

Anarchism

Michael Bakunin, State and Society, from Michael Bakunin, Selected Writings, Edited and Introduced by Arthur Lehning, Jonathan Cape, London, 1973, ISBN 0-224-00893-5, pp. 136-54.

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POLS10003 Introduction to Political Ideas.

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SELECTED WRITINGS

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VII STATE AND SOCIETY

The first of these three extracts is from *Fédéralisme, socialisme et anti-théologisme*, published in *Œuvres*, vol. I (Paris, 1895), pp. 139-45. The other two texts are from *L'Empire knouto-germanique* (see p. 139); they are to be found in *Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 264-89 and vol. III (Paris, 1908), pp. 211-15. They are here translated from the French by Steven Cox.

I

Man is not only the most individual being on earth, but also the most *social*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was sorely mistaken in his belief that primitive society was established by a free contract, effected by savages. But Jean-Jacques Rousseau is not alone in his assertion. The majority of modern jurists and publicists, whether of the Kantian or any other individualist, liberal school, accept neither the society of the theologian, based upon divine right, nor the society depicted by the Hegelian school as the more or less mystical embodiment of objective Morality, nor the primitively animal society of the naturalists. Willy-nilly, and for want of any other foundation, they take the *tacit contract* as their point of departure. A tacit contract—a wordless and consequently a thoughtless and unintentional contract—what terrible nonsense! An absurd and, worse, a pernicious fiction! A shameful deceit, presupposing that while I was in no condition either to decide, think or speak, and let myself be fleeced without a murmur, I could have agreed to eternal enslavement for myself and all my descendants!

The implications of the *social contract* are in fact fatal, because they culminate in the absolute domination of the State. And yet the principle seems extremely liberal at first sight. Before arranging their contract, individuals are assumed to have enjoyed absolute liberty, because this theory holds that only man in his natural, wild state is totally free. We have expressed our opinion of this natural liberty, which is nothing but the absolute dependence of the ape-man in his permanent

struggle with the external world. But supposing that he really is free to begin with, why then does he band himself into society? And back comes the answer—in order to ensure his safety against all the possible inroads of that same external world, including any other associated or unassociated men who do not belong to this nascent society.

So here we have primitive men, each one totally free in his own right, and enjoying his freedom only as long as he does not come into contact with another and remains immersed in absolute individual isolation. The liberty of one does not require the liberty of the other. On the contrary, since each individual's liberty is sufficient in itself, each man's liberty necessarily involves denial of every other man's, and when all these liberties encounter one another they are bound to be mutually limited and diminished and to contradict and destroy one another ...

In order not to utterly destroy one another, they form an explicit or tacit *contract* by which they relinquish a part of themselves so as to safeguard the rest. This contract becomes the basis of society, or rather of the State, for it must be noted that there is no room in this theory for society, only for the State, or rather that society is totally absorbed by the State.

Society is the natural medium of the human collectivity, regardless of contracts. It progresses slowly, through the momentum imparted by individual initiatives, not through the mind and will of the legislator. There may be many unarticulated laws that rule it, but these are natural laws, inherent in the social body just as physical laws are inherent in the material. Most of these laws remain unknown to this day, and yet they have governed human society from its inception, irrespective of the thoughts and intentions of the men who have composed it. It follows that they are not to be confused with the judicial and political laws proclaimed by some legislative authority, which are assumed by the system under investigation to be the logical conclusion of the first contract deliberately entered into by men.

The State is not a direct product of nature; it does not, like Society, precede the awakening of thought in man, and later on we shall attempt to show how it is created by the religious

conscience in the midst of natural society. According to the liberal propagandists, the first State was created by the free, deliberate decision of men; according to the absolutists, it is a divine creation. In either case it dominates society and tends to absorb it altogether.

In the second case, this absorption is self-explanatory: a divine institution is bound to absorb any natural organization. The odd thing is that the individualist school with its free contract arrives at the same conclusion. And in fact this school sets out by denying the very existence of a natural society prior to the contract, since such a society would presuppose natural contact among individuals and consequently *reciprocal limitation of their liberties*, which would run counter to the absolute liberty which everybody is theoretically assumed to have enjoyed before the conclusion of the contract, and which would amount to nothing more or less than the contract itself, existing as a natural fact prior even to the free contract. So according to this system human society begins only with the conclusion of the contract. Then what is society? It is the pure and logical application of the contract with all its legislative and practical apparatus and consequences — it is the State.

Let us look closer. What does it represent? The sum of all its members' denials of individual liberty, or of the sacrifices made by all its members in renouncing a portion of their liberty for the common welfare. We have seen that according to the individualist theory each man's liberty is the boundary or natural denial of everybody else's: so, this absolute limitation, this denial of each man's liberty in the name of the liberty of all, or of the common law — it is the State. Therefore individual liberty ends where the State begins, and vice versa.

The reply will be that the State represents the public safety or common interest of all, and that it only removes part of a man's liberty in order to preserve the remainder. But while that remainder may, if you will, be security, it is never liberty. Liberty is indivisible: no part can be removed without killing the whole. By a natural, necessary and irresistible process, all my liberty is concentrated precisely in the fragment you remove, however tiny. This is the story of Bluebeard's wife, who had a whole palace at her disposal,

with absolute freedom to go anywhere and see and touch anything, except for one paltry little room which the sovereign will of her terrible husband forbade her to enter on pain of death. So her soul withdrew from all the splendours of the palace and focused wholly on this paltry little room. She opened it. And she was right to open it, because the action was necessary to her liberty, flagrantly violated by the prohibition. It is also the story of Adam and Eve: forbidding them to taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge, for no other reason than because he required it, was an act of sheer despotism on the part of the good Lord, and if our first parents had obeyed, the whole human race would still be weltering in the most humiliating slavery. Instead, their disobedience emancipated and rescued it. Mythologically speaking, it was the first step towards human liberty.

But perhaps it will be said that the State, the democratic State, based on free suffrage among all its citizens, could not be a denial of their liberty. And why not? This will wholly depend on the functions and power which the citizens leave to the State. A republican State based on universal suffrage can be very despotic, even more despotic than a monarchic State, because under the pretext of representing the will of all it will bear down on the will and free impulse of each of its members with all the weight of its collective power.

II

The doctrinaire liberals turn out to be no less fanatical partisans of the absolute right of the State than the monarchist and Jacobin absolutists.

Their worship of the State in spite of everything, even when it may seem to be so contrary to their liberal doctrine, has two kinds of explanation. First, *practical*: it is in the interests of their class, since the vast majority of doctrinaire liberals belong to the bourgeoisie. This numerous, respectable class would ask nothing better than to award itself the right or rather the privilege of utter anarchy; its whole social economy, the real base of its political existence, is well known for having no other law than the kind of anarchy expressed in the famous phrase *Laissez faire et laissez passer*. But it loves that anarchy only for its own advantage, and strictly on condition that the

masses, 'too ignorant to enjoy it without abusing it', remain subject to the harshest State discipline. For if the masses were to weary of working for others and rebel, the entire political and social existence of the bourgeoisie would collapse. Which explains why whenever the working masses stir we see the most upstanding bourgeois liberals revert at once to rabid support of State dominance. And since agitation among the popular masses is now becoming a growing, chronic evil, we see the liberal bourgeois converting to the cult of absolute power even in the freest countries.

As well as this practical reason, there is another quite *theoretical* reason which likewise compels even the most genuine liberals to keep harking back to worship of the State. They are, and are called, liberals because they take the freedom of the individual as the basis and starting-point of their theory, and it is precisely because they set out from this premise that they are bound to arrive at recognition of absolute State power.

From their standpoint, the freedom of the individual is not a creation, an historical product of society. They claim that it is previous to any society, and that every man bears it from birth onwards, together with his immortal soul, as a divine gift. It follows that only outside society is man complete and in some sense absolute in himself. Being himself free prior to and apart from society, he necessarily forms the latter by a voluntary action and by a kind of instinctive and tacit or deliberate and formal contract. In other words, according to this theory it is not individuals who are created by society but the other way about, as a result of some external necessity such as work and war.

What emerges from this theory is that society proper does not exist; it utterly ignores natural human society, the real starting-point of all human civilization and the only medium in which the personality and liberty of man can really be born and grow. All it acknowledges is, at one extreme, the individual, a being who exists in himself and is free in himself, and at the other that conventional society arbitrarily formed by these individuals and based on a formal or tacit contract—the State. (Liberals are well aware that no historic State has ever been based on a contract, and that they have all been

founded by violence and conquest. But they need this fiction of the free contract as the basis of the State, so they grasp at it without further ado.)

The human individuals whose conventionally united aggregate forms the State are shown up by this theory as quite peculiar creatures, bulging with contradictions. Each equipped with an immortal soul and inborn liberty or free will, on the one hand they are infinite, absolute beings and as such complete in themselves, self-sufficient and with no need for anyone else—at a pinch, not even God, because being immortal and infinite they are gods themselves. On the other hand, they are very crassly material beings, weak, imperfect, limited and absolutely dependent on the external nature which holds and enfolds them and eventually carries them away. Seen from the former viewpoint, they have so little need for society that it seems something of an impediment to the plenitude of their being, their perfect liberty. Thus, ever since the dawn of Christianity there have been austere, holy men who have taken the immortality and salvation of their souls seriously, broken their social ties, shunned all human contact and sought perfection, virtue and God in the wilderness. Quite rationally and logically, they have considered society as a source of corruption and the utter isolation of the soul as the earnest of all the virtues. If they ever left their solitude it was never from need but from generosity and Christian charity towards those who, continuing to fester in the social sphere, had need of their advice, prayers and guidance. It was always to save others, never to save and perfect themselves—in fact they were running the risk of losing their souls by returning to the society which they had fled in horror as the forcing-ground of all corruption, and once acquitted of their holy mission they hurried back to their wilderness, there to purify themselves once again in ceaseless contemplation of their individual being and solitary soul, in the presence of God alone.

It is an example which ought to be followed by all who still believe in the immortality of the soul, inborn liberty or free will, if they really want to save their souls and train them properly for eternal life. I repeat that the anchorite saints who achieved complete imbecility through isolation

were being perfectly logical. Once grant that the soul is immortal, infinite in essence, free and *sui generis*, then it should be sufficient in itself. Only fleeting, limited, finite beings can mutually fulfil one another; the infinite cannot be fulfilled—on the contrary, when it encounters another, which is not itself, it feels hemmed in and has to escape, to exclude everything which is not itself. At a pinch, I have said, the immortal soul should even be able to do without God. A being which is infinite in itself cannot acknowledge another equal being at its own level, let alone one which is higher and superior. Any being as infinite as itself and other than itself would impose a limit on it and would therefore make it a determinate, finite being. In recognizing a being as infinite—like itself but separate from itself—the immortal soul is necessarily recognizing itself as finite. For infinity is infinity only when it is all-embracing and leaves nothing outside itself. More important, an infinite being cannot and must not recognize an infinite being which is superior to itself. The infinite does not allow for anything relative or comparative; the idea of a superior and an inferior infinity is therefore an absurdity. And God is that absurdity. The theology whose privilege it is to be absurd, and which believes in things precisely because they are absurd, has promoted the superior, absolute infinity of God above the immortal and consequently infinite souls of men. But it has created the compensatory fiction of Satan, the image of an infinite being rebelling against the existence of an absolute infinity, against God. And just as Satan rebelled against the superior infinity of God, so the anchorite saints of Christendom, too humble to rebel against God, turned against the equal infinity of man, against society. Reasonably enough, they asserted that they did not need to be saved, and that since a strange fatality dictated that they were infinities, the society of God and the contemplation of their own selves in the presence of that absolute infinity was enough for them.

And I say again that theirs is an example to be followed by all believers in the immortality of the soul. From their point of view, society has nothing to offer except certain damnation. After all, what does it give to men? First, material wealth, which can only be produced in sufficient quantity by collective

labour. But surely a believer in the life eternal is supposed to despise this wealth? Did Jesus Christ not tell his disciples, 'Lay not up treasures on this earth, for where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also,' and 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven'? (I often wonder how those rich, pious Protestants in England, America, Germany and Switzerland must feel when they read those lines, which apply so directly and so unpleasantly to their own selves.)

Jesus Christ is right; there is no possible compromise between coveting material wealth and the salvation of immortal souls. And in that case, given a genuine belief in the immortality of the soul, is it not advisable to give up the comforts and luxuries of society and live on roots like the anchorites for the sake of an eternity of salvation, rather than lose one's chance for the sake of a few dozen years' material enjoyment? It is a simple sum, and the solution is so obvious that we are driven to the conclusion that all those pious wealthy bourgeois, bankers, industrialists and merchants doing such thriving trade by the same old methods, and for ever paying lip-service to the Gospel, do not really expect their souls to be immortal, and are generously leaving that privilege to the proletariat, humbly keeping their own hands on the worthless material goods they lay up on this earth.

What else does society offer, apart from material wealth? Carnal, human, earthly affection, civilization and culture—vast enough from the transitory, earthbound point of view, but insignificant compared with eternity, immortality and God, in whose sight the greatest human wisdom is but folly.

There is a legend of the Eastern Church which tells how two anchorite saints voluntarily marooned themselves on a desert island for some decades, avoiding even each other and spending night and day in prayer and meditation. The time came when they had lost even the use of words, and were left with only three or four out of all their old vocabulary, which made no sense when put together, but nevertheless expressed their souls' sublime yearnings towards God. They lived on raw roots, like herbivores. From the human standpoint these two were fools or lunatics, but from the viewpoint of the divine, of belief in the immortality of the soul, they

proved themselves much more profound in their calculations than a Galileo or a Newton by sacrificing a few decades of earthly wealth and worldly wisdom to win eternal beatitude and divine wisdom.

So it is obvious that, as a being equipped with a divine soul and the infinity and liberty inherent in that soul, man is eminently anti-social. And had he always been wise, had he always been so exclusively preoccupied with his own eternity and had the sense to despise all the wealth, affection and vanities of this world, he would never have relinquished this state of innocence or holy imbecility and would never have organized himself into society. In other words, Adam and Eve would never have tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge and we should all have lived like animals in that terrestrial paradise which God gave them for a dwelling. But from the moment when men wanted to know, to civilize and humanize themselves, think, speak and enjoy material wealth, they had no choice but to leave their solitude and form themselves into society. For to the extent that their *inner* selves are infinite, immortal and free, their *outer* selves are limited, mortal, weak and dependent upon the external world.

Seen from the viewpoint of their earthly, that is, their non-fictional, real existence, the mass of mankind presents such a degrading spectacle and seems so woefully devoid of initiative, will-power and sense that it really takes great capacity for self-deception to locate an immortal soul among them, or even the merest hint of free will. To us, they appear as utterly and inexorably determined beings — determined above all by external nature, the configuration of the soil and all the material conditions of their existence, but also determined by the unending political, religious and social pressures, the customs, habits and laws and the whole world of prejudices or thoughts slowly developed in the course of centuries which they encounter when they enter social life and whose products and instruments they may be, but never their creators. Even from a relative, let alone an absolute viewpoint, there is hardly one man in a thousand of whom it could be said that his wants and thoughts are his own. Both among the *ignorant masses* and the civilized and privileged classes, the vast majority of human individuals want and think only what the

surrounding world wants and thinks: they probably believe that their minds are their own, but they are tied to the servile, routine regurgitation of the thoughts and wishes of others, with utterly imperceptible, empty modifications. Servility and routine, those bottomless wells of the commonplace, together with the absence of scepticism and initiative in the individual mind and will, are the main causes of the distressingly slow historic development of humanity. For materialists and realists like ourselves, who believe neither in the hereafter nor in free will, this sluggishness, painful though it is, appears as a natural factor. Emerging from the simian state, it is only with great difficulty that man achieves awareness of his humanity and realization of his liberty. At the beginning he is capable neither of awareness nor of liberty; he is born a wild beast and a slave, and his progressive humanization and emancipation come only in the context of society, which is necessarily prior to the birth of thought, word and will, and only through the collective pressure of every member of that society, past and present. Consequently society is the basis and natural starting-point of man's human existence, and it follows that he only realizes his individual liberty or personality by integration with all the individuals around him and by virtue of the collective power of society, without which there can be no doubt that of all the wild beasts on the face of the earth he would for ever remain the most stupid and the most wretched. According to the materialist theory, the only natural, logical theory, instead of diminishing and constricting the freedom of the individual, society creates it. Society is the root and branch, liberty the fruit. Therefore in every era man must find his liberty not at the beginning but at the end of history, and it may be said that the real and total emancipation of every human individual is the true great objective and ultimate goal of history.

Anything else is idealism. According to this theory, man starts out as a free immortal being and ends in slavery. As a free immortal, infinite and self-sufficient, he has no need of society, which implies that if he then submits to society it can only be as a result of some kind of failure, or else because he forgets and loses the awareness of his immortality and liberty. A paradoxical creature, inwardly infinite and spiritual but

outwardly dependent, ineffective and material, he is forced to enter into association not for his soul's requirements but for his body's protection. So society only comes about through a kind of sacrifice of the interests and independence of the soul to the despicable call of the body. It is a true fall and enthrallment for the inwardly free and immortal individual, and involves him in what is at the least a partial abdication of his original liberty.

We are familiar with the sacramental saying which expresses this fall and this sacrifice, this first fatal step into human slavery, in the jargon of every supporter of the State and of judicial law. By his entry into any society the individual — who enjoys complete liberty in the state of nature, prior to becoming a member of that society — offers up a portion of this liberty so that society will vouchsafe him the rest. Anybody who asks for an explanation is usually presented with a further saying: '*The liberty of each human being should have no limits other than that of every other.*'

At first glance, this seems utterly fair, does it not? And yet this theory holds the germ of the whole theory of despotism. In agreement with the basic thinking of every idealist school, and contrary to all the actual facts, the human individual emerges as a completely free being only as long as he holds aloof from society, which means that the latter, seen and interpreted in judicial and political terms — as State, in fact — is the negation of liberty. This is the end-product of idealism, and is quite opposed to the deductions of materialism, which hold, in agreement with the pattern of the real world, that the freedom of the individual is a function of man in society, a necessary consequence of the collective development of mankind.

The materialist, realist and collectivist definition of liberty flatly contradicts the idealists. It is as follows: man does not become man, nor does he achieve awareness or realization of his humanity, other than in society and in the collective movement of the whole of society; he only shakes off the yoke of external nature through collective or social labour, the one force capable of transforming the earth's surface into an environment favourable to the growth of humanity; and without this material emancipation there can be no intellectual

and moral emancipation for anyone. No one can shake off the yoke of his own nature, subordinate the instincts and drives of his body to the guidance of his ever-developing mind, except through upbringing and education. Yet these are eminently, in fact exclusively, social phenomena, for without society man would eternally have remained a wild beast or a saint — there being little difference between the two. Lastly, man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty. Being free for man means being acknowledged, considered and treated as such by another man, and by all the men around him. Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation, but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection, for the liberty of any individual is nothing more or less than the reflection of his humanity and his human rights in the awareness of all free men — his brothers, his equals.

I can only call myself free and feel free in the presence and in terms of other men. In the presence of a lesser animal, I am neither free nor a man, because no animal is capable of conceiving and therefore also of acknowledging my humanity. I myself am human and free only to the extent that I acknowledge the humanity and liberty of all my fellows. It is only by respecting their human character that I respect my own. When a cannibal treats his prisoner like an animal, he himself is not a man but an animal. A slavemaster is not a man but a master. By ignoring his slave's humanity he ignores his own. The whole of ancient society demonstrates that the Greeks and Romans did not feel free as human beings and in terms of human rights; they thought themselves privileged as Greeks or Romans, in terms of their own society, and only as long as it continued to be independent and unconquered and in fact to conquer other countries, through the special protection of their national Gods, so that when they themselves were conquered they felt no surprise and no right or duty to rebel if they themselves relapsed into slavery.

It is greatly to the credit of Christianity that it proclaimed the humanity of all human beings, women included, and the equality of all men in the sight of God. But how was this message proclaimed? It applied to heaven and the life to come, not to earth and the real life of the present. In any case this equality in the hereafter is still a falsehood, since the number of

the elect is extremely small, we know. Theologians of the most diversified Christian sects are unanimous on this point. Thus the so-called Christian equality leads to the most flagrant privilege, whereby a few thousand are selected by divine grace out of the millions of the damned. In any case, even if it were to apply to everybody, this equality in the sight of God would only be the equal insignificance and servitude of all men under one supreme master. Is it not the basis of Christian worship and the prime condition of salvation to renounce human dignity and to despise that dignity in the presence of divine greatness? A Christian is therefore not a man in this respect, since he has no awareness of humanity; when he does not respect human dignity in himself, he cannot respect it in others, and when he does not respect it in others, he cannot respect it in himself. A Christian can be prophet, saint, priest, king, general, minister, civil servant, spokesman for authority, policeman, executioner, aristocrat, bourgeois exploiter or wage-slave, oppressor or oppressed, torturer or tortured, but he has no right to call himself a man, because man is not truly man until he respects and loves the humanity and liberty of all, and his own liberty and humanity are respected, loved, upheld and created by all.

I am only properly free when all the men and women about me are equally free. Far from being a limitation or denial of my liberty, the liberty of another is its necessary condition and confirmation. I only become truly free through the liberty of others, so that the more I am surrounded by free men, and the deeper and wider this freedom grows, the further my own extends. It is the servitude of men which erects a barrier against my liberty, or rather—and this amounts to the same thing—it is their bestiality which is a denial of my liberty because once again I cannot truly call myself free until my liberty, in other words my dignity as a man, and my human right, which consists in not obeying any other man and behaving only in accordance with my own convictions, are reflected in the equally free awareness of all men and return to me confirmed by the assent of all the world. When my personal liberty is thus confirmed by the liberty of all, it extends to infinity.

We see that liberty as conceived by the materialists is a very

positive, complex and, above all, an eminently social matter, which can only be realized by means of society and through the strictest equality and solidarity of each and everybody. We can distinguish three aspects of its development, the first being eminently positive and social; it is the full development and full enjoyment of all human faculties and powers in every man, through upbringing, scientific education and material prosperity, which cannot be provided for all without the collective physical and intellectual labour of society as a whole.

The second aspect of liberty is negative. It consists in the *rebellion* of the human individual against all authority, whether divine or human, collective or individual.

This rebellion is first of all directed against the supreme phantom of theology, against God. It is obvious that as long as we have a master in heaven we shall be slaves on earth. Our reason and will-power will be equally nullified. As long as we believe that we owe absolute obedience—and no other kind is possible in the sight of God—we are bound to submit, passively and uncritically, to the divine authority of his spokesmen and his elect: Messiahs, prophets, divinely inspired legislators, emperors, kings and all their dignitaries and ministers, the representatives and devoted servants of the two great institutions which inflict themselves upon ourselves as God's instruments for the guidance of men. Those institutions are *Church* and *State*: all temporal or human authority derives directly from spiritual or divine authority. But authority is denial of liberty, therefore God, or rather the fiction of God, is the sanction and the intellectual and moral source of all slavery on earth, and men's liberty will not be complete until it has utterly eradicated the pernicious fiction of a heavenly master.

It follows that another aspect of liberty is the rebellion of every man against the tyranny of men, the individual and social authority embodied and legalized by the State. But we must make ourselves very clear at this point, and to do so we must begin by making a precise distinction between the official and therefore tyrannical authority of the State-organized society and the influence and natural effect of non-official, natural society upon each of its members.

Rebellion against this natural influence of society is a great deal harder for the individual than rebellion against the official, organized society of the State, although it may often be just as essential. Social tyranny is often overwhelming and deadly, but it does not exhibit the character of imperative violence, of legalized, formal despotism, which distinguishes State authority. It is not applied like some law which forces the individual to comply on pain of incurring legal punishment. Its effect is gentler, more insinuating and imperceptible, but correspondingly more powerful than that of State authority. It exerts its domination by means of conventions, morals and a multitude of sentiments, prejudices and habits, in the material as well as in the mental sphere, and constitutes what we call public opinion. It envelops man from the moment of his birth, transuses and permeates him and forms the very basis of his own individual existence, so that every man is its more or less unsuspecting accomplice against himself. It follows that in order to rebel against this natural influence exerted by society man must at least partially rebel against himself, for with all his material, intellectual and moral learnings and aspirations, he himself is only a product of society. Hence the immense power which society exercises over men.

From the viewpoint of absolute morality—that is, from the viewpoint of human respect, and I shall explain what I mean by this phrase presently—this power may be just as much beneficial as harmful. It is beneficial when it contributes to the development of knowledge, material prosperity, liberty, equality and brotherly solidarity, harmful when it has the opposite tendencies. A man born into a society of brutes remains a near-brute, with very few exceptions; born into a society ruled by priests, he becomes an idiot, a cretin; born into a band of thieves, he is liable to become a thief; born into the bourgeoisie, he will be an exploiter of other men's labour; and if he has the misfortune to be born into the society of demigods who rule this earth—nobles, princes, kings' sons—he will, to the extent of his abilities, resources and power, be a despiser and enslaver of humanity, a tyrant. In all these cases, if the individual is to humanize himself he is bound to rebel against his native society.

But I repeat that rebellion by the individual against society requires an altogether more difficult step than his rebellion against the State. The State is a historical, transitory institution, a temporary form of society, like its elder brother the Church, but it lacks the inexorable, changeless character of society which exists prior to all the developments of mankind and partakes of the universality of natural laws and phenomena to constitute the very basis of human existence. Ever since he took his first step towards humanity and started to be a human being—a talking and more or less thinking creature—man has been born into society like the ant into the nest, the bee into the hive. Far from choosing it, he is produced by it, and he is just as subject to the natural laws which preside over its necessary growth as he is to all other natural laws. Society precedes the human individual and at the same time it survives him, like nature itself; like nature, it is eternal, or rather, having been born on earth, it will endure as long as our earth endures. Radical rebellion against society would therefore be as impossible as rebellion against nature, since human society is, after all, nothing but the last great manifestation or creation of nature on earth. An individual who tried to call society—that is, nature in general and his own nature in particular—in question would be cutting himself off from all the conditions of a real existence and launching out into nothingness, utter vacuity, deathly abstraction—into God. So there is just as little point in asking whether society is good or evil as in asking whether nature, the universal, material, real, unique, supreme and absolute entity, is good or evil; it is more than all this; it is a vast, positive, primitive fact, prior to all awareness, ideation or intellectual and moral values, it is the very foundation, the world in which what we call good and evil later and inevitably develop.

The state is another matter, and I have no hesitation in saying that the State is evil, but an historically necessary evil, as necessary in the past as its utter extinction will eventually become in the future, as necessary as the primitive bestiality and theological divagations of mankind. The State is not society, but one of its historical forms, at once brutish and abstract. Historically, it was born out of the marriage of violence, rapine and plunder—in other words of

war and conquest—with the successive Gods created by the theological imagination of nations. From its beginning it has been the divine mainstay of brute force and rampant injustice. Even in the most democratic lands, such as the U.S.A. and Switzerland, it is the prevailing [sanction] of minority privilege and the practical subjugation of the vast majority.

It is much easier to rebel against the State, because there is something in the very nature of the State which provokes rebellion. The State is authority, force on display, infatuation with power. It does not insinuate and does not seek to persuade, and whenever it makes the attempt it does so clumsily, for its nature is not to convert but to coerce and impose, however much it strives to conceal its function as the legal violator of man's will and the permanent denial of his liberty. So even while commanding the good it frustrates and despoils it, precisely because it does command, and every command provokes and kindles the legitimate rebelliousness of liberty; and because from the viewpoint of real, non-divine human morality and of true respect and liberty, good becomes evil once it is made subject to command. The liberty, morality and human dignity of man consist in his doing good not because he is compelled but because he conceives, desires and loves it.

Society, however, does not make its pressure felt in a formal, official, authoritarian manner, but naturally, and it is for this very reason that its effect on the individual is incomparably more powerful than the State's. It creates and moulds all the individuals who are born and develop within it. From the cradle to the grave, it slowly instils them with all its material, intellectual and moral essence; we may say that it incarnates itself in every man.

III

Do you want to prevent men from ever oppressing other men? Arrange matters such that they never have the opportunity. Do you want them to respect the liberty, rights and human character of their fellow men? Arrange matters such that they are compelled to respect them—*compelled not by the will or oppression of other men, nor by the repression of the State and legislation, which are necessarily represented and implemented by men and*

would make them slaves in their turn, but by the actual organization of the social environment, so constituted that while leaving each man to enjoy the utmost possible liberty it gives no one the power to set himself above others or to dominate them, except through the natural influence of his own intellectual or moral qualities, which must never be allowed either to convert itself into a right or to be backed by any kind of political institution.

The same tendency underlies all political institutions, even those which are the most democratic, are founded upon the broadest application of universal suffrage, and commence, as they often do at the outset, by giving power to the worthiest, most liberal men, the ones most dedicated to the common good and most capable of serving it. *Precisely because their inevitable effect is to transform the natural and, as such, quite legitimate influence of these men into a right, their final outcome is always to produce a dual demoralization and dual evil.*

First of all, their immediate and direct effect is to transform really free men into allegedly free citizens who may even continue to maintain the fatuous delusion that they are every man's equal, but who are in fact *compelled to obey the representatives of the law from now onward*—to obey men. And even if these men really are their equals from the economic and social point of view, nevertheless in political terms they are leaders, and under the pretext of the public welfare and the popular will, expressed not even by unanimous acclaim but by majority vote, all citizens owe them *passive obedience*, within the limits determined by law, to be sure, yet everyday experience shows how elastic these limits are for the man in command, and how unbending for the citizen wishing to claim the right of legal disobedience.

My own view is that as long as citizens obey the official representatives of the law and the leaders imposed upon them by the State, even when these leaders may have been sanctioned by universal suffrage, they are slaves.

What is liberty? What is slavery? Does man's liberty consist in rebellion against all laws? No, in so far as these are natural economic and social laws, not imposed from above but inherent in the things, relationships and situations whose natural growth they express. Yes, in so far as they are political and

juridical laws, imposed by men upon men, whether by right of superior strength, violently, or in the name of some religious or metaphysical doctrine, hypocritically, or by virtue of that fiction, that democratic lie known as universal suffrage.

It is impossible for man to rebel against the laws of nature, for the simple reason that he himself is nature's product and exists only by virtue of its laws. Rebellion would therefore be an act of absurdity on his own part, a rebellion against himself, a true suicide. And even when man makes up his mind to destroy himself, even when he carries out his decision, he is still acting in accordance with those natural laws from which nothing could detach him—not thought or will, despair or any other passion, not even life or death. He himself is nothing except nature; his most sublime or monstrous feelings, the most perverted, selfish or heroic resolves of his will, the most abstract, theological or lunatic of his thoughts, all are nothing more or less than nature. Nature enfolds and saturates him, it constitutes his entire existence; how can he ever take leave of nature?

It is remarkable that he could ever have conceived the idea of taking leave of nature. Since such a separation is so utterly impossible, how could man even dream of it? Where could such a monstrous dream originate?—Where but in *theology*, the science of Nothingness, and later in *metaphysics*, the science of the impossible reconciliation of Nothingness with reality.

Theology ought not to be confused with religion, or the theological spirit with religious feeling. Religion arises out of animal life. It is the direct expression of the absolute dependence binding all the things and creatures of this world to the Great All, to Nature, to the infinite Totality of real things and real creatures.