

## ANARCHISM: TOWARDS AN HISTORICAL BALANCE SHEET

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Anarchism has come to a turning-point in its history. The forces that gave birth to it and encouraged its development have faded away and it is clear that this cycle is irreversible. Anarchism has lost many of its historical and ideological characteristics with the, by now, almost complete disappearance of the era in which these emerged and took shape. This presents us with a fundamental problem: does the exhaustion of this historical cycle throw doubt on the very identity of anarchism? What is left of anarchism? Is what remains still the anarchism we have known and practised? If we accept the relevance of these questions, can we accept the *Gattopardo's* lesson that everything changes but that nothing has changed? Can we modify the whole in order to preserve it?

I believe that we must find an adequate answer to these questions. It is here that the future of anarchism, that is to say, our future, lies. These questions are the speculative background to the decidedly presumptuous task I have set myself. This is to trace, in however summary a fashion, an historical balance sheet for anarchism in order to discover its meaning and a direction for its future. The first question is that of the very nature of anarchism: what particular anarchism are we talking about. The moment we decide that we are concerned with the *being* of anarchism, with its ultimate and irreducible essence, this becomes an ontological question. It means drawing up a reasonably definite outline of the concrete historical form and the ideological nature of anarchism. This calls for a kind of circular reasoning. On the one hand we must choose what we want to see in history and on the other we want to extract that history of anarchism which can provide the ideological confirmation of the criteria governing this choice.

### *Anarchism*

Generalising greatly, we can say that anarchism is the result of repeated interactions between the long process of secularisation – with its inexorable and progressive “demystification of the world” – and the two historical events that have assured its path: the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution.

Anarchism is, and could only be, the highest point of this process. It is the cultural apex of this formidable interweaving which has had a constantly revolutionary dimension – in the widest sense of the term, as the total rejection of all authority, human or divine; the critique of the principle of authority at all levels of its historical forms, both given and possible; the critique of both the existing and future forms shaped by this principle: all these place anarchism on the ill-defined frontier separating the extreme fringes of the revolutionary critique from the problematical no-man's-land of nihilism.

In any case, the origins of anarchism are to be found in that particular revolutionary logic of this historical process as it took place in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries: a process that signalled the beginning of the contemporary era. More precisely, anarchism can be said to be the extreme form of the Enlightenment. By its very nature, therefore, it cannot be reduced to this or that starting point as it was only the coming together of all these elements that made it possible. So *it is only when the logic of secularisation has completely developed* that anarchist culture can appear in its fullest sense. This is why anarchism was born in Europe and not, for example, in Africa or in the Middle East, and why it saw the light of day at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century and not before. Therein lies its universal nature: once the process of secularisation has definitely begun it becomes a completely logical point of arrival, and unavoidable appointment for the human spirit.

Having originated on a cultural plane, as a universal human creation, anarchism, in its final essence, shows the imprint of this. Thus the decisive moment in its historical formation came long before the birth of anarchism as a specific social and political movement. *Unlike the anarchist*

*movement, anarchism itself has no class origins.* Its birth, and thus its primary characteristics, cannot be reduced to those historiographic explanations that seek to identify it with the birth of the anarchist movement, in some way deducing its nature and ideological features from the compound and contradictory features of the latter.

What then is the “propositional” content of anarchism, understood as a moment of universal human creation and, specifically, as the logical point of arrival of secularisation? To explain the “propositionality” of anarchism we need only direct our attention to that *historical genesis of a synthesis* that has gradually eliminated those elements which proved to be incompatible with their own authentic logic. Anarchism was born from the desire to bring together two great principles – of freedom and of equality. It has aimed to be the confluence of the fundamental characteristics of liberalism and socialism. It was not by chance that it appeared in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as it coincided with a consideration of the theoretical, historical and logical limits of the liberal and socialist ideologies and an ideological elaboration aimed at overcoming the partiality of their principles.

In the anarchist view, individual freedom can only be realised through carrying social equality to its extreme, and social equality can only be truly realised through the complete extension of individual freedom. Thus in order to realise equality it is necessary to use freedom as a fulcrum, while to realise freedom it is necessary to use equality as a fulcrum: that is to say, to carry the presuppositions of each to its ultimate consequences. In other words anarchism blames liberalism for being only a partial doctrine of freedom and socialism for being only a partial doctrine of equality. This partial nature lies in the fact that these two doctrines aim to realise their principles by means of laws – and so of domination – whereas anarchism seeks to show that it is only by going beyond the legal arena that their proposals gain real meaning. It seeks a freedom that, having equality as a fulcrum, will bring human relationships to a point where they are no longer based on equality as a legal principle, but where they refer to the actual effects of freedom for all. And *vice versa*. The principles must become facts, and only thus can they exist as principles. However, to become facts, all the consequences of these self-same principles must be fully accepted.

The merging of the two principles in a single, coherent, organic whole is the “ideal formula” of anarchism. It is here that one can see how its theory is equidistant from liberalism and from socialism, and is distinguished from both of them by the dual nature of the epistemological and ethical content of its doctrine. This is an enormous ambition: anarchism is in fact convinced that it has forged the epistemological key to complete and real human emancipation. The ethical presuppositions of freedom and equality – and here the secret lies – *when activated at one and the same time* – are intrinsically revolutionary.

In conclusion we can say that what is to be seen as anarchism in its fullest realisation – that is to say what we have called the *being* of anarchism – is given by the process of secularisation at its highest degree. This process generated the two great ethical-political movements of the contemporary era – liberalism and socialism – and it is the coherent and extreme synthesis of these two that produced anarchism. It is not, however, a simple synthesis. In fact once activated in the way discussed above, the two great principles of freedom and equality undergo a *radical “genetic” mutation*, thus becoming libertarian and egalitarian principles. The revolutionary dimension of anarchism and its intimate and irreducible ideological nature is due to the logical and ethical adoption of the two principles of freedom and equality taken, shall we say, by their roots.

What we have outlined above could be termed the necessary *formal* conditions, from the point of view of doctrine, for the definition of what is and what is not anarchist. It is a necessary formal condition – to use an analogy – in the Kantian sense of the term. Just as for Kant knowledge is only possible through the pure *a priori* forms of space and time, so can we only talk of anarchist ideology if this satisfies, *a priori*, the formal condition of the coherent equilibrium between the requirements of freedom and those of equality. Around this central axis, this model which is, at one and the same time, “hermeneutic” and “ideal”, we can sketch the map of the positive doctrine of anarchism as it has taken shape in history and, thus, as it has been propounded and elaborated by its theoreticians and its activists. Without going into a detailed analysis, which would be out of place here, we should remember that the various tendencies produced by libertarian thought in

different times, places, traditions and circumstances, must rotate on this orbit if they are indeed to be considered libertarian. All of them – through the many possible gradations and variations from the ultra-communist to the ultra-individualist – must share this formal condition or they cannot be included in anarchism. We today can measure the authenticity, that is the degree to which they were coherently anarchist or not, of the doctrines of Malatesta, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon, etc., by using this “hermeneutic” and “ideal” model, these formal, *a priori*, distinctions.

### *The Anarchist Movement*

Just as I have extracted the *being* of anarchism, as a universal human creation, from its origins, I will now draw out the primary historical characteristics of the anarchist movement, understood as a specific social and political movement, from its origins. If our model of its ideological essence provides us, today, with a criterion for evaluating and discriminating between what we consider to have been anarchist and what was not, its primary historical characteristics allow us to explain the fundamental trends in the real history of the anarchist movement.

Here too, an initial question arises which is absolutely decisive. How can we explain the huge discrepancy between anarchism's “perfect” ideological equidistance from both liberalism and socialism and the anarchist movement's “objective” historical presence in the wider socialist workers' movement? Does not this contradiction render it very difficult to explain the connection between anarchism and the anarchist movement? We could answer that history is in itself a contradiction and the translation of a “perfect” model into reality is not of this world. Such a translation is always imperfect and – as it is in this specific case – unbalanced. However, it is this very relationship between the “undeveloped” history of anarchism, understood in its fullest sense, and the actual history of the anarchist movement that fully reveals the “ontology” we were looking for. The connection between anarchism and the anarchist movement is, naturally, a historical one, which can be summarised very simply: the anarchist movement could only have emerged in the socialist arena because it was the socialist movement that was, at that time, carrying out the process of secularisation. But we must be careful: this secularisation was in the particular revolutionary version of social transformation. It is here that we can find a convincing explanation of the intricate connection binding anarchism to the anarchist movement and the latter to the socialist movement.

We have said that liberalism, socialism and anarchism are historical products of secularisation and that anarchism represents the logical confluence of the fundamental requirements of the principles of freedom and of equality; thus it is the final, logical point of arrival in this phase of history. We have also said that anarchism is ideologically equidistant from liberalism and from socialism and we can further demonstrate this by considering the different attitudes of the three movements towards the modernisation begun by the process of secularisation. While liberalism and socialism have uncritically absorbed the logic of the capitalist rationality produced by this process (marxism is well known to be nothing but the “other” side of rationality), anarchism has made a double response. If, on the one hand, it is the extreme point of secularisation, on the other it is the most extreme and radical response to this. And it is the anarchist movement itself which demonstrates this, as its whole reality is nothing but a radical, unequivocal reaction to the disintegration of sense caused by the selfsame secularisation.

What then is the fundamental character of the anarchist movement which arose out of its origins and has remained unchanged up to the present day? I believe that there can be no doubts that this character consists in its insurmountable and contradictory double nature; that is, in the fact that the anarchist movement is the only movement, that has been historically political only in order to satisfy its initial and irreducible ethical content. The origins of the anarchist movement – actually born at Saint-Imier in September 1872 – are also the origins of an irreversible and intrinsically contradictory rejection: as on the one hand, it was politically constituted, but on the other, it denied being so. All political action of the anarchist movement is aimed at negating the political, in the sense that it rejects, *a priori*, any possible management of it. Thus, while anarchism, influenced by the Enlightenment, shares the desecratory and dissolving “spirit” of secularisation, the anarchist movement provides a response to this secularisation which is a radical, historical break with the Machiavellian tradition founded on the separation of ethics and politics. It could

even be said that the secularisation begun with the Renaissance here comes to an end. The disintegration of sense produced by that separation ends with the birth of the anarchist movement, which responds to this disintegration by entirely reassessing the political in an ethical key. Rereading the fundamental “tablets” of its act of foundation – the famous resolutions of Saint-Imier – we can see these as a clear expression of the “logic of supersedence” produced by the process of secularisation. (The political *avant-garde* of the proletariat is rightly seen to be the new vehicle of mystification and domination; the real revolution lies in a “logic”, not in a particular historical subject). On the other hand, they also perfectly reflect the supreme limits of the selfsame logic beyond which, obviously, only an ethical dimension can give any sense to politics. In conclusion, we can say that the anarchist movement could only be born within the socialist workers' movement, as it was this movement which was carrying out the process of secularisation, in its revolutionary version. To be precise (and this is very important), as far as the objective modernisation started by the process of secularisation was concerned, the socialist workers' movement was a “reactionary” rather than a revolutionary phenomenon. By dissolving every former social, political, economic, ethical codification, modernisation in fact provoked a reaction to this disintegration. The anarchist movement was not born within the socialist workers' movement by chance but because it was part of this reaction, *although its participation had a double sense*. Pushing this process of secularisation to its ultimate consequences, it rendered the Machiavellian separation vain, returning an ethical dimension to politics. Inevitably, the process of finding this new significance was based on the logic of “supersedence” which was typical of secularisation, so that what had been a social and political phenomenon of reaction to modernisation (the socialist workers' movement) became with the anarchist movement *a radically revolutionary phenomenon*.

It is thus that the historical comparison between liberalism, socialism and anarchism can be outlined. Liberalism and socialism are mirror images of one another because they unequivocally follow in the historical footsteps of secularisation: the former personifies the rationality of the Enlightenment as it is manifested in the capitalist logic; the latter is a social reaction to the disintegration of sense caused by the process of secularisation; and later in its marxist form fails to achieve a new meaning, but simply turns that logic upside down. Both are irremediably only a part of history. And what about anarchism?

Anarchism released the secularising logic of the Enlightenment into the socialist workers' movement. And the anarchist movement, by resolving the political in the ethical, gave *an autonomous* meaning (not dialectically necessitating) to the social reaction begun by modernisation, thus transforming it into radical revolution. As far as it takes full part in the events of history, it divides and re-divides, now presenting a radical critique of the selfsame secularisation and now unceasingly activating secularisation's own desecratory logic. Anarchism is *within* history but *opposed to* it. The connection between anarchism and the anarchist movement and that between the anarchist movement and the socialist one is therefore clarified by the full sense of this dual nature, which is not a dialectical artifice but the effective historical nature of anarchism as it becomes the anarchist movement. Here we can see how its equidistance from liberalism and from socialism becomes a dramatic and at times conflicting division, the key to that “ontology” set out at the beginning of these notes, whose occurrence can now be seen as an explanation of its real history.

### *The Socialist Phase of the Anarchist Movement*

From what we have said up to now, the difficulty of applying the pure and simple political categories to the complex historical vicissitudes of the anarchist movement becomes clear. In order to come to grips with its meaning we must, rather, make use of various disciplines and varieties of logic. And above all, if we wish to understand why it has been a loser (and the whole history of the anarchist movement as a political movement with ethical intentions is the history of a loser devoid of any other destiny) we must be able to see all the possible consequences of its structural “ontological” dual nature which has, in its turn, been the source of a paralysing division between the ethical and the political one.

An appropriate definition of the anarchist movement in this historical-interpretative key could well be as follows: the anarchist movement is an ethical subject that moves in a political sense within a social body. It was thus that, for all its multiformity, it existed through the first phase of its history from 1872 to 1917 without major contradictions. The anarchist movement was born as a “heresy” within the First International (but the claim to internationalist authenticity was rightly anarchist rather than marxist) and retained this fundamental prerogative up to 1917. Internationalism could only be revolutionary insofar as the political struggle did not superimpose itself on the social one and dominate it; the revolution – by its very definition – cannot be “postponed” or “diluted” as neither a “principle” nor a “logic”, that is to say neither a way of being nor an attitude, can be postponed or diluted; thus it cannot be political but only social (which is to say universal); there can be no mediation between the “bourgeois world” with its God, its State and its capital, and the world of the proletariat. Of the two fundamental characteristics of this historical phase that we have to understand, one is subjective and the other objective. The former concerns the anarchist movement, whose action in history can be reduced to a precise significance: the application of the secularising logic, in the particular version of the social revolution superseding the political one, cast it ever more in the role of the *guardian of an image* (in its own eyes as well as in those of the proletariat), and this image was, naturally, that of the revolution. The increasing multiformity of the historical process, while nurturing and adding to it more ideological and practical versions (mutualism, collectivism, communism, individualism, anti-militarism, communitarianism, pacifism, syndicalism, etc.) did not change its ultimate essence. Rather, it remained revolutionary, *tout court*. Paradoxically, as, little by little, it became ever purer anarchism and revolution (and custodian of an image that was ever “purer” in the face of the reformist and authoritarian betrayals) it tended to occupy an ever more restricted space in society (except in Spain and to some degree in Russia). And it emerged when antagonism in society had abandoned the political path and become open rebellion (as with various insurrectional or strongly conflictual movements in Italy, France, Spain, Russia, the United States, etc.). The anarchist resolution of the political into the ethical, that is the social revolution as a universal human, internationalist revolution; as a political and economic, sexual and anti-authoritarian, pedagogical and participatory revolution, did not destroy the historic possibility although it reduced it to an “occasion” (this being the precise meaning of insurrectionalism). The revolution was still the moment of prime importance.

The other objective characteristic can be summed up in a few words; throughout this phase the battleground was divided into two: on the one hand the world of the proletariat and on the other that of the bourgeoisie. There was only one system, as a sociological system: the bourgeois capitalist society, and there was likewise only one antagonist: the workers' movement. In the latter the anarchist movement and the marxist movement came into confrontation. Even though the marxist movement – particularly in its reformist and social-democrat guise – had gained much ground with the passing of the years, the final outcome of the struggle was still all to come and it could not yet be said that the authoritarians would definitely win the victor's laurels. Bourgeois society had still to be brought down and socialism had still to be realised. The historical-strategic significance of this entire phase can be summarised in the fact that there were two main subjects, socialism and capitalism, and two subjects competing within socialism, anarchism and marxism. However, the historical objectivity of the situation meant that the duel between these two would never be carried to the last drops of blood: subjectively they may have been enemies but objectively they were allies.

### *The Russian Revolution and its Effects*

It was the October Revolution that changed everything by casting them in the historical roles best suited to their genetic make-ups. With the October Revolution the skirmishing between marxism and anarchism became a duel to the death (as is well known, anarchism was, quite simply, exterminated) and their radical social and political diversity became clear. The anarchist movement moved definitively into a new field, leaving the socialist camp in fact, even if it remained ideologically there, and, finally, the overall picture of relationships of force in the world

was altered: the battlefield was no longer divided into two but in three – the socialist world, the capitalist world and the revolutionary anarchist movement.

From the moment that marxism won by being the first in the world to realise socialism, anarchism was reduced to a mere distant hope. It is not necessary to state the influence that this victory had on the struggle between marxism and anarchism: in Russia the proletariat could see the realisation of socialism being transformed from a vague utopia into a concrete reality. The myth was to last for decades influencing tens of millions of proletarians and cutting the ground from under the feet of the anarchist movement which lost, in a few years, much of the ground it had won with blood and pain. All the marxists working outside Russia gained ground from this and this tendency has not yet drawn to a close.

This is all, naturally, from a historical and strategic point of view. But what was the significance of the Russian Revolution from the point of view of socialism seen as an integral human emancipation, that is, from the anarchist point of view?

I believe that this disastrous experience, the true historical ruin of socialism, exemplifies both the sense of the conflict between marxism and anarchism and the internal contradictions of the latter (the other and perhaps more significant example is that of the Spanish Revolution). The Russian Revolution brought to light socialism's total lack of a political theory suited to its needs. Marxism overcame this lack with the dictatorship of the proletariat which, being unable to declare itself to be what it was, became an ideological demagogy rather than an operational political theory suited to the desired end. For anarchism, on the other hand, this is the very reason for the existence of the anarchist movement which was, as we can recall, born out of this very rejection (the secular superseding of the universal human social revolution which takes the place of the political one, the vehicle of a new power). Thus it cannot be superseded. The Russian Revolution fell prey to the marxists because the anarchists did not know how to oppose the former's ideological demagogy with an anarchist form of political action. The anarchists' only response to the Bolsheviks' Machiavellian management and manipulation of the soviets was to propose a simple generalisation of the selfsame soviet system, which is to say virtually nothing. In other words, they did not know how to defend the methodological principle (or one of the principles) of the social revolution.

Here for the first time the anarchists had proof of the deleterious practical effects of a complete resolution of the political into the ethical. And, paradoxically, this came at the very moment in which anarchism became the overwhelming victor from a theoretical point of view. And this victory was due to the confirmation of the anarchists' analysis of the primacy of the political over the economic provided by the Russian Revolution: the revolution did not break out in the heart of the capitalist system but on its periphery. More specifically, it highlighted the decisive importance of political will as a determining factor in a revolutionary situation and so of the relationship between this subjective willingness and the historical possibility of realising socialism, a possibility which is independent of the degree of capitalist development and of modernisation (as every so-called socialist revolution, since the Russian one, has punctually confirmed). It was also victor in its forecasting of the irremediably totalitarian nature of the marxist socialist vehicle of domination of a "new class" (the "red bureaucracy") whose power is based not on a juridical-privatist ownership of the means of production but on intellectual ownership. Finally, it is victor because this power of the bureaucracy, which is founded on the totalitarian character of the State, does not come from the elimination of capitalism (as liberal historiography would like to claim) but from the particular political form assumed by this elimination. It is this "politicalness" which was the decisive cause of the failure of socialism and the success of the State: the marxists set up the most totalitarian regime in the twentieth century as they avidly delegated all the chances of socialism to the power of the State.

So, for anarchism, the victory of its theoretical rightness is directly and proportionately related to the defeat of its practical reason, almost everything having been played on this tragic, paradoxical relationship. To summarise, the situation is as follows. The anarchist movement cannot transform its revolutionary will, which is morphologically political but ethical in its intentions, into an entirely political will able to direct the whole revolutionary process. It is therefore incapable of moving from the negative moment of the revolution-insurrection to the positive moment of its direction. It was, furthermore, incapable of successfully inhibiting the Jacobinising Leninist

direction because, to do so, in view of the less than favourable circumstances, it would have had to ally itself with other social and political forces that, in the revolutionary context of advanced and almost irreversibly socio-economic transformation, were assuredly more moderate than either the anarchists or the Bolsheviks.

As we can see from the degree to which the “spontaneous” social revolution requires “voluntary” political revolution (the historical conditions which provided theoretical support for the claims of anarchism but not of marxism), the anarchist movement ended up being its own prisoner. If too great an emphasis is placed on the political, it tends to replace social spontaneity (and so, with this substitution, comes into conflict with its own ends). If, on the other hand, the social forces are given free rein and no attempt is made to determine political events (as effectively happened, except for the Makhnovist experience) this ends, as in Russia, with favouring the Bolshevik expansion which was based on the completely political determination to take over the direction of the whole revolutionary process. Any attempt to halt this Bolshevik advance by an alliance with other forces requires acceptance of or at least non-opposition to policies aimed at stopping or turning back the revolutionary process although this is, naturally, repugnant to anarchists. All in all, to be able to act effectively, anarchism must, willingly or not, put aside, at least temporarily, its revolutionary extremism, renouncing a part of its identity. It must become much less “ideological” and much more free of prejudice, that is to say, less ethical and more political.

### *From Democracy to Totalitarianism*

Over the twenty years from 1917 to 1937 the anarchist movement used up all its potential. A cycle was finished. In the socialist world the anarchist movement was physically exterminated; in any case, it could no longer offer a valid alternative. In the capitalist world it had to face up to the growing totalitarian reaction in Europe (Italy, Spain, Germany, Hungary). The advent of the various fascist, or at least totalitarian, regimes cut away the anarchist movement's social base, forcing it into the *diaspora* of exile and so into the disintegration of its organisation.

Reigning side by side with the implacable spread of the fascist reaction was the ill-omened myth of the Bolshevik revolution. It was inauspicious from a pedagogical point of view as the working class and socialist masses, spurred on by the indisputable concrete evidence (the realisation of socialism), wanted to “do like they do in Russia”. Thanks to communist propaganda, the catastrophic idea that the realisation of socialism was combined – indispensably – with the practice of an authoritarian, political will was born in the collective popular imaginary. Stalinism, far from seeming horrific, became the crystalline confirmation of a virtue and the extermination of adversaries, rather than being seen as a destruction of freedom, was finally considered to be the indubitable sign of an uncorrupt and intransigent revolutionary will.

This myth was inauspicious from a strategic point of view because the proletariat modelled its actions on the basis of repetition, rather than acting in accordance with the given historical conditions, in accordance with the times and with the means suited to its traditions and situations. Here too the communist movement played its part by exporting strategies and programmes from Russia in accordance with the dictates of a hegemonic design. In consequence, the revolutionary action of the masses became less homogeneous. The socialist workers' movement split, sometimes irremediably, on these very questions of strategy and modes of operating, all to the good of the bourgeois reaction.

This situation either forced the anarchist movement back into retreat under the blows of the reaction or else into complete isolation. By holding to an inflexibly critical position on the totalitarian socialism realised in Russia (and what else could it have done?), it found many of its organic ties with the socialist workers' movement dissolving. On the other hand it could not seek support or alliances in the liberal-democratic camp as, even in its critique of socialism as it had been realised in Russia, it remained essentially revolutionary. Thus the internal and external effects of the Russian Revolution and of the mounting fascist reaction in Europe put the anarchist movement in an almost desperate strategic situation: if it wished to remain what it was and not lose its identity, it could neither join the bourgeois camp nor avoid a definitive uprooting from the socialist one. The price it paid for this progressive isolation was all the higher for the stress it put

on its “anarchistness”, for the retention of its ontological double nature which placed it *within* history but *in opposition* to it.

If it had tried to graft itself on to the liberal camp, it would have had to abandon its socialist expectations, renouncing its role in that restructuring of meaning which only socialist culture, with its communitarian, mutualist, communist, etc. aspects, could create as a social-revolutionary response to modernisation. By abandoning the socialist workers' movement it would have left the historical wake of secularisation in the specific guise of the transformation of society.

On the other hand the price of avoiding total uprooting from the socialist camp was the abandonment of its “secularisation” inheritance, thus renouncing the application of the logic of revolutionary “supersedence” which was the direct basis of its critique of the advent of socialism in Russia as the advent of a new power.

In both cases it would have lost its “ontological” double nature. By moving towards the liberal camp it would be prisoner of a logic of modernisation devoid of any reworking of sense, it would have remained *within history* by participating in the course of history, but would have been unable *to oppose it* by revolution. By remaining within the socialist camp it would have to renounce the revolutionary logic of the Enlightenment in the work of restructuring the meanings of the old bourgeois world (the critique of its exploitation and alienation) with the revolutionary logic which opposed it to the new history of the socialist world.

This is the key to understanding the progressive “erosion” of the anarchist movement in the 1930s, during which years it was caught in the vice of communist and fascist totalitarianism and liberal democracy. The international anarchist movement's exit from the mainstream of history, which did not coincide only accidentally with the progressive decline of its anarcho-syndicalist formulations (from France to Brazil, from Argentina to the USA and from Portugal to Germany), was due to the progressive stress placed on its essentially anarchist nature. The movement did not choose because it could not. Thus its revolutionary nature was slowly but inexorably transformed into ideological immobility and it was in this unavoidable but sterile slide that it underwent the devastating effects of the Second World War.

### *The Spanish Revolution*

This outline of the relations of anarchism, totalitarianism and democracy in the 1930s does not, of course, apply to Spain. There this situation did not arise, because the anarchist movement was a predominant force whereas the communist element was virtually insignificant. It was, however, the Spanish Revolution that raised this logic to its highest level, thus bringing to a close the cycle begun in 1917.

The Spanish Revolution could be called a great, unrepeatable chance. But it was also a chance that brought to light, in a tragic scenario, the historical and tactical problems of the struggle for freedom without any of these having been resolved by the end. Spain between July 1936 and May 1937 was the peak of the century-long struggle for human freedom; at the same time, there came the tragic confirmation of anarchism's inability to resolve the problem of the relationship between ethics and politics. It was this that split Spanish anarchism into its *political representatives* in the Catalan and Madrid government and the living *social formations* of the self-managed collectives. While one part of anarchism became a pseudo-state (an anarchist surrender to politics without a suitable political theory or strategy), the other carried out the social revolution (without, however, a political strategy capable of defending what the revolution had achieved). It was thus that the tragic, paradoxical situation arose: the anarchist political involvement in the government only served to give “revolutionary” legitimacy to the State, at the same time and for the same reasons, destroying anarchism's own legitimacy. At the same time the immense social force of Spanish anarchism proved to be incapable of political action in defence of the social revolution.

We may well ask why the anarchist movement in Spain was not one hundred percent revolutionary (had it been, its representatives could never have joined the government) whereas the Russian movement was “too much” so. In 1936 the “historical time” (that is, the “realistic” consideration of the given social conditions, with the principle of reality prevailing over that of utopia) was prior to the “revolutionary time” (a revolutionary evaluation of reality) whereas in



Russia it was the opposite. The result in both cases was the same, as the marxist counterrevolution triumphed. But why was this so?

It seems to me that the explanation lies in the fact that in Russia the anarchist movement was not a predominant force and so could not even think of directing the overall revolutionary process. In Spain, on the other hand, the movement was a major force and so was in a position to take on that responsibility. But what had already happened in Russia then became clear in Spain as well: that the lack of any substantial political criteria means a corresponding lack of an historical criterion; that the inability to use one's force strategically and "unscrupulously" does not bring about the victory of ethics over politics but rather the contrary. Moving immediately from an ideological evaluation to a political one – an automatism that implies an evaluation which is "indifferent" to the various forms of power, whether it may be liberal, communist, democratic, fascist, nazi, etc., – it is always the loser.

How then, returning to Spain, should we explain the anarchist participation in the government? The only way that I can see is to go back to the categories of politics.

Spanish anarchism accepted State politics because it found itself heir to a political and military situation which offered no alternative. The anarchist presence in the government was a compromise which clearly revealed the political impotence of that anarchist movement born in 1872. To be more exact, it is the fear of following the logic of the social revolution to its end. This implies a radical and irreversible break with all existing political forces and this could only have come about if the immense social force of Spanish anarchism had assumed a self-directing political will ready to take on the direction of and the responsibility for the whole revolutionary process. On 20 July 1936, the anarchists in Catalonia could have done it and they did not. They did not because they did not know where they should, politically, begin.

In any case, anarchist dictatorship or democratic collaboration was not valid to the ends of the social revolution. Without either a theory or a political strategy, for either situation, that is, neither for the complete direction of the revolution nor even for defending its gains, anarchism was doomed to defeat. Without a theory or strategy for the revolution the "anarchist dictatorship" would have become a "revolutionary totalitarianism" with one of two results: the return of the moderates or domination by the communists. The result of the democratic collaboration in 1936-1937 is well known: the moderates were manipulated and the communists eventually overcame.

To the question "could it have finished differently?", I must answer no. It could not have been different for the same reason that the relationship between anarchism, totalitarianism and democracy could not have been different. We have said that the anarchist movement in Spain was caught between the political moment of its pseudo-presence in the government (I repeat pseudo because the "anarchists" in the government were, after all, always anarchists) and the social movement of collectives. If the social element is decisive in determining the effective productivity of a revolution (which it is not) we have to ask why the anarchists of the collectives did not prevail over the political element. The answer is simple: in the end it is always the political (the concentrated use of the collective force for a certain end, as Proudhon teaches us) that decides and never the social (the spontaneous but ineffectual expression of the collective force itself). All forms of human will, including the revolutionary one, are expressed, more than in any other way, through politics. So it can be said that at that very moment when, in September 1936, the anarchists entered the government in Catalonia, the revolutionary image of anarchism in the collective popular imaginary died and it was not, or barely, reborn in the revolutionary sense shown by the heroic anarchism of the collectives in Aragon and in Catalonia itself. This may be tragic but it is true.

To complete our explanation of Spanish anarchism's division into its political and its social moments, we must return to the relationship between totalitarianism, democracy and anarchism. The increasing "anarchistness" of the anarchist movement in the 1930s which, as we have seen, affected its relationships with totalitarianism and democracy – did not occur here or if it did so then only very slightly. Who would wish that Spain had undergone this process, that is a revolutionary intransigence in the face of communism, and of liberal democracy? Who judges the anarchist surrender to the communist counterrevolution in May 1937 to have been insane, as in fact it was? It was not the Spanish anarchists (with a few exceptions) but those anarchists who suffered the *diaspora* brought about by the split between the totalitarian and democratic camps.

And Spanish anarchism did not become anarchist to its depth, undergoing the ill-omened myth of the popular front, because the basically religious anti-modernising element in its social base was too strong. It impeded the extension and assimilation of the secularising logic which is essential if anarchism is to be within history but *opposed to* it; that is, if anarchism is to be revolutionary despite any lack of equilibrium between its Enlightenment-liberal component and the socialist-communitarian one.

The tragedy of the Spanish Revolution was also the tragedy and the end of the anarchist movement born in 1872. The years following this, up to the turning point of 1968 brought no substantial changes to the irreparable situation caused by the defeat of the Spanish Revolution. The anarchist movement did not undergo a real generational change because the conditions created after 1945 made its position even more isolated: it was *against* history but had a sterility which effectively placed it *outside* history.

### *The Anarchist Analysis of Power*

As we have seen, anarchism's "ontological" double nature, its being both *within* and *against* history, explains the origins of the anarchist movement which was born on a wave of revolutionary, secularising "supersedence" of marxism that represents the creation of a new history through a new power. This was the ultimate power, founded on the intellectual ownership of the revolutionary process: within the process of increasing immanence begun by secularisation, marxism re-deifying the revolution, endowing it with the principle of authority through the party which became the source of a new political power (as leninism, the inevitable result of marxism, demonstrates). It would be as well to stress that this "ontological" double nature of anarchism – a criterion for the historical explanation of the origins of the anarchist movement and also of the authoritarian nature of marxism – lies inevitably at the roots of its scientific thought and the elaboration of its ideology. From the point of view of theory, being within history but opposed to it provides the possibility of analysing the reality of history scientifically in order to oppose it. We can even see how the structural diversity of the two levels – the being part of history (which means scientifically analysing the given historical process) and the being opposed to it (which means elaborating, if necessary, the ethical-ideological ends in contrast to that process) recalls that heterogeneity of the "ethical" nature of the end that is sought and the "political" nature of the means employed, a heterogeneity which serves to feed its revolutionary tension. The whole revolutionary dimension of anarchism, which is *revolutionary insofar as it is ethical*, lies in this tension/conflict, that is, in the insertion of the ethical logic in the means.

However, while in practice anarchism seeks to integrate its means and ends ideologically – and this has been the cause of its recurring subordination and political impotence – in its theory it rejects the deducibility that makes ideological ends depend on scientific analysis and *vice versa*. It is thanks to this difference between theory and practice and to the epistemological division within its theory that anarchism has won over both marxism and liberalism on the theoretical and ideological planes. I have no space here to touch on this point more than briefly so I will limit myself to analysis of anarchism in this light, seeking, where possible, to make some comparisons. The epistemological division within anarchist thought does not stretch throughout all anarchist thought: we can always find anarchist writers who, consciously or unconsciously, mix the two plans. Nor is it always possible to think scientifically without ideology intruding. However, the search for a separating epistemological tension, which is destined to remain ever open, exists in the central nucleus of a system of thought which thus becomes radically free and radically universal. It is radically free because it has no form of integralism: the ethical and the historical planes are not required to coincide, neither is freedom required to coincide with scientific truth, nor scientific truth with the totality of human experience. It is the logic of freedom which prevails. It is radically universal because it is on this division that anarchism's "revolutionary transcendence", in the sense of infinite renewal, is founded. If ethics are not necessarily deduced from the historical vicissitudes of power, they can be continually reformulated according to a new revolutionary will.

Thus the division between ideology and science brings anarchism to a decisive point: it allows the continual reformulation of its ethical outlook and at the same time the continual scientific reformulation of its theory. Thus anarchism can abandon its former scheme of scientific analysis if it considers it to be no longer appropriate, without in any way renouncing its ideal ends. Here the separation between science and ethics has brought us forcibly to the central nucleus of anarchist thought around which the relationship between the analysis of power in its individual historical formulations and that of the analysis of power as such rotates. Once again its “ontological” double nature emerges predominant because, while the analysis of particular historical forms of power reflects a use of scientific analysis *within* history, the analysis of power as such is “metaphorically” *opposed to* history.

The diversity between the scientific critique of a particular historical power and the scientific and ideological critique of power as such recalls, respectively and analogically, the diversity between the analysis of exploitation and that of inequality. The former is always the analysis of a precise historical reality whereas the latter is an inquiry into the structural causes of the reproducibility of power. Just as a particular historical power is a particular expression of the logical reproducibility of power as such, so is the historical form of exploitation a particular expression of the reproducibility of inequality. This explains anarchism's radical diversity and opposition, from a scientific point of view, to marxism. It is in the light of this, that anarchist thought developed its position on capitalism as an historical variable of inequality and successor of other such. Capitalism is not the structural cause of inequality and the oppression of man by man but one particular historical form which is the most recent in order of historical time and of the modernising logic.

For anarchist thought, bourgeois ownership is a phenomenological form of power. Even better, every form of ownership expresses one of the many phenomenological forms of power. Thus all the possible forms of ownership – from the economic to the intellectual – express all the possible historical forms of power as it reproduces itself in inequality. If, then, property is always an historical variable of inequality produced by power, in order to understand the cause of exploitation it is necessary to aim at the science of the reproducibility of power and its fundamental forms rather than at the analysis of property in its capitalist form. Thus anarchist theory's lack of research into political economy (except for Proudhon although even for him it was subject to the requirements of a sociological research into power) can be explained and consequently the deep-seated difference from marxism (which is only a revolutionary critique of political economy). However, here we can make a comparison with liberal thought with regard to the effective realisation of freedom. For anarchism the economic ownership of the capitalist relationships of production can always be reduced to an historical phenomenology of power, as every form of property is a phenomenological expression of power as such. If property can be identified as a form of power it shares its character, that is, of being a social relationship or rather a relationship of force. As a relationship of force, property (and here the Liberals are right) cannot be eliminated.

Relationships of force can be balanced and modified but, short of bringing society to an end (as utopian marxism and an ingenuous current of anarchism would like), they cannot be overcome.

For freedom to be realised, property must be “redistributed”(as marxism insists in the guise of elimination) but for this to be done the power connected with this property must also be “redistributed”. This is why the *effective* redistribution of property, which ends with being directly connected with an *infinite redistribution of power* up to the limits allowed by the attainment of the equilibrium of relationships of force freed from any legalistic mortgaging of power, is unacceptable to either marxism or liberalism.

### *Freedom: Cause or Effect*

Thus we have come to the central problem of socialist, liberal and anarchist thought. What we would like to show, even if summarily, is that the difference between anarchism, liberalism and socialism is due to the fact that it is only for the first that freedom is the principle governing the whole of its thought while for the other two it is the effect of an historical cause.

For liberalism, freedom is realised to the degree in which it serves the growth of civilised society. Freedom is not, however, its driving principle. For the liberals, the principle governing civilised society is provided by the epistemological premises of classical political economy which declares that freedom is attained through the preservation of property. Since property cannot be extended to everyone it follows that freedom cannot be made universal. On the contrary, it is inevitably necessary to defend the freedom of the holders of property by means of political power, that is, the State. The division between civil society, where freedom exists through property, and the State, where freedom is brought back to its “functionality”, therefore remains incurable.

With socialism things are very little different. For socialism, the realisation of freedom goes step by step with the extension of the socialist economic base, with its ability to overturn and overcome the bourgeois one. In communism, the final stage of socialism, the contradictions which liberalism poses between citizen and bourgeois are declared to be resolved. However, here too the guiding principle is not freedom because the epistemological premises of socialism have other references, being given by the revolutionary overturning of classical political economy. Communism places the realisation of freedom in the irreversible overcoming of the economic, in going beyond economic laws.

Thus, in a deep-reaching analogy between them, socialism and liberalism see freedom as an historical result and, specifically, as the final product of a process of modernisation. *For socialism and/or liberalism freedom is an effect of causes which are not “ontologically” intrinsic to freedom itself.* The epistemological premises underlying the “constructive” strategies of both socialist and liberal societies differ, by their very nature, from the ends which are, in both cases, theoretically sought. This explains why, in both socialism and liberalism, the nature of the means ends up in deep-seated and conflicting contradiction with that of the end and thus why the political dimension, that is, that of the State, of domination, is inevitable to them.

At this point the abyss separating them from anarchism becomes clear. They are very far from seeing the realisation of freedom as an end in itself, to be pursued for itself without any other justification (historical, economic, political, social, etc.). They are therefore light years away from conceiving of and practising freedom as the *criterion for discriminating between everything and everything* and thus as the principal guide of all human conduct whether individual, productive, sexual or affective. They are in no way “fanatical lovers” of freedom as is anarchism by its “ontological” nature. That is why socialism and liberalism place freedom “within” history, as an effect of modernisation, and thus why, whereas they are “unequivocally of this world”, anarchism is “duplicity” so; why, in short, they can never be completely revolutionary. At most they can vaguely indicate, from the camp of authority, the confines beyond which the ground of freedom stretches away into infinity. But they cannot, without annihilating themselves, cross this “threshold” which divides the authority principle from that of freedom.

It is anarchism then which remains the supreme, perhaps unrepeatable, standard of freedom in the modern world. It is only anarchism that has unceasingly identified the principle of authority as the guiding principle of society in the last century, as the decisive cause of every defeat of human emancipation (over and above those social, economic and political gains achieved if emancipation is taken to mean the realisation, to the highest possible degree, of freedom and equality. It is only anarchism that has identified the State, which incorporates in its very principle all the existing authoritarian forms of any society as it is historically at the moment at which it is being considered, as the “great obstacle” in the way of emancipation, the rock on which any intentions of regeneration are shattered, regardless of whether they are motivated by an affectionate utopian dream or by a cold scientific project. It is only anarchism with its double theory of a critical analysis of a particular historical power and of the ideological induction of power itself (the latter “directing” the former) which has declared that freedom is “metaphysical” even before it is the object of a possible economic, social or political science, thus opening up its value to a double use: to a scientific use because the theory of freedom, not being definitively fixed on any theory, has been able to be “Popperianly” corrected and recorrected *ad infinitum* and a human use because it has given a voice to all the “rebels” of this world, all those who reject any conformity, to the “unsettled” ones of every generation (it is thanks also to this human “abuse” of freedom that there has remained an historical possibility of freedom in this world in defiance of every depersonalising totalitarian tendency).

In the end, that which has been easily considered to be anarchism's "ingenuous and incautious idealism", its "scientifically simplistic" theories, the "extremism" of its proposals, has won hands down, as the "hard facts of history" have confirmed, on every well-intentioned proposal of emancipation which has nevertheless included the authoritarian principle.

Here lies the whole question on which anarchist thought has always striven. An almost paradoxical contradiction seems to rob its logic of any force: on the one hand its ideology is founded in the ethical dimension while on the other its analysis is almost obsessively fixed on the problem of politics. Effectively the explanation of the existing reality always finishes in this way with all the complexity of reality reduced to the single, decisive explanation of domination. In their pure states, politics and domination can be reduced one to another: economic, social, cultural, racial, psychological, religious, etc.; domination can always exist but *domination in its essence* (that is, the *fact of domination* and of *acting to dominate* over and above its specific economic, social, cultural, etc. forms) is always, and above all, political. What has been and still is important in anarchist thought is the continued obsessive reflecting on the relationship between domination and politics; reflections that have ended with summarising these two concepts under the definition of "authority principle" and have identified this definition in the existing and logically coherent reality, that has personified and enlivened the supreme image, the ultimate essence, the decisive function in the world today, that is, the State.

Just as the anarchist movement is an ethical subject which moves politically within the body social (that is the definition given above), so can we also say that anarchist thought is ethical thought reflecting on the political with the aim of finding the end of this need within the broadest solution which can be called freedom. This is, however, extremely difficult because of the "ontological" differences between democracy and freedom. Domination, being the guiding principle of the existing reality, is finite in the sense that a description of what exists suffices for a description of all its possible ways of being. Freedom, on the other hand, does not enjoy this "physical" prerogative. It remains the guiding principle of an ethical will which seeks to overturn, or better supersede, the existing reality. Thus it can never be fully described. The immediate description of freedom is in fact negative as, by freedom, it means the absence of domination. Furthermore, freedom is, in itself, "incommensurable" as it has, and can have no end. It is this that the exploration of freedom is, as much economic as social, religious as racial, sexual as affective, etc., etc.

Anarchism's lack of a political theory for positive anarchism (federalism is not yet anarchism) is directly related to the understanding of the nature of domination, which is political. It seems that anarchism can have no political theory as this would lessen its reason for existing. It is from this that the present impasse arises, although it has not, naturally, prevented anarchism from showing, through this very difficulty, the historical problem of emancipation.

We have seen how important the undetermined relationship between ethics and politics has been in the history of anarchism. And it is undetermined because this undeterminability has provided the reason for anarchism as movement. Looking deeper, it is necessary to say that this contradiction, which has so far proven insurmountable, has been part of anarchism as movement to the same degree in which it has been part of the actual working out of freedom. As the Spanish experience teaches us, the unresolved relationship between ethics and politics is simply the difficult problem of the defence and advance of freedom by means of freedom. While anarchism, as a universal theoretical model, is a balanced play of the needs of the individual and those of society, anarchism, as a system of thought reflecting on the historical problem of human emancipation, is an immensely difficult theorem which seeks to extract from an ethical end those and only those means that are coherent with it, in form, logic and content. This theorem is immensely difficult, *almost impossible*, because, while the end is, by definition, purely ethical, the means are, and cannot but be, always and above all historical, which is to say "political". Means and ends are thus structurally heterogeneous. However, should anarchism seek to even partially attenuate or renounce the ethical nature of its end, it would fall inexorably into one of the two parts of its positive doctrine, according to the moment in history. In other words, it would end up being either a more radical form (or a further stage) of socialism or a more extreme form (or a further stage) of liberalism, because, in attenuating or renouncing the ethical nature of the end, *it*

*would lose that revolutionary tension* which makes it radically and “genetically” different from both.

The reason for anarchism's defeat in history has also been the reason for its ideological victory: its wanting to retain its objective of human emancipation, in opposition to history, has made this inevitable. The reasons for its ideological victory are naturally the same as for its theoretical victory as the conditions of its historical defeat must be explained by “self-made political obstacles”: the anarchist movement could not be totally political because this would have weakened its ideological rightness. And, on the other hand, its ideological rightness has shown, through its political defeat, that the historical problem of emancipation can only be resolved through the elimination of the political. Human emancipation means the overcoming of the political, which means the elimination of power, which, to be epistemologically more precise, and up to date, means the elimination of domination.