

Part 2

SECULARISATIONS: PHILOSOPHY



Have we then in this discursus only contributed to a further *disenchantment* of the world, and thus are we simply taking part of the general rationalizing culture of Christianity, and specifically Protestantism? Not at all. Rather we are concerned with re-connecting what has been thoughtlessly sundered, the ideal world of thought and the material world. In reality we find they are never really apart in their immediacy, but also that historically they re-unite in moments that, seen with the common fragmented way of thinking, appear as far too real. This is important for us because effectively this study is one concerned with the knowledge of history.

A popular conception would have it that revolution is not concerned with history, but this is quite false: the beginning of modern revolt comes from the rediscovery of historical knowledge in the re-birth of the Renaissance, later follows the Protestant critique of Catholic Church history and the admiration for Antiquity of the French Revolutionary period. Even the modern revolt of the proletariat according to its theorists is related to *History and Class-Consciousness*, as

in the title of that most famous work of Marxist philosophy by Georg Lukacs. Thus, upon further examination the true question will be seen to be between different conceptions of history, not getting rid of or denying the possibility of historical knowledge.

Then the question becomes: what can revolutionaries take from history, or in a more real sense, what belongs to them as a legacy? This is particularly important because we find ourselves in the specific situation of a modern Greece harking back to the oldest foundations of the West, structured through a modern nationalism spuriously linked back to Antiquity. Here the pastiche of a few 19th century buildings amidst urban ugliness, eurozone aspirations, Orthodox Churches, Athenian democratic and Roman imperial monuments, and an imagined ethnic continuity are somehow supposed to be plastered into a coherent whole. Yet in order to contest the dominant historical presentation and to combat its clear descent into extremist madness, we would have to have our own historical view, which is what is attempted here. Yet I believe we can plot our ship through the reefs

of under and over-appreciation for the past, in following the obviously reasoned fashion of Bakunin:

"It is true that the Greek civilisation, like all the ancient civilisations, including that of Rome, was exclusively national and based on slavery. But, in spite of these two immense defects, the former none the less conceived and realised the idea of humanity; it ennobled and really idealised the life of men; it transformed human herds into free associations of free men; it created through liberty the sciences, the arts, a poetry, an immortal philosophy, and the primary concepts of human respect. With political and social liberty, it created free thought. At the close of the Middle Ages, during the period of the Renaissance, the fact that some Greek emigrants brought a few of those immortal books into Italy sufficed to resuscitate life, liberty, thought, humanity, buried in the dark dungeon of Catholicism. Human emancipation, that is the name of the Greek civilisation."

Perhaps we can afford to be less enthusiastic and a bit more discerning than Bakunin, while still following the



historic line he traces (which Greek readers will note is continued in the work of Castoriadis, for one modern example). But in this sense, what belongs to modern revolution from Antiquity and from the Renaissance, as well as from the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, is not a particular political situation or customs, nothing material or ethnic, since these peoples and epochs are forever past. However, what *does belong* is ideal or intellectual, and most clearly these are the conceptions stored in philosophy. In other words (for example that great German one, *aufheben*) philosophic revolution abolishes the old forms of society and yet preserves and improves upon the spiritual memories of the past.

That said, we should continue with our historical and philosophical investigation. The root of the problem is one in logic concerning supposed eternal truth. The real way of looking at things philosophically has always been concerned with the one and many, the $\epsilon\nu$ και $\pi\alpha\nu$, but monotheism has simply reduced everything to the one. This leads to gross contortions and problems of meaning and I submit produces the

doubts and sufferings inherent in this tradition: for example the rhetorical exercises of the Book of Job and the Lamentations when respectively, Judea or Christian Rome suffer a loss in battle. After all if God is there, then he has to be acting to defeat what he is supposed to love. From this come the unappealing intellectual contortions about punishment with the consigning of this world to a second practically omnipotent deity, Satan. Or else we fall back on a crude and unjustified theodicy, etc. The polytheism of the ancient world could be remarked as the other side, as purely the rule of the many, which descends into its own problems. The problem there is a disordered descent into infinitude: by the end, for example, the Romans not only mechanically manipulated their religion for purposes of State, but also had multiplied the deities for every specific purpose imaginable (childbirth, crossroads, doorways, luck, war, harvests, etc.). It is no surprise that in these contexts the old faith dies away.

The real solution is to be found in the philosophy that emerged out of the old polytheistic world and gave its

weight to tempering the monotheism of Christianity. In the final working out of this system in antiquity, in Neo-Platonism, we see that there is a real superessential unity behind the fabric of appearances- designated poetically by Aristotle as the unmoved mover- but its emanations are fragmented down into many component parts. These go much further to explaining and mitigating the influences of bad events, as consolation, than only having one source and cause of blessings and pains. In sum, it means a different way of thinking about truth and meaning, and that there is another tradition to which we can apply for political imagery, not just the crude thought that separates Heaven and Earth.

So, we must keep in mind what we said earlier about the transcending of differences of the one and the many in philosophy. Now, the secularized concept of heaven, as we use it in our Christian sense, is utopia. But this prior heaven was always separated from our earth in time. These two terms have been re-united but as still separated. I mean that Utopia is linked to earth, and will arrive in a definite period, just a few

years more—the famous Soviet waiting for communism. However, reality is not really sundered in this fashion—there is a way of thinking about reality that sunders its own unity with the world. Meaning expressed in life (here abandoning the use of the word 'heaven' and 'utopia') is not linked to the marginal practice of cults extended outside of time (e.g. the negation of personality and property with the Essenes, monks, and millennials) but rather appears most clearly in real historical periods. And this occurs not in a crudely linear manner but rather in a discontinuous manner which, however, still does have a progression inside it.

If we really wanted to learn more, we would have to bring up that weighty question, concerning *The Ages of the World*. After all, otherwise the world presents itself as an inexplicable sequence of secularizations and divinizations: what was previously secular becomes divinized as the Holy Roman Empire, out of which we now emerge once more into a secularized world. This remains at the level of observation, which is extremely useful, but not quite explanation, which would be more useful still. Without the latter, we seem to have an endless changing back and forth, where there is in truth just as much meaning in history as in the rotation of the planets, from whence we derive the word 'revolution'. As is well-known, this historical preoccupation largely concerned Hegel, and it is he who made philosophy historical, in a sense it previously had not been. The logical connection between the finished Neo-Platonic edifice elaborated by Proclus and that of the system of Hegel has not really been adequately explored. But in brief it means is that to the 'flat' system of ancient philosophy, Hegel has added 'depth', or the consideration of Time. In a real sense the old transcendence of the one and the many within the neo-Platonic system was also applied to Time by Hegel, and 'the one' of the linear

time of the Judeo-Christian tradition is reconciled with 'the many', the eternal circle of the Greek world. This gives us Hegel's system, an ascending cycle that returns back into its altered self. Hegel has shown that progress toward the Good, in history, is reflected in the advance of Liberty. And if one wanted the secret to these World-Spirits that rule an age, they could perhaps each be conceived of as, in the old terminology, a world-ruler, a *κοσμοκράτορ*.

This has meaning if we want to determine why Anarchy is so special at this specific moment in time. Why is Anarchy possessed of the only energy, and why has Marxism now become a lifeless parliamentary party? No longer do the Marxists expropriate the program of the Anarchists (as with the Commune, October, or the New Left), now it becomes clear that this was only Marxism approximating to the superior form of its own truth. The present moment opens up the revelation that Anarchy is now the only real revolt: Marxism has no more life precisely because it has no more Anarchy left inside itself. The struggles of today like Val de Susa or the Zapatistas are not all consciously anarchist, but they are all fighting against the state, they are *all anarchistic*. In this sense Anarchy might be said to have resolved the contradictions of the past by being "*one many*". Anarchy is the intellectual term that unites a diverse multitude of anti-state struggles, that influences but does not control, the sun that shines down on a world of revolt. In the hourglass of Spirit, the sands of Anarchy have been draining away from Marxism over history. As Marxism is fading away it dissolves into Anarchy, which is seen quite clearly with the EZLN or even the PKK. At the end the hour is struck, and what has seemed to be Marxist progress, is actually revealed as today's emptiness, and all the real historical content is seen to be on the bottom, in the tradition of emancipation that logically leads to Anarchy. This new type

of revolution will divide the old from the new and reveal the real historical current of the past era. This means we are at the passing of a stage in history.

When eras end, they leave behind them brief flickerings of memory from the illumination they participated in, and it is this lightness of feeling that allows us to describe these great historical moments most appropriately as a Bacchanalian festival. We can recognize a few of these special epochs, knots in the thread of time, as they appeared in history, for example in the Renaissance or around the revolutionary time loosely designated by 1789. The spirit is free from its mundane shackles, allowed the ground to create and live as it likes, and correspondingly these are periods full of Liberty, in all senses of the term. Not the tired course of history that we simply have to accomplish, but to arrive at a new dispensation; not the winding mountain path, but the vista; not the day of labor, but the festival. These special periods embody the truth of the prior age and bring a term to the old era, all while they usher in the promise of the new. But these really-living heroic and noble times have in one sense the most danger, divisions, chaos, collapses, and so forth; but on the other hand they are full of life, full of thought, have the most sublime moments, and above all, the greatest understanding of the passage of time in its richness. These epochs always rise to the clarity to see that eternity appears in time, as an historical, phenomenal appearance. This also accounts for the striking lucidity of the works informed and produced by these moments, as these eras always seem to know their own ethereality as well as their own beauty. In the words of that great spirit, Lorenzo de Medici, *Quant'è bella giovinezza, che si fugge tuttavia:*

*Fair is youth and void of sorrow,
But it hourly flies away.
Youth and maids, enjoy today,
For naught ye know about tomorrow.*

Like the aforementioned poem, *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, these are times that inspire us with that old feeling of joy. For whenever the world rediscovers its joy in life, the old celebration of the Dionysia, the Bacchanal, is never far from it— not in a perpetual way, like the supposed Christ, but in these uneven moments of joy and laughter, as Goethe described the Saturnalia (renamed by the Christians, Carnival) at Rome.

“On the contrary, knowing that life, taken as a whole, is like the Roman Carnival, unpredictable, unsatisfactory and problematic, I hope that this carefree crowd of maskers will make [the readers] remember how valuable is every moment of joy, however fleeting and trivial it may seem.”

But this passing of faded loves and of rich moments, of the good and noble, of experiences in time, is not an unhappy doctrine, but rather one that fortifies and uplifts us. The tree that was green withers, but it remains forever in our memory, and the joy of its blossoming, is in a real sense outside of temporal existence. After all how could it not be so, if we can remember and inwardize an event, after it has passed?

“But, just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than the Nature which directly provides them—the Nature diversified into their conditions and elements, the tree, air, light, and so on—because she sums all this up in a higher mode, in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture with which she offers them, so too, the Spirit of the Fate that presents us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of that nation, for it is the inwardizing in us of the Spirit which in them was still outwardly manifested; it is the Spirit of the

tragic Fate which gathers all those individual gods and attributes of the substance into one pantheon, into the Spirit that is itself conscious of itself as Spirit.”

The real meaning of the past comes to us from the recollection of the happy vintage of the harvest, these times that are in truth outside of time— not the periods of gestation, but the fruit itself. This means very much for us as we today live largely in the meaningless present, the linear advance of technology and its promises. But Judeo-Christian revolt against nature can only take humanity so far before humans are forced to realize that they too, are a part of this Nature. As many have remarked, the God-man of Christianity has given way to the Man-god of modernity, but now we progress further and yet come back to the truth of separation, but revealed in its true form: *man, as simply man, content in himself, and god, or the invisible realm, understood now as it always really was, as Thought.*

So to bring us back to contemporary issues, I contend we do head into one of these ages of great formative chaos that later ages recollect with awe. Just as the spirit of the Renaissance was submerged into the Reformation, only to come back out again at the other end, refreshed and renewed in the French Revolution of 1789, so too German Idealism, the spirit and comprehension of 1789, has submerged into the workers' movement. It is now getting ready to emerge once more into its new shape of Anarchy, as the workers' movement quite obviously passes away. It comes home to itself, this revolution getting older and more profound, passing from the France of 68, its old dwelling place, back to the strange and apocalyptic Italy of 77, where there is less talk of revolution than impending

catastrophe threatening the delicate welfare state. But from these Roman lands, we go back ever further in time, back to the land of Greece that German Idealism loved so much. The Odysseus who left in the prime of his manhood is much different from the far-wandering beggar who returns home, but for all that, it is still the same man. In a certain esoteric sense, the revolution that began it all, 1789 in France, gave birth to its son, 1917 in Russia, and now this too as physical incarnation has passed away. But we still need to enter into the period of things revealed in their true shape, the successor to the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, the third moment, as Hegel might say, as *Geist*. Only Anarchy expresses this sacred and spiritual character of revolution, and only Anarchy shows that revolution is not caused by a sociological status, but rather, *revolutionists participate of liberty*, which is open to all who feel that existential need. In this sense there is no sociological revolutionary subject, *but an ideal one with infinite manifestations*. Liberty today means to destroy the State, and the cup of revolt is passed to whomsoever wishes to drink that heady draught. Thus revolution, like the old mysteries, could be conceived of as a generalized mystical experience. Only now, with philosophy, the mystery is no longer obscure. The moments leave historical time and find the reality of eternity: *Geist* abolishes Time, in its last moment.

Therefore, what is the point of all this investigation, this long research back into time and into lands far away? I think to point out, with a real historical grounding, that the *only contemporary conception of revolt still credible is the state withering away*. But concepts always relate to the world and so in our world, where the state is incontestably dying, many can only see death, not a new life. But

it is, in fact, a completely new world arriving, and not in an otherworldly haze or suspended future but currently. Only, what world is this? *One created by German Idealism*, whose founding document informs us that, “we must transcend the state”.

So if we come back full circle from historical thinking to its application, this might mean that true meaning in life is never something separated or unattainable, but rather mundane earthly moments filled with consciousness, unity and meaning, a dangerous intensity that lends value to the scene. Not quantity, but quality. Anarchy is going ever further away from the old separation, but on the only correct basis of separation itself, as “one many”. Anarchy is the refiguration of an essential plurality: *it is the secularization of German Idealism*. In looking at it in a religious sense, we could call this *Pantheism*. I would introduce this term, not only because it was used as a term of abuse against German Idealism by its Christian adversaries, but also to designate its difference between the faded old polytheism and the faded, more modern monotheism, to designate it as a middle ground. In a real sense it has evaded the old problems that plagued both traditions: the unfocused running on into infinity of polytheism, and the too-focused logical quandaries of monotheism. Already both traditions approximated to this: educated Athenians or Romans very rarely took their mythology seriously, or if they did, interpreted it in the symbolic way of philosophy (not the direct, credulous faith of religion) and they had also put something above even the Olympians, namely Thought and its productions. So too Christianity can't really cope with the intellectual sterility of monotheism, and has to bring back several gods in its trinity and lesser gods with its cult of angels

and saints. But in either case, once we have dispensed with the literal faith and seen its substratum of the intellect, when gods have become thoughts, we have left the sphere of religious belief and are already in a more philosophic mode of viewing things. Philosophy is, in this sense, the true revealed religion.



Practically, the pantheistic shattering of philosophic revolution means a return to the disordered chaos of the old times, the popular liberty of the city-states. The small regions will split off from the larger, the villages from the cities, and things will begin to inexorably break down. Whenever the world begins to liberate itself, in the Renaissance, the French Revolution or the revolts after the First World War, philosophy returns

into practicality and political life opens up into broad new horizons of autonomous meaning. And to use a term of Foucault's, there will necessarily be a proliferation of *heterotopias*, not any one model for the whole world, but rather thousands of different metaphysical systems, embodied and really lived in daily life. Their correlate is for thousands of different political entities and sovereignties, all contesting the enormous and unbearable tyranny of this modern world-state, Empire. *When the assemblies, communes and councils return, it means the germ of the city-state of Antiquity, the Renaissance republic, the Soviet of modern revolt, is once more becoming a reality.*

The thoughts of these special eras of the past are preserved and purified in philosophy. Now according to the story, when they removed the statue of Athena from the Acropolis, she fled into the house of Proclus, the last great philosopher of Antiquity. But today, revolt reinstates this wisdom in its true form, *as really lived*. Everyone feels that with revolt in modern Athens something truly historic reaches its end. Philosophy implicitly has done away with the false contradictions of subject and object, reality and utopia, being and thought. In other words, the owl of Athena takes her flight at the falling of dusk on the West. So what Plato called Forms and Aristotle called Categories, the old shell of divine thought, philosophy, *now returns in its secularized form, as revolution.*