cannot do so, it follows that the animal, which is intelligent, has wit. It even sometimes demonstrates it at our expense. What do we know about its way of thinking? It expresses undeniable thoughts through gestures. We would know a little more if we understood its language. Is there not a current of spirit that escapes us even in a plant? The sensations it gives us, how does it give them to us? Through our senses? We like to think so, but when I am moved by the sight of a tree that I do not touch, how is contact established? Others, who also have eyes, pass by indifferently. These are the things that poets are said to have a presentiment of. How many have they not foreseen that science would later confirm!

If everything is energy, including thought waves, if this energy is indefinable in itself, if we refer to the ultimate particles without being able to know anything other than their manifestation, we return to the potentialities that we attribute to God. Nothing therefore prevents energy from being conceived as being eternal.

Therefore, the term God is a synonym; the mystery of the Trinity is the mystery of Being in three words: Absolute, Energy, God. Under one or the other of these names, this All is eternal and unthinkable. So don't paint me a picture of it; don't tell me what it wants and what it doesn't want. What do you know about it? Exactly what physics and biology are discovering about the infinite complexity of its mechanisms, of which we are tiny parts, destined for a function that escapes us. To imagine this function is not to know it; on the contrary, it is too often to hinder its search.

It is the conception of life and death that we adopt within this forever unknowable absolute that separates a religion of salvation from atheistic philosophy. The latter inclines man to accept himself where he is, as he is. The former encourages him to imagine himself as he would like to be. Where is the strength of character? Will it be said that it diminishes man to place him at his rank in the world where his destiny is fulfilled? Is it not, in another way, calling it to grow by wanting to be constantly richer in properly spiritual elements in order to be, more intensely, in felt and thought participation with a universe that is alive in each of its molecules and is it not, in this way, engaging it to want to be closer to man?

This is all well and good, one might think, but the mystery of the afterlife remains unsolved. It remains so, and I explained this in my book *Anarchism and the Real* in the chapter on "Anarchism and Destiny." I recalled what Montaigne thought about it and quoted Spinoza's judgment: "wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death." One must still be wise, and not everyone is capable of thinking of death as Epicurus said: "It is never present. When I am there, it is not there. When it is there, I am no longer there."

Many are in a state of mind that led one of my listeners, who was no fool, to confide to me after a controversy with a priest: "I have nothing to object to your argument. However, I absolutely need, even if it's a weakness, to believe that there is something."

In this way, this man unwittingly echoed a note in Paul Valéry's *Journal*: "Everything they say about life and death is a fable. But there is *something*."

Certainly! There is the imponderable universal energy and the very ponderable universe in constant transformation, according to the constant laws of this very energy where opposites are balanced. It follows that the notions of good and evil only have meaning as far as we are concerned. Life

and death are but two moments in the same chain of events; the former exists only through the latter; the organic world maintains itself only by devouring itself.

I agree with Epicurus's thought, adding only that the notion of good and evil regains meaning for us when it is men who devour each other. Now, this concerns life, which is a certainty. If a highly improbable beyond personal life is a fact, we will see it when it becomes relevant to us. On the other hand, we should know that it is *hic et nunc*, here and now, that we would have learned to use it if, instead of dreaming of survival, we were committed to living, as far as society does not forbid us, the best of ourselves.

This best lies in an open mind, which an active sensitivity constantly awakens, a mind that is not and does not want to be satisfied, that knows that dissatisfaction is our driving force and that a man from La Trappe, a woman from Carmel, live only from dissatisfaction: that of not having achieved the survival of their dream. But we know that there are also unbelieving businessmen who are, on a completely different level, aggressively dissatisfied with being merely businessmen. In this respect, the spirit does not fail to reassert itself.

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In Praise of Egoism

A eulogy for egoism may seem like a challenge.

I will approach this debate cautiously, with a question: Why do so many men and so many women, who in youth were passionate about an idea, resign themselves too soon to the mediocrity of a life without impetus? I do not think that we should blame the material difficulties. On the contrary, it is to these difficulties, which everyone continues to face, it is to the conditions of this struggle that young people first attach themselves. But they only do this when they are endowed with a minimum of sensitive intelligence, with a perspective that goes beyond daily needs. They dream of a prosperous life in a peaceful world.

So where do the skepticism and abandonment come from, if not from the bankruptcy of the means? In truth, the condition of man, which has too often been said to be absurd, seems to justify the relentless determination to seize and enjoy of the voracious and cunning. There remains no other choice, for anyone who is not a carnivore, but withdrawal or faith in a world in-progress, which is only bad because it is incomplete. It is on this illusory program that the builders of idyllic kingdoms have worked and still work.

For millennia, impulsive and fervent men have wandered in these misty realms. This is where the ravenous have organized the collection of the spoils of power and money. Does this mean that the strength of the mind is a trick? If I thought so, I wouldn't bother to talk about it. Mind, like matter, is worth what you make of it. An explosive material can make a shell or an engine. The mind embellishes the real or damages it.

This is the problem of the thinking being: to know how to embellish what is and not to hope that the artificiality of myths materializes. Oh! Certainly, a myth can have the beauty of a poem. It is preferable that we do not degrade it and that it remains the poetry of the dream. It has been rightly said that dream is a refuge. I don't understand why people want to make a springboard of it. It is the field of the imagination, as it was already for the magician-painters of the quaternary caves.

I know that I will be accused later of reducing the mind to the level of pragmatism. We will speak about it again. But I could ask right away whether it is by making the ideas arise from the real or by making them fall from the skies that one degrades the spirit.

Let's leave the images behind and turn to the concrete. The concrete is undoubtedly defined in technology and economics. But the way to organize it, the way to use it comes down to politics and, consequently, to directives that are both religious and philosophical in nature. They determine and regulate the morality of the citizen and arrange the immorality of power. To see how the world evolves, it must be admitted that the essential principles and their attendant illusions vary very little over time. The progress of techniques only modifies the appearances of the behaviors. Personal impulses only change objects.

The corrections that two thousand years of social evolution and scientific revolutions have introduced into the Christian morality that governs us have not touched, even among atheists, those prejudices that it is improper even to question. These range from the incontinences of sex to the respectability of the philanthropists. Feelings that are said to be highly human are taboo by general consent. We have the right to judge them only in their consequences. It is therefore through this fact

that I will approach the Christian taboo of love for one's neighbor in order to proceed, if you allow me, to a view that, despite being anarchist, is no less consistent and no better assured than the dogma of charity.

Let us say just a word about the fallacious Church of the poor that separates because it distinguishes. Everything is settled: to the poor the Church of Heaven and to the rich the Temporal Church. But what becomes, in these separated Churches, of the fundamental dogmas, which are the brotherhood of men and the love of one's neighbor? If they have brought glory to Christianity, if they are still the pride of Christians, they are also an example of stupidity happy with itself, not by the grace of God but by that of ideologies. Good feelings have camouflaged this incongruous morality so well that rationalists — and not the least of them — have joined in. They have accused Christians, notable Christians of course, of betraying their teaching. These overly well-meaning rationalists thus recognize in these cheaters an ability that exonerated them of common stupidity. It is true that this skill is not lacking either in certain political rationalists who willingly join forces in the brotherhood.

Ah! the brotherhood of men! Let's talk about it! One would believe, to read Saint Paul and the Evangelists, that these Jews had become de-Judaized to the point of having forgotten the fraternal assassination of Abel and the story of Joseph sold by his brothers. There was a lot of murder in the biblical world, within the family and among neighbors. If the Essenes, who left us the Dead Sea Scrolls, agreed better among themselves, they made the mistake, in inspiring Christianity, of concluding from the particular to the general. The general did not vindicate them and neither did the generals. In two thousand years of Christianity, there has not been a day when Christians have not been at war somewhere, fraternally. The principle was not, however, rendered obsolete. The representatives of the church being accredited in all camps, the effectiveness of their blessings counterbalanced each other. Even in the wars of religion, there was never an atrocity committed that did not claim a common father.

This excessive fraternity no longer has any reference, now that the peoples, united by airplanes, have multiplied the fathers, not to mention the atheists who shamelessly declare themselves the descendants of fathers unknown. It is reasonable to think that it is expedient and more effective to encourage these people to support one another for simple reasons of common interest. No doubt this is still a pragmatic view. I agree that it is not with arguments of this order that one prepares the glorification of heroes. On the other hand, the commemoration of the victims is diminished just as much.

I come to the topic of love. This is the term least suited to helping people get along, as it borrows so many meanings. In retaining, with a capital L, only the Christian meaning, which is that of charity, we do not understand ourselves any better, as the theologians also give it different motives. I shall therefore confine myself to the following two basic definitions: The love of God is a virtue inspired by baptism; from this it follows that love is a duty towards our neighbor, since every neighbor is our brother in God.

We have seen what love between brothers provides, even if they are in brothers in Yahweh. As far as Christian sentiment is concerned, it must be admitted that a virtue inspired by baptism concerns only the baptized. Supposing that it encourages them to love men of other religions, that is to say three quarters of humanity, this does not imply reciprocity, especially when the good of others leads to

conversion. Heaven is really not a meeting place. The love of God has such a particular object that it cannot be the foundation for a universal morality.

Moreover, love, whether it be a vice or a virtue, is a spontaneous feeling. It is this spontaneity that gives it its warmth, that makes it beautiful, sometimes tragic and sometimes great in sacrifice. It would be immoral, it would be disappointing, to overuse it. I don't see myself forced to love a neighbor whose actions disgust me. It would be denying my right to revolt and confusing the forgiveness of offenses with resignation.

Let me say in passing what good intentions are made from this flour, mixed in the kneading-troughs of demagogues. It is from these troughs that come prejudices that are only moldy ideas. We don't want to know about it and honest people are complicit in these ideas rooted in falsified education. It reminds me how I used to infuriate my adversary and nevertheless friend, the late Canon Viollet, when I opposed egoism to Christian charity.

It is because this regrettable egoism has such virtues, when seen from a certain angle, that, in order to protect ourselves from it, we have made a vice of it. We should not forget, when we attack egoism on the ethical level, that it is precisely the instinct of self-preservation of the individual and that it is also a factor of solidarity. As an instinct for self-preservation, do we not see it manifest itself, in an irrefutable way, in the young child who relates everything to themselves? It took a lot of shrewdness and a long tradition in the art of conditioning judgments to turn such a vital instinct into a flaw. Yet this is what we have done with generations of vaticinators, despite the rational philosophies that have long since situated egoism in its true nature, which I am only recalling. But what can wisdom do when good feelings are targeted in the name of love? Now, is there a form of egoism more passionate than love? Is it not this passion that makes it the most powerful of feelings?

We know that the individual should not always congratulate themselves for it. But I didn't say that excess of passion never turns out badly, any more than I confuse the bouquet of the Burgundy with the cheap wine of the dive. The excesses do not condemn the use and it is not necessary to insist on the primacy of selfishness as an instinct of defense. I retain its social as well as its anti-social character, its faculties of both competition and absorption, mutual aid and expansion.

Permit me a remark about lessons that condemn egoism on the pretext that it leads the individual to want to absorb more than their fair share, to use violence and deceit in competition. These lessons have not, as far as I know, at any time eliminated the depredations of all sorts of public or private malefactors. I say that, on the contrary, they leave them a field all the more open because the just, by abstaining, in the Christian spirit, from all egoism, condemn it only in words, instead of countering them in deeds.

This is the typical example of inconsistent morality that is not based on relativized reality. Not only do they fail because they go against nature, but, more seriously perhaps, they distract attention from the solutions found in nature itself, on condition that they are freed from it.

If I call avarice, rapacity, authoritarianism and violence by their proper names, I fight these vices for what they are, depraved egoisms. If I remove the adjective depraved, all egoism is condemned, including precisely that natural weapon, which is in each and which opposes each to the other as soon as the other abuses.

In this way you immediately grasp that a clear-sighted and measured egoism is the primary means, the irreplaceable means, of conquering, affirming and defending one's personal freedom. And whatever the conforming definitions may claim, if there are always contingent political and social freedoms in the plural, there is no freedom equal to individual freedom. And it is worth what the individual is worth, that is to say his voluntary thought, exactly his *ego*.

We should not be surprised if all sorts of powers, all sorts of scribes, courtiers and profiteers of power, endeavored to curb among the subjected an essential force, of which they carefully reframed from dispossessing themselves. A well-informed person does not let himself be fooled in this way and that is why an anarchist presses egoism like an alarm button. But the echoes of this alert are lost in the crowd, which is more accessible to the myths of feeling than it is open to the rigor of clear ideas.

And yet! What the myths of charity and fraternity elaborated in the empyreans offer us in vain, candid egoism, precisely understood, provides us. It is up to everyone to take it up for themselves. It will not be forbidden to others. And if you ask me what I mean by well-understood egoism, I will answer you that it is quite simple, quite spontaneous egoism, but corrected by a morality open to the facts, the realities commensurate with us, which govern the actions of our lives.

I have explained it to myself many times and all the more easily since it is only a matter of an entirely epicurean reasoning, which the maniacs of transcendence make fun of and reasonable people worry about because we do not appeal to the sacrosanct formulas of devotion and abnegation.

In fact, the morality of egoism is defined in three observations: the being absorbs in order to subsist; its nervous system is on the lookout for the perceptions that protect its body and inform its thoughts; its thought is its surest wealth. If an individual knows that their thought is wealth, if they feel that their sensibility disposes of this wealth and that they enjoy it only by spending it, that individual is only rich from what they disperse, they will absorb everything useful to their being, they will keep their dispensing and their informing senses awake, they will never stop acquiring in order to give according to a Nietzschean formula, thus enriching themselves by their generosity, expanding into the highest and best of themselves.

The satisfaction they experience from this leads them not to allow themselves to be robbed, to become the companion of the less well-armed, to help them provide for themselves so that at their side beings are united in an authentic fraternity, that of the heart and mind and not of social conventions.

This lucid egoist lives fully and so intensely that they is a source of joy to themselves. I will thus maintain in conclusion that it is on this egoism that the solidarity of men is built.