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BAKUNIN

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Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin God and the State

Preface to the First French Edition

One of us is soon to tell in all its details the story of the life of Michael Bakunin, but its general features are already sufficiently familiar. Friends and enemies know that this man was great in thought, will, persistent energy; they know also with what lofty contempt he looked down upon wealth, rank, glory, all the wretched ambitions which most human beings are base enough to entertain. A Russian gentleman related by marriage to the highest nobility of the empire, he was one of the first to enter that intrepid society of rebels who were able to release themselves from traditions, prejudices, race and class interests, and set their own comfort at naught. With them he fought the stern battle of life, aggravated by imprisonment, exile, all the dangers and all the sorrows that men of self-sacrifice have to undergo during their tormented existence.

A simple stone and a name mark the spot in the cemetery of Berne where was laid the body of Bakunin. Even that is perhaps too much to honor the memory of a worker who held vanities of

that sort in such slight esteem. His friends surely will raise to him no ostentatious tombstone or statue. They know with what a huge laugh he would have received them, had they spoken to him of a commemorative structure erected to his glory; they knew, too, that the true way to honor their dead is to continue their work – with the same ardor and perseverance that they themselves brought to it. In this case, indeed, a difficult task demanding all our efforts, for among the revolutionists of the present generation not one has labored more fervently in the common cause of the Revolution.

In Russia among the students, in Germany among the insurgents of Dresden, in Siberia among his brothers in exile, in America, in England, in France, in Switzerland, in Italy, among all earnest men, his direct influence has been considerable. The originality of his ideas, the imagery and vehemence of his eloquence, his untiring zeal in propagandism, helped too by the natural majesty of his person and by a powerful vitality, gave Bakunin access to all the revolutionary groups, and his efforts left deep traces everywhere, even upon those who, after having welcomed him, thrust him out because of a difference of object or method. His correspondence was most extensive; he passed entire nights in preparing long letters to his friends in the revolutionary world, and some of these letters, written to strengthen the timid, arouse the sluggish, and outline plans of propagandism or revolt, took on the proportions of veritable volumes. These letters more than anything else explain the

prodigious work of Bakunin in the revolutionary movement of the century. The pamphlets published by him, in Russian, French, and Italian, however important they may be, and however useful they may have been in spreading the new ideas, are the smallest part of Bakunin's work.

The present memoir, "God and the State," is really a fragment of a letter or report. Composed in the same manner as most of Bakunin's other writings, it has the same literary fault, lack of proportion; moreover it breaks off abruptly: we have searched in vain to discover the end of the manuscript. Bakunin never had the time necessary to finish all the tasks he undertook. One work was not completed when others were already under way. "My life itself is a fragment," he said to those who criticised his writings. Nevertheless, the readers of "God and the State" certainly will not regret that Bakunin's memoir, incomplete though it be, has been published. The questions discussed in it are treated decisively and with a singular vigor of logic. Rightly addressing himself only to his honest opponents, Bakunin demonstrates to them the emptiness of their belief in that divine authority on which all temporal authorities are founded; he proves to them the purely human genesis of all governments; finally, without stopping to discuss those bases of the State already condemned by public morality, such as physical superiority, violence, nobility, wealth, he does justice to the theory which would entrust science with the government of societies. Supposing even that it were possible to recognize,

amid the conflict of rival ambitions and intrigues, who are the pretenders and who are the real savants, and that a method of election could be found which would not fail to lodge the power in the hands of those whose knowledge is authentic, what guarantee could they offer us of the wisdom and honesty of their government? On the contrary, can we not foresee in these new masters the same follies and the same crimes found in those of former days and of the present time? In the first place, science is not: it is becoming. The learned man of to-day is but the know-nothing of to-morrow. Let him once imagine that he has reached the end, and for that very reason he sinks beneath even the babe just born. But, could he recognize truth in its essence, he can only corrupt himself by privilege and corrupt others by power. To establish his government, he must try, like all chiefs of State, to arrest the life of the masses moving below him, keep them in ignorance in order to preserve quiet, and gradually debase them that he may rule them from a loftier throne.

For the rest, since the *doctrinaires* made their appearance, the true or pretended “genius” has been trying his hand at wielding the sceptre of the world, and we know what it has cost us. We have seen them at work, all these savants: the more hardened the more they have studied; the narrower in their views the more time they have spent in examining some isolated fact in all its aspects; without any experience of life, because they have long known no other horizon than the walls of their cheese; childish in their passions and vanities, because they have been unable

to participate in serious struggles and have never learned the true proportion of things. Have we not recently witnessed the foundation of a whole school of “thinkers” – wretched courtiers, too, and people of unclean lives – who have constructed a whole cosmogony for their sole use? According to them, worlds have been created, societies have developed, revolutions have overturned nations, empires have gone down in blood, poverty, disease, and death have been the queens of humanity, only to raise up an *élite* of academicians, the full-blown flower, of which all other men are but the manure. That these editors of the *Temps* and the *Debats* may have leisure to “think,” nations live and die in ignorance; all other human beings are destined for death in order that these gentlemen may become immortal!

But we may reassure ourselves: all these academicians will not have the audacity of Alexander in cutting with his sword the Gordian knot; they will not lift the blade of Charlemagne. Government by science is becoming as impossible as that of divine right, wealth, or brute force. All powers are henceforth to be submitted to pitiless criticism. Men in whom the sentiment of equality is born suffer themselves no longer to be governed; they learn to govern themselves. In precipitating from the heights of the heavens him from whom all power is reputed to descend, societies unseat also all those who reigned in his name. Such is the revolution now in progress. States are breaking up to give place to a new order, in which, as Bakunin was fond of saying, “human justice will be substituted for divine justice.” If it is

allowable to cite any one name from those of the revolutionists who have taken part in this immense work of renovation, there is not one that may be singled out with more justice than that of Michael Bakunin.

Carlo Cafiero.

Elisée Reclus.

GOD AND THE STATE

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

All branches of modern science, of true and disinterested science, concur in proclaiming this grand truth, fundamental and decisive: The social world, properly speaking, the human world – in short, humanity – is nothing other than the last and supreme development – at least on our planet and as far as we know – the highest manifestation of animality. But as every development necessarily implies a negation, that of its base or point of departure, humanity is at the same time and essentially the deliberate and gradual negation of the animal element in man; and it is precisely this negation, as rational as it is natural, and rational only because natural – at once historical and logical, as inevitable as the development and realization of all the natural laws in the world – that constitutes and creates the ideal, the world of intellectual and moral convictions, ideas.

Yes, our first ancestors, our Adams and our Eves, were, if not

gorillas, very near relatives of gorillas, omnivorous, intelligent and ferocious beasts, endowed in a higher degree than the animals of any other species with two precious faculties —*the power to think and the desire to rebel.*

These faculties, combining their progressive action in history, represent the essential factor, the negative power in the positive development of human animality, and create consequently all that constitutes humanity in man.

The Bible, which is a very interesting and here and there very profound book when considered as one of the oldest surviving manifestations of human wisdom and fancy, expresses this truth very naively in its myth of original sin. Jehovah, who of all the good gods adored by men was certainly the most jealous, the most vain, the most ferocious, the most unjust, the most bloodthirsty, the most despotic, and the most hostile to human dignity and liberty – Jehovah had just created Adam and Eve, to satisfy we know not what caprice; no doubt to while away his time, which must weigh heavy on his hands in his eternal egoistic solitude, or that he might have some new slaves. He generously placed at their disposal the whole earth, with all its fruits and animals, and set but a single limit to this complete enjoyment. He expressly forbade them from touching the fruit of the tree of knowledge. He wished, therefore, that man, destitute of all understanding of himself, should remain an eternal beast, ever on all-fours before the eternal God, his creator and his master. But here steps in Satan, the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and

the emancipator of worlds. He makes man ashamed of his bestial ignorance and obedience; he emancipates him, stamps upon his brow the seal of liberty and humanity, in urging him to disobey and eat of the fruit of knowledge.

We know what followed. The good God, whose foresight, which is one of the divine faculties, should have warned him of what would happen, flew into a terrible and ridiculous rage; he cursed Satan, man, and the world created by himself, striking himself so to speak in his own creation, as children do when they get angry; and, not content with smiting our ancestors themselves, he cursed them in all the generations to come, innocent of the crime committed by their forefathers. Our Catholic and Protestant theologians look upon that as very profound and very just, precisely because it is monstrously iniquitous and absurd. Then, remembering that he was not only a God of vengeance and wrath, but also a God of love, after having tormented the existence of a few milliards of poor human beings and condemned them to an eternal hell, he took pity on the rest, and, to save them and reconcile his eternal and divine love with his eternal and divine anger, always greedy for victims and blood, he sent into the world, as an expiatory victim, his only son, that he might be killed by men. That is called the mystery of the Redemption, the basis of all the Christian religions. Still, if the divine Savior had saved the human world! But no; in the paradise promised by Christ, as we know, such being the formal announcement, the elect will number very few. The rest, the

immense majority of the generations present and to come, will burn eternally in hell. In the meantime, to console us, God, ever just, ever good, hands over the earth to the government of the Napoleon Thirds, of the William Firsts, of the Ferdinands of Austria, and of the Alexanders of all the Russias.

Such are the absurd tales that are told and the monstrous doctrines that are taught, in the full light of the nineteenth century, in all the public schools of Europe, at the express command of the government. They call this civilizing the people! Is it not plain that all these governments are systematic poisoners, interested stupefiers of the masses?

I have wandered from my subject, because anger gets hold of me whenever I think of the base and criminal means which they employ to keep the nations in perpetual slavery, undoubtedly that they may be the better able to fleece them. Of what consequence are the crimes of all the Tropmanns in the world compared with this crime of treason against humanity committed daily, in broad day, over the whole surface of the civilized world, by those who dare to call themselves the guardians and the fathers of the people? I return to the myth of original sin.

God admitted that Satan was right; he recognized that the devil did not deceive Adam and Eve in promising them knowledge and liberty as a reward for the act of disobedience which he had induced them to commit; for, immediately they had eaten of the forbidden fruit, God himself said (see Bible): "Behold, the man is become as one of the gods, to know good and

evil; prevent him, therefore, from eating of the fruit of eternal life, lest he become immortal like Ourselves.”

Let us disregard now the fabulous portion of this myth and consider its true meaning, which is very clear. Man has emancipated himself; he has separated himself from animality and constituted himself a man; he has begun his distinctively human history and development by an act of disobedience and science – that is, by *rebellion* and by *thought*.

Three elements or, if you like, three fundamental principles constitute the essential conditions of all human development, collective or individual, in history: (1) *human animality*; (2) *thought*; and (3) *rebellion*. To the first properly corresponds *social and private economy*; to the second, *science*; to the third, *liberty*.

Idealists of all schools, aristocrats and *bourgeois*, theologians and metaphysicians, politicians and moralists, religionists, philosophers, or poets, not forgetting the liberal economists – unbounded worshippers of the ideal, as we know – are much offended when told that man, with his magnificent intelligence, his sublime ideas, and his boundless aspirations, is, like all else existing in the world, nothing but matter, only a product of *vile matter*.

We may answer that the matter of which materialists speak, matter spontaneously and eternally mobile, active, productive, matter chemically or organically determined and manifested by the properties or forces, mechanical, physical, animal, and intelligent, which necessarily belong to it – that this matter has

nothing in common with the *vile matter* of the idealists. The latter, a product of their false abstraction, is indeed a stupid, inanimate, immobile thing, incapable of giving birth to the smallest product, a *caput mortuum*, an *ugly* fancy in contrast to the *beautiful* fancy which they call *God*; as the opposite of this supreme being, matter, their matter, stripped by them of all that constitutes its real nature, necessarily represents supreme nothingness. They have taken away from matter intelligence, life, all its determining qualities, active relations or forces, motion itself, without which matter would not even have weight, leaving it nothing but impenetrability and absolute immobility in space; they have attributed all these natural forces, properties, and manifestations to the imaginary being created by their abstract fancy; then, interchanging *rôles*, they have called this product of their imagination, this phantom, this God who is nothing, “supreme Being,” and, as a necessary consequence, have declared that the real being, matter, the world, is nothing. After which they gravely tell us that this matter is incapable of producing anything, not even of setting itself in motion, and consequently must have been created by their God.

At the end of this book I exposed the fallacies and truly revolting absurdities to which one is inevitably led by this imagination of a God, let him be considered as a personal being, the creator and organizer of worlds; or even as impersonal, a kind of divine soul spread over the whole universe and constituting thus its eternal principle; or let him be an idea, infinite and divine,

always present and active in the world, and always manifested by the totality of material and definite beings. Here I shall deal with one point only.

The gradual development of the material world, as well as of organic animal life and of the historically progressive intelligence of man, individually or socially, is perfectly conceivable. It is a wholly natural movement from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher, from the inferior to the superior; a movement in conformity with all our daily experiences, and consequently in conformity also with our natural logic, with the distinctive laws of our mind, which being formed and developed only by the aid of these same experiences, is, so to speak, but the mental, cerebral reproduction or reflected summary thereof.

The system of the idealists is quite the contrary of this. It is the reversal of all human experiences and of that universal and common good sense which is the essential condition of all human understanding, and which, in rising from the simple and unanimously recognized truth that twice two are four to the sublimest and most complex scientific considerations – admitting, moreover, nothing that has not stood the severest tests of experience or observation of things and facts – becomes the only serious basis of human knowledge.

Very far from pursuing the natural order from the lower to the higher, from the inferior to the superior, and from the relatively simple to the more complex; instead of wisely and rationally accompanying the progressive and real movement from the world

called inorganic to the world organic, vegetables, animal, and then distinctively human – from chemical matter or chemical being to living matter or living being, and from living being to thinking being – the idealists, obsessed, blinded, and pushed on by the divine phantom which they have inherited from theology, take precisely the opposite course. They go from the higher to the lower, from the superior to the inferior, from the complex to the simple. They begin with God, either as a person or as divine substance or idea, and the first step that they take is a terrible fall from the sublime heights of the eternal ideal into the mire of the material world; from absolute perfection into absolute imperfection; from thought to being, or rather, from supreme being to nothing. When, how, and why the divine being, eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect, probably weary of himself, decided upon this desperate *salto mortale* is something which no idealist, no theologian, no metaphysician, no poet, has ever been able to understand himself or explain to the profane. All religions, past and present, and all the systems of transcendental philosophy hinge on this unique and iniquitous mystery.¹ Holy men, inspired lawgivers, prophets, messiahs, have searched it for life, and found only torment and death. Like the ancient sphinx, it has devoured them, because they could not explain it. Great philosophers,

¹ I call it “iniquitous” because, as I believe I have proved in the Appendix alluded to, this mystery has been and still continues to be the consecration of all the horrors which have been and are being committed in the world; I call it unique, because all the other theological and metaphysical absurdities which debase the human mind are but its necessary consequences.

from Heraclitus and Plato down to Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, not to mention the Indian philosophers, have written heaps of volumes and built systems as ingenious as sublime, in which they have said by the way many beautiful and grand things and discovered immortal truths, but they have left this mystery, the principal object of their transcendental investigations, as unfathomable as before. The gigantic efforts of the most wonderful geniuses that the world has known, and who, one after another, for at least thirty centuries, have undertaken anew this labor of Sisyphus, have resulted only in rendering this mystery still more incomprehensible. Is it to be hoped that it will be unveiled to us by the routine speculations of some pedantic disciple of an artificially warmed-over metaphysics at a time when all living and serious spirits have abandoned that ambiguous science born of a compromise – historically explicable no doubt – between the unreason of faith and sound scientific reason?

It is evident that this terrible mystery is inexplicable – that is, absurd, because only the absurd admits of no explanation. It is evident that whoever finds it essential to his happiness and life must renounce his reason, and return, if he can, to naive, blind, stupid faith, to repeat with Tertullianus and all sincere believers these words, which sum up the very quintessence of theology: *Credo quia absurdum*. Then all discussion ceases, and nothing remains but the triumphant stupidity of faith. But immediately there arises another question: *How comes an intelligent and well-*

informed man ever to feel the need of believing in this mystery?

Nothing is more natural than that the belief in God, the creator, regulator, judge, master, curser, savior, and benefactor of the world, should still prevail among the people, especially in the rural districts, where it is more widespread than among the proletariat of the cities. The people, unfortunately, are still very ignorant, and are kept in ignorance by the systematic efforts of all the governments, who consider this ignorance, not without good reason, as one of the essential conditions of their own power. Weighted down by their daily labor, deprived of leisure, of intellectual intercourse, of reading, in short of all the means and a good portion of the stimulants that develop thought in men, the people generally accept religious traditions without criticism and in a lump. These traditions surround them from infancy in all the situations of life, and artificially sustained in their minds by a multitude of official poisoners of all sorts, priests and laymen, are transformed therein into a sort of mental and moral habit, too often more powerful even than their natural good sense.

There is another reason which explains and in some sort justifies the absurd beliefs of the people – namely, the wretched situation to which they find themselves fatally condemned by the economic organization of society in the most civilized countries of Europe. Reduced, intellectually and morally as well as materially, to the minimum of human existence, confined in their life like a prisoner in his prison, without horizon, without outlet, without even a future if we believe the economists,

the people would have the singularly narrow souls and blunted instincts of the bourgeois if they did not feel a desire to escape; but of escape there are but three methods – two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution. Hence I conclude this last will be much more potent than all the theological propagandism of the freethinkers to destroy to their last vestige the religious beliefs and dissolute habits of the people, beliefs and habits much more intimately connected than is generally supposed. In substituting for the at once illusory and brutal enjoyments of bodily and spiritual licentiousness the enjoyments, as refined as they are real, of humanity developed in each and all, the social revolution alone will have the power to close at the same time all the dram-shops and all the churches.

Till then the people, taken as a whole, will believe; and, if they have no reason to believe, they will have at least a right.

There is a class of people who, if they do not believe, must at least make a semblance of believing. This class, comprising all the tormentors, all the oppressors, and all the exploiters of humanity; priests, monarchs, statesmen, soldiers, public and private financiers, officials of all sorts, policemen, gendarmes, jailers and executioners, monopolists, capitalists, tax-leeches, contractors and landlords, lawyers, economists, politicians of all shades, down to the smallest vendor of sweetmeats, all will repeat in unison those words of Voltaire:

“If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” For, you understand, “the people must have a religion.” That is the safety-valve.

There exists, finally, a somewhat numerous class of honest but timid souls who, too intelligent to take the Christian dogmas seriously, reject them in detail, but have neither the courage nor the strength nor the necessary resolution to summarily renounce them altogether. They abandon to your criticism all the special absurdities of religion, they turn up their noses at all the miracles, but they cling desperately to the principal absurdity; the source of all the others, to the miracle that explains and justifies all the other miracles, the existence of God. Their God is not the vigorous and powerful being, the brutally positive God of theology. It is a nebulous, diaphanous, illusory being that vanishes into nothing at the first attempt to grasp it; it is a mirage, an *ignis fatuus* that neither warms nor illuminates. And yet they hold fast to it, and believe that, were it to disappear, all would disappear with it. They are uncertain, sickly souls, who have lost their reckoning in the present civilization, belonging to neither the present nor the future, pale phantoms eternally suspended between heaven and earth, and occupying exactly the same position between the politics of the bourgeois and the Socialism of the proletariat. They have neither the power nor the wish nor the determination to follow out their thought, and they waste their time and pains in constantly endeavoring to reconcile the irreconcilable. In public life these are known as bourgeois

Socialists.

With them, or against them, discussion is out of the question. They are too puny.

But there are a few illustrious men of whom no one will dare to speak without respect, and whose vigorous health, strength of mind, and good intention no one will dream of calling in question. I need only cite the names of Mazzini, Michelet, Quinet, John Stuart Mill.² Generous and strong souls, great hearts, great minds, great writers, and the first the heroic and revolutionary regenerator of a great nation, they are all apostles of idealism and bitter despisers and adversaries of materialism, and consequently of Socialism also, in philosophy as well as in politics.

Against them, then, we must discuss this question.

First, let it be remarked that not one of the illustrious men I have just named nor any other idealistic thinker of any consequence in our day has given any attention to the logical side of this question properly speaking. Not one has tried to settle philosophically the possibility of the divine *salto mortale* from the pure and eternal regions of spirit into the mire of the material world. Have they feared to approach this irreconcilable

² Mr. Stuart Mill is perhaps the only one whose serious idealism may be fairly doubted, and that for two reasons: first, that, if not absolutely the disciple, he is a passionate admirer, an adherent of the positive philosophy of Auguste Comte, a philosophy which, in spite of its numerous reservations, is really Atheistic; second, that Mr. Stuart Mill is English, and in England to proclaim oneself an Atheist is to ostracise oneself, even at this late day.

contradiction and despaired of solving it after the failures of the greatest geniuses of history, or have they looked upon it as already sufficiently well settled? That is their secret. The fact is that they have neglected the theoretical demonstration of the existence of a God, and have developed only its practical motives and consequences. They have treated it as a fact universally accepted, and, as such, no longer susceptible of any doubt whatever, for sole proof thereof limiting themselves to the establishment of the antiquity and this very universality of the belief in God.

This imposing unanimity, in the eyes of many illustrious men and writers to quote only the most famous of them who eloquently expressed it, Joseph de Maistre and the great Italian patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini – is of more value than all the demonstrations of science; and if the reasoning of a small number of logical and even very powerful, but isolated, thinkers is against it, so much the worse, they say, for these thinkers and their logic, for universal consent, the general and primitive adoption of an idea, has always been considered the most triumphant testimony to its truth. The sentiment of the whole world, a conviction that is found and maintained always and everywhere, cannot be mistaken; it must have its root in a necessity absolutely inherent in the very nature of man. And since it has been established that all peoples, past and present, have believed and still believe in the existence of God, it is clear that those who have the misfortune to doubt it, whatever the logic

that led them to this doubt, are abnormal exceptions, monsters.

Thus, then, the *antiquity* and *universality* of a belief should be regarded, contrary to all science and all logic, as sufficient and unimpeachable proof of its truth. Why?

Until the days of Copernicus and Galileo everybody believed that the sun revolved about the earth. Was not everybody mistaken? What is more ancient and more universal than slavery? Cannibalism perhaps. From the origin of historic society down to the present day there has been always and everywhere exploitation of the compulsory labor of the masses – slaves, serfs, or wage-workers – by some dominant minority; oppression of the people by the Church and by the State. Must it be concluded that this exploitation and this oppression are necessities absolutely inherent in the very existence of human society? These are examples which show that the argument of the champions of God proves nothing.

Nothing, in fact, is as universal or as ancient as the iniquitous and absurd; truth and justice, on the contrary, are the least universal, the youngest features in the development of human society. In this fact, too, lies the explanation of a constant historical phenomenon – namely, the persecution of which those who first proclaim the truth have been and continue to be the objects at the hands of the official, privileged, and interested representatives of “universal” and “ancient” beliefs, and often also at the hands of the same masses who, after having tortured them, always end by adopting their ideas and rendering them

victorious.

To us materialists and Revolutionary Socialists, there is nothing astonishing or terrifying in this historical phenomenon. Strong in our conscience, in our love of truth at all hazards, in that passion for logic which of itself alone constitutes a great power and outside of which there is no thought; strong in our passion for justice and in our unshakable faith in the triumph of humanity over all theoretical and practical bestialities; strong, finally, in the mutual confidence and support given each other by the few who share our convictions – we resign ourselves to all the consequences of this historical phenomenon, in which we see the manifestation of a social law as natural, as necessary, and as invariable as all the other laws which govern the world.

This law is a logical, inevitable consequence of the *animal origin* of human society; for in face of all the scientific, physiological, psychological, and historical proofs accumulated at the present day, as well as in face of the exploits of the Germans conquering France, which now furnish so striking a demonstration thereof, it is no longer possible to really doubt this origin. But from the moment that this animal origin of man is accepted, all is explained. History then appears to us as the revolutionary negation, now slow, apathetic, sluggish, now passionate and powerful, of the past. It consists precisely in the progressive negation of the primitive animality of man by the development of his humanity. Man, a wild beast, cousin of the gorilla, has emerged from the profound darkness of animal

instinct into the light of the mind, which explains in a wholly natural way all his past mistakes and partially consoles us for his present errors. He has gone out from animal slavery, and passing through divine slavery, a temporary condition between his animality and his humanity, he is now marching on to the conquest and realization of human liberty. Whence it results that the antiquity of a belief, of an idea, far from proving anything in its favor, ought, on the contrary, to lead us to suspect it. For behind us is our animality and before us our humanity; human light, the only thing that can warm and enlighten us, the only thing that can emancipate us, give us dignity, freedom, and happiness, and realize fraternity among us, is never at the beginning, but, relatively to the epoch in which we live, always at the end of history. Let us, then, never look back, let us look ever forward; for forward is our sunlight, forward our salvation. If it is justifiable, and even useful and necessary, to turn back to study our past, it is only in order to establish what we have been and what we must no longer be, what we have believed and thought and what we must no longer believe or think, what we have done and what we must do nevermore.

So much for *antiquity*. As for the *universality* of an error, it proves but one thing – the similarity, if not the perfect identity, of human nature in all ages and under all skies. And, since it is established that all peoples, at all periods of their life, have believed and still believe in God, we must simply conclude that the divine idea, an outcome of ourselves, is an error historically

necessary in the development of humanity, and ask why and how it was produced in history and why an immense majority of the human race still accept it as a truth.

Until we shall account to ourselves for the manner in which the idea of a supernatural or divine world was developed and had to be developed in the historical evolution of the human conscience, all our scientific conviction of its absurdity will be in vain; until then we shall never succeed in destroying it in the opinion of the majority, because we shall never be able to attack it in the very depths of the human being where it had birth. Condemned to a fruitless struggle, without issue and without end, we should for ever have to content ourselves with fighting it solely on the surface, in its innumerable manifestations, whose absurdity will be scarcely beaten down by the blows of common sense before it will reappear in a new form no less nonsensical. While the root of all the absurdities that torment the world, belief in God, remains intact, it will never fail to bring forth new offspring. Thus, at the present time, in certain sections of the highest society, Spiritualism tends to establish itself upon the ruins of Christianity.

It is not only in the interest of the masses, it is in that of the health of our own minds, that we should strive to understand the historic genesis, the succession of causes which developed and produced the idea of God in the consciousness of men. In vain shall we call and believe ourselves Atheists, until we comprehend these causes, for, until then, we shall always suffer

ourselves to be more or less governed by the clamors of this universal conscience whose secret we have not discovered; and, considering the natural weakness of even the strongest individual against the all-powerful influence of the social surroundings that trammel him, we are always in danger of relapsing sooner or later, in one way or another, into the abyss of religious absurdity. Examples of these shameful conversions are frequent in society to-day.

I have stated the chief practical reason of the power still exercised to-day over the masses by religious beliefs. These mystical tendencies do not signify in man so much an aberration of mind as a deep discontent at heart. They are the instinctive and passionate protest of the human being against the narrowness, the platitudes, the sorrows, and the shame of a wretched existence. For this malady, I have already said, there is but one remedy – Social Revolution.

In the meantime I have endeavored to show the causes responsible for the birth and historical development of religious hallucinations in the human conscience. Here it is my purpose to treat this question of the existence of a God, or of the divine origin of the world and of man, solely from the standpoint of its moral and social utility, and I shall say only a few words, to better explain my thought, regarding the theoretical grounds of this belief.

All religions, with their gods, their demigods, and their prophets, their messiahs and their saints, were created by

the credulous fancy of men who had not attained the full development and full possession of their faculties. Consequently, the religious heaven is nothing but a mirage in which man, exalted by ignorance and faith, discovers his own image, but enlarged and reversed – that is, *divinized*. The history of religions, of the birth, grandeur, and decline of the gods who have succeeded one another in human belief, is nothing, therefore, but the development of the collective intelligence and conscience of mankind. As fast as they discovered, in the course of their historically progressive advance, either in themselves or in external nature, a power, a quality, or even any great defect whatever, they attributed them to their gods, after having exaggerated and enlarged them beyond measure, after the manner of children, by an act of their religious fancy. Thanks to this modesty and pious generosity of believing and credulous men, heaven has grown rich with the spoils of the earth, and, by a necessary consequence, the richer heaven became, the more wretched became humanity and the earth. God once installed, he was naturally proclaimed the cause, reason, arbiter, and absolute disposer of all things: the world thenceforth was nothing, God was all; and man, his real creator, after having unknowingly extracted him from the void, bowed down before him, worshipped him, and avowed himself his creature and his slave.

Christianity is precisely the religion *par excellence*, because it exhibits and manifests, to the fullest extent, the very nature and

essence of every religious system, which is *the impoverishment, enslavement, and annihilation of humanity for the benefit of divinity.*

God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power, and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave. Incapable of finding justice, truth, and eternal life by his own effort, he can attain them only through a divine revelation. But whoever says revelation says revealers, messiahs, prophets, priests, and legislators inspired by God himself; and these, once recognized as the representatives of divinity on earth, as the holy instructors of humanity, chosen by God himself to direct it in the path of salvation, necessarily exercise absolute power. All men owe them passive and unlimited obedience; for against the divine reason there is no human reason, and against the justice of God no terrestrial justice holds. Slaves of God, men must also be slaves of Church and State, *in so far as the State is consecrated by the Church.* This truth Christianity, better than all other religions that exist or have existed, understood, not excepting even the old Oriental religions, which included only distinct and privileged nations, while Christianity aspires to embrace entire humanity; and this truth Roman Catholicism, alone among all the Christian sects, has proclaimed and realized with rigorous logic. That is why Christianity is the absolute religion, the final religion; why the Apostolic and Roman Church is the only consistent, legitimate,

and divine church.

With all due respect, then, to the metaphysicians and religious idealists, philosophers, politicians, or poets: *The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice.*

Unless, then, we desire the enslavement and degradation of mankind, as the Jesuits desire it, as the *mômiers*, pietists, or Protestant Methodists desire it, we may not, must not make the slightest concession either to the God of theology or to the God of metaphysics. He who, in this mystical alphabet, begins with A will inevitably end with Z; he who desires to worship God must harbor no childish allusions about the matter, but bravely renounce his liberty and humanity.

If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist.

I defy anyone whomsoever to avoid this circle; now, therefore, let all choose.

Is it necessary to point out to what extent and in what manner religions debase and corrupt the people? They destroy their reason, the principal instrument of human emancipation, and reduce them to imbecility, the essential condition of their slavery. They dishonor human labor, and make it a sign and source of servitude. They kill the idea and sentiment of human justice, ever tipping the balance to the side of triumphant knaves, privileged objects of divine indulgence. They kill human pride and dignity,

protecting only the cringing and humble. They stifle in the heart of nations every feeling of human fraternity, filling it with divine cruelty instead.

All religions are cruel, all founded on blood; for all rest principally on the idea of sacrifice – that is, on the perpetual immolation of humanity to the insatiable vengeance of divinity. In this bloody mystery man is always the victim, and the priest – a man also, but a man privileged by grace – is the divine executioner. That explains why the priests of all religions, the best, the most humane, the gentlest, almost always have at the bottom of their hearts – and, if not in their hearts, in their imaginations, in their minds (and we know the fearful influence of either on the hearts of men) – something cruel and sanguinary.

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