

# Fanatics of freedom

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*I am a fanatical lover of freedom.*

Michail Bakunin

*Anarchism is an exaggeration of the idea of freedom.*

Karl Popper

My title and the epigraphic quotations must already show very clearly which way my argument is to head. I hope that this will allow us to avoid losing our way in the labyrinth of the *more than two hundred* recognized meanings of the word “freedom”.<sup>1</sup> This “porous”, “proteiform”, constantly appearing word is probably the most used word in the world of politics, whether in its doctrine, its practice or in political news.<sup>2</sup> With the events in Eastern Europe over the past few months, the inflation in the use of the word freedom is in danger of reaching monstrous levels. And, as we all know, with inflation money loses value. With the current inflation in the use of the word freedom, too, its semantic value is in danger of plummeting with the speed of some South American currencies ... Even the fascists feel themselves to have the right to speak of freedom, in one of its many aberrations, called “positive” freedom (to which we will return later). As indeed had Stalin, as had Wojtyła. Or, somewhat more nobly, as had Plotinus or Montesquieu. In Plotinus’ words: “Man becomes free when he moves towards the Good.”<sup>3</sup> Or from Montesquieu: “Freedom consists in being able to do what one *must* want” (italics mine) ...<sup>4</sup>

So, out of the more than two hundred meanings for the word “freedom”, the only ones that interest us are those which serve to define the theoretical and practical dimension of anarchist freedom, of freedom in its anarchist sense.

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<sup>1</sup> “The meaning of this term [...] is so porous that it will allow almost any interpretation” (I. Berlin, *Quattro saggi sulla libertà*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1988, p. 188). I too would prefer to avoid “discussing either the history of the more than two hundred meanings that have been recorded for this proteiform term by the historians of ideas” (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> “Freedom is possibly the most frequently used word in political life and doctrine... It tends to be used by all and sundry to designate whatever action, institution, directive or political system that they may hold most dear, from obedience to the law (positive or natural) to economic well-being” (F.E. Oppenheimer, *Dimensioni della libertà*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1982, p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Oppenheimer, op. cit, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in H. Arendt, *La Crise de la Culture*, Gallimard, Paris, 1989, p. 209, (my italics).

With what purpose? With the purpose of redefining my, our identity, as anarchists, on the basis of the central value of our imaginary, with the purpose of reaffirming the inexhaustible diversity of anarchism, especially when confronted with a complementary and today “triumphant” liberal democracy. But, at the same time, we can reduce this diversity to its essence, so as not to waste it in defending the indefensible, such as, for example, statements of the kind, “from an anarchist point of view, dictatorship and democracy are one and the same.” And finally, in order to find, if it is indeed possible, a *lay* or *secular* concept of freedom, that is to say a “neutral” area which will allow real communication and action between anarchists and non-anarchists. We are different and should remain so, as it is our diversity which gives meaning to our existence and to our resistance to assimilation (to homologation, as it is said today). Different, yes, *cultural mutants*, yes – but not Martians. We share a great part of the common cultural heritage of humanity and, in particular, as far as values are considered, a great part of European culture and, more specifically, of the culture of the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment. There are some differences which are important, indeed *fundamental* to our identity – but only some, after all. To pursue the genetic metaphor, our diversity concerns some few cultural genes out of millions ... which however make the difference. Think: between humans and chimpanzees, there is but a 1–2 percent difference in DNA.

It is in this direction that the following reflection moves. But for this goal, one single definition, one single accepted meaning of the word “freedom” is not enough. We need several, though it is necessary to reduce them to one central meaning. There are different levels, different environments, different contexts which reflect, directly or indirectly, the anarchist concept of freedom in both its descriptive and prescriptive understandings, in both its effectual and valuative meanings.

*Brief excursus.* The distinction between value-related and descriptive terms (or, better, concepts) is far from clear and is more a matter of convention than of “objectivity”. To term a “fact” a fact is already something of a value judgment. The meaning of “value” is itself difficult to define clearly – in the words of one dictionary of philosophy – “because this word most often expresses an unstable concept, a step from fact to right”.<sup>5</sup> For example, the statement (from the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, Art. 1) that “All men are born and live free” is presented as an assessment of fact, whereas it is at the same time a value judgment.

According to Max Planck, “the problem of freedom leads to the heart of those dark woods in which philosophy lost itself.”<sup>6</sup> We are looking for the path or better, *a path*.

Hannah Arendt writes: “to raise the question of ‘what is freedom?’ seems an impossible task. ... In its simplest form the difficulty can be summarised in the contradiction between our conscience which tells us we are free and therefore responsible, and our everyday experience of the world around us, in which we are directed by the principle of cause and effect.”<sup>7</sup> Freedom and causality...

In 1963, a tiny group of anarchists (of which I was one) founded and produced, albeit briefly, a periodical entitled “*Materialismo e libertà*”. As we were (or felt we were) materialists and, at the same time we considered ourselves (and were) profoundly libertarian, we considered that there could not, indeed *should* not, be any contradiction between the two things. Had Bakunin himself

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<sup>5</sup> A. Lalande, *Dizionario critico di filosofia*, ISEDI, Torino, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

not talked of the “materialistic conception of freedom”? If the “grand old man” said it... At that time I was twenty-two.

Today the “materialistic conception of freedom” seems to me to be a far more complex philosophical problem than I or we believed then. In particular, I see freedom (not just in the “anarchist” sense, but freedom pure and simple) as incompatible with a reductionist concept of materialism – mechanicism – that we so boldly proclaimed. Today, when we are no longer sure what is the real nature of nature (matter? energy? -try to find an answer from sub-atomic physics and astrophysics as they stand today). Today, when we do not know exactly what is the “reality of reality” (do we present reality in a certain way because it “is” like that or “is” reality in fact like that because we present it in a certain way? Or ...<sup>8</sup>).

And yet ... And yet, I still consider myself to be a “materialist”. The quotation marks are a candid admission of uncertainty concerning this philosophical term. This “materialist” is, and probably always was, to be seen to hold to a “Popperian realism of common sense”.<sup>9</sup> I am a materialist in that, unlike the various types and degrees of idealists, I see “matter” (in the sense of the physical world) as the *model* of reality, in the sense that, unlike the various orders and levels of mystics, I believe I need the *instruments of reason* to explain reality and to transform it (although this is not of course the same as “instrumental rationality” – indeed far from it).

Today, if we want to find a rational explanation of “things”, we must cope with the – enormous – problem of the relationship between determinism (cause and effect as a necessary relationship between phenomena, even if with all the complexities of retroaction and the other devilries of contemporary epistemology) and freedom. If reality can be reduced to purely deterministic relationships, how can “freedom” exist and be *conceived* of? If everything is determined, then the “freedom” of a choice – of every choice – is purely apparent, no more than a way (as is “chance” as well) of describing our ignorance of all the causes that have necessarily determined that sequence of phenomena that we have chosen. But, to paraphrase Bakunin speaking of the non-existence of god, “man is, wants to be free, therefore, absolute causal determination does not exist”.<sup>10</sup>

There is a watered-down version of determinism, also called “auto-determinism” (although if this term is looked at closely, it has very little to do with what I will later be calling self-determination) which is interesting, almost convincing, from the point of view of a “libertarian materialist” – but it is still not quite enough. This soft determinism, as one critic has referred to it,<sup>11</sup> according to which (quoting Berlin<sup>12</sup>): “The nature and the structure of the personality, the

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<sup>8</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> It is worthwhile considering Karl Popper in this context, as he has attempted a useful approach to reality that is neither monistic (all is matter/all is spirit) nor dualistic (matter/spirit). Popper distinguishes three levels of reality, which he terms World 1, World 2, World 3. World 1 is the world of physics, chemistry and biology; World 2 of psychology (both human and animal), that of fear, hope, the impulse to act, of all type experience, including those of the subconscious and the unconscious; World 3 is the world of the products of the human mind (works of art, ethical values, social institutions, scientific works, books, theories – including the false ones as Popper is quick to specify). This World 3, which only begins with the evolution of a distinctive human language (“in the beginning there was the Word and the Word was man”, one might say) is every bit as real as Worlds 1 and 2, and its “objects” are in “close interaction” with those of the other two levels of reality (see K. Popper, *L’Indeterminisme n’est pas suffisant*, in *L’Univers irresolu*, Hermann, Paris, 1984, pp. 93–107).

<sup>10</sup> “While, along with Doctor Johnson, Alfred Lande and other sensible realists, World 1 (see preceding note) is the real model of reality, I am not for this re but rather a pluralist (Popper, op. cit., p. 107).

<sup>11</sup> “If man is free so, at least in part, will nature be as well” (Popper, op. cit., p.105); and “Our universe is partly causal, partly probabilistic and partly open” (Ibid., p. 107).

<sup>12</sup> W. Jones, quoted in Berlin, op. cit., p. 13.

emotions, attitudes, choices, decisions and other acts that occur would play a fundamental role in what happens, but would therefore be the result of causes, whether psychological or physical, social or individual, which in their turn are effects of other causes and so on in an uninterrupted succession. According to the best-known version of this doctrine, I am free if I do what I want to (...) However my choice is itself ‘*causally*’ determined, because if not it would be a ‘*chance*’ event.” (my italics)

Chance is the *bête noir* of the determinists, both hard and soft. I, however, while I have always felt close to the determinists’ position (as a good materialist, first without quotes and then with them), I believe that the solution to the philosophical dilemma of freedom can only start with the introduction of “chance” at the side of causal determination.

Chance has been a category of thought since very ancient times<sup>13</sup> which seemed to have been swept disdainfully aside by modern science (in theory if not in practice) as mere ignorance of the relationships of cause and effect, until almost the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when quantum indeterminacy and the subsequent developments in physics and genetics brought it back into question, not only at a subatomic level but also at the macro-molecular one.

So *chance* seems to have been firmly ensconced at the side of *cause and effect* as a “scientific” fact. Reality presents, at its various levels of organisation, chance breaking into the causal chain.

But naturally this is not yet freedom. Causal indeterminism (although probability may go some way to reducing it to the domain of the “determinable”) is no more freedom than is causal determination.<sup>14</sup> The two together, however, are the *presuppositions* of freedom, the logically necessary conditions of its appearance at a human level, that is, at the socio-cultural level.

Freedom, understood as individual or collective choice of behaviour from among various possibilities, in the face of a certain state of things,<sup>15</sup> calls for both an openness to behaviour which is *equally* compatible with the pre-established present state of things and the voluntary intervention (therefore determined by chance) in the causally determinable elements of this state of things.

Chance can also be seen anthropomorphically as a sort of physical predecessor of freedom,<sup>16</sup> but this, in its most fundamental meaning (and so that which interests us here) appears only – as we were saying – with the emergence of human nature, with the emergence, that is, of an animal whose behavior is *essentially* not determined by the “laws” of biology<sup>17</sup> (although they cannot of course be ignored). It is true that other species of animals also exhibit behaviour which is in some degree voluntary, “free”, but it is only in the human being that this dimension of freedom, of the voluntary nature of behaviour, has become *essential*, characteristic and identifying. This

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Everything that exists in the universe is the fruit of chance and of necessity” (Democritus, quoted in Monod, *Il caso e la necessità*, Mondadori, Milano, 1986, p. 9).

<sup>15</sup> Despite the protests of Einstein, quantum mechanics has introduced what may be termed a “god playing dice”... [But] the indeterminism of the laws of probability, does not, of itself, lead to human liberation. What we are seeking to understand is not how we can act in an unpredictable and fortuitous fashion but rather how we can act deliberately and rationally... Indeterminism is necessary but, in itself, is insufficient to bring about human freedom and creativity” (Popper, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–103).

<sup>16</sup> This definition is virtually the same as that of Ludovico Geymonat (*La libertà*, Rusconi, Milano, 1988, p. 27), whose ideas on liberty have been of little assistance overall.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, we can also accept the ideas of a “creativity” of nature which goes beyond pure chance and which can be considered as the matrix, to use Murray Bookchin’s term (*The Ecology of Freedom*, Cheshire Books, Palo Alto, 1983), of creativity and so of human freedom, but which is not totally identifiable with the latter.

was a qualitative leap analogous to that when the biological developed out of chemical and the chemical out of physical.

Every subsequent “level of organisation”<sup>18</sup> of reality absorbs within itself the “laws” of the preceding levels, adding and superimposing its own “laws” on them. The hydrochloric acid in my stomach reacts chemically, that is to say according to the laws of chemistry, with the substances it encounters, but the stomach cannot be explained by those laws, nor even the release of hydrochloric acid in the gastric tract. For that we have to turn to the biological level.

Then, after the biological level, we find, in natural history the level of the socio-cultural, that is, the typically human level. It is here that freedom appears as a new dimension of reality, which introduces itself between causality and chance. Freedom is neither determinism nor indeterminism: it is self-determination. And it is at this point that socio-historical creation<sup>19</sup> takes over from the simple interaction between chance and necessity in the appearance of the new.

In the course of the development of the human race, instinct has come to play an ever-decreasing role<sup>20</sup> and has been replaced by culture, that is, by norms, rules, codes of communication and interaction. As I have written elsewhere: “It is precisely in this substitution where human freedom at its highest level is situated: *self-determination*.”<sup>21</sup>

This freedom of human beings, which belongs to the species as *Homo Sapiens*, but also and unavoidably to every individual member of the species, is a freedom which, with all the reservations already mentioned, lies in judgments of fact. It is not a freedom as value. And, as I have already said, it is freedom as a value that interests me. Nonetheless this “anthropological” dimension of freedom – not yet ethical but *open* to ethical questions – is the albeit fragile foundation of every possible interpretation of freedom as value – including ours. This assumption seems to me to be essential to our discussion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Recent research in anthropology suggests that the prevailing view that the mental dispositions of men are genetically prior to culture... is incorrect... the final stages of the biological evolution of man occurred after the initial stages of the growth of culture [and] implies that... tools, hunting, family organization, and, later, art, religion, and ‘science’ molded man somatically” (Clifford Geertz, quoted in A. Montagu (ed.), *Man and Aggression*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 15). Therefore, “man’s brain began to grow and develop in a simultaneous feedback interaction with culture” (Montagu, *Ibid.*)

<sup>19</sup> See C. Castoriadis, *L’Imaginaire: la creation dans le domain socialhistorique*, in *Domaines de l’homme*, vol. II, Seuil, Paris, 1986, pp. 219–237.

<sup>20</sup> Under the selection pressures exerted by the necessity to function in the dimension of culture, instinctive behavior would have been worse than useless, and hence would have been negatively selected, assuming that any remnant of it remained in man’s progenitors. In fact, I also think it very doubtful that any of the great apes have any instincts” (Montagu, *op. cit.*, p. 15). Or, less extremely, “the higher the animal on the evolutionary scale, the more its tendencies are shaped, developed and organized into behavior by its interactions with its environment”. And, “a number of distinguished zoologists and animal psychologists insist that even if insects and lower animals are largely guided by instincts, man himself is almost instinctless” (M. Hunt, in Montagu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 21).

<sup>21</sup> A. Bertolo, *Potere, autorità, dominio: una proposta di definizione*, “*Volontà*”, 2/83, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> “If we accept classic determinism, we cannot pretend (as do any philosophers) to be endowed with real freedom and creativity” (Popper, *op. cit.*, p. 102). The point of view of classic determinism “leads to predestination, to the idea that hundreds of thousands of years ago, the elementary cells contained the poetry of Homer, the philosophy of Plato, the symphonies of Beethoven, just as the seed contains the flower” (*Ibid.*, p. 105). If determinism was shown to be thus, it would require a drastic review of all the language of ethics” (Berlin, *op. cit.*, p. 22). “In effect, the idea of a morally responsible being would be, at best, the result of a myth” (*Ibid.*, p. 17) However, “until now we have not been given valid arguments against the openness of the universe or against the fact that radically new things are continually appearing, nor have we been given any valid reason to doubt human freedom and creativity” (Popper, *op. cit.*, p. 107).

This brings us to another problematical step, intricate but unavoidable, in a discussion of anarchist freedom. It is the fact that freedom is not a value in itself. No value, in any axiological system, is independent of other values. There are no individual values but only *systems* of interconnected values. This is equally true of the anarchist system of values, whose essential nucleus (as with those of its siblings, children of the Enlightenment, liberalism and socialism) refers back to the Enlightenment-revolutionary triad (revolutionary in the sense of the French Revolution): *liberté-égalité-fraternité*/freedom-equality-brotherhood.

So we are faced with not a unique value but a *configuration* of values, whose reciprocal relationships are determining. Unfortunately our words can only follow the linear path of spoken thought, becoming, at best, two-dimensional with ramifications, deviations and excursus. But to really speak of freedom, we should be able to speak in three or four dimensions at the same time, so as to be able to include all the “configurations” of values. The only artifice of logic which I can think of is that of *projecting onto to freedom all of the other essential anarchist values*, thereby also attributing to it the features of its *relationships* with the other elements of the axiological configuration. This is as much as to say that we may project the solid whole on to one plane or rather we can say that we will incorporate the other values into freedom, which may indeed be less of a misuse of words than it seems. Freedom in the axiological configuration of anarchism has a specific value, an “exuberance” which is such that other values can, albeit with a little effort, be recognised as premises or consequences.

At this point, however, we must consider these other anarchist values, to render explicit what may then be taken as implicit.

The foremost of these is – predictably – equality, which the liberals continually label the enemy sister of freedom. Today, we are in this continuity. But it is not difficult to show that, at least from an anarchist point of view, the two values not only can, but inevitably must, be compatible. We need only point out the different – indeed opposing – logical and value content of diversity and inequality. Diversity is the opposite not of equality but of uniformity. We need only show that diversity is a category in itself and raise it to the rank of an explicit value, to see that equality ceases to be its negation.

This is not mere word play, but is rather a semantic operation which is very much in line with our tradition and even with the most honest of liberal traditions. In our tradition, anarchists have always seen diversity as implicit in freedom as a value, as their inevitable individualism, their obvious “extravagance”, continually go to show. It is also in the best liberal tradition, as when John Stuart Mill, for example, writes: “My writings on freedom form a sort of philosophical manual of a simple truth (...) that is to say the importance for man and for society of a *wide variety of characters* and of a complete freedom for human nature to develop in innumerable different directions.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “If man is free so, at least in part, will nature be as well” (Ibid., p.105); and, “Our universe is partly causal, partly probabilistic and partly open” (Ibid., p. 107).

It is time to make explicit what was implicit (as I already suggested ten years ago).<sup>24</sup> It is time to see that diversity – understood as difference devoid of any hierarchical connotation – is a value in itself, which is to give value to an incontrovertible fact of nature: the infinite diversity of reality.<sup>25</sup> This reflects the analogous operation by environmentalists and feminists. *At the same time*, the negative value of inequality, of difference inherent in hierarchy, must also be stressed.

At this point we are left with equality as a value cleansed of ambiguity, a value reduced to its essential form of *qualitative* equality: equality in freedom. This does not, of itself, obviate the *quantitative* dimension of equality as defined by Castoriadis: “arithmetic” (“possessed equally by all”) and “geometric” (“to each according to ...”, “in proportion to ...”).<sup>26</sup> However, this quantitative dimension can be reduced to applications and measures which are only partial and can be debated in the light of qualitative equality, that is to say, equality with respect to power and so, according to my definition of power<sup>27</sup>, with respect to freedom. Even such an honest enemy of equality as Raymond Polin can admit this from the start, writing, “It is true that even I hold it to be undeniable that men are born free, that is to say capable of freedom, and also that they are born fitted to exist in freedom. The capacity for freedom and awareness, which are in fact one and the same thing, is the very essence of human nature. It does not follow that men must be considered equal in their capacity to be free.”<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, in order to be equally free, human beings must be equal, if I may be forgiven the word play. Equality must be seen as a value if we are to go on.

And then, what of brotherhood, or less ideologically, of solidarity, the Cinderella of the triad? For me too it remains something of the Cinderella as it seems only slightly problematic, although of course necessary in the context of the present discussion of freedom. It is clearly necessary on an effective level, such an eminently social animal as the human is inconceivable without a wide and growing practice of mutual aid.<sup>29</sup> The autonomy of individual human beings must needs coexist with social interdependence (“interdependence”: yet another term which is quite rightly dear to ecological thought). But solidarity is also necessary at the level of the pursued values, as the “mortar” of freedom, equality and diversity, to ensure that freedom does not decline into indifference, and diversity does not become inequality. And also to ensure that justice is not blind, avoiding, as Bookchin says, an inequality of equals, an “inequality in fact” of “equals in right” and safeguarding the differences of, and means for, an equality of diversity. Solidarity is necessary to give a sense of coherence to a seeming paradox: “the communitarian individualism”, to which Alan Ritter effectively reduces the axiological nucleus of anarchism.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in G. Giorello, *Introduzione to J. Stuart Mill, Saggio sulla libertà*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 1984, p. 7. But, following the liberal, we can turn to what contemporary Italian marxists write: “We must free... difference from its hierarchical element” (R. Gagliardi, “II Bimestrale”, a supplement to “il manifesto”, 31-1-1989); and, “Egalitarianism in social practice, in the concrete dimension of its conflicts and micro-conflicts, has never [well!!!] attacked difference but rather hierarchy, never a world of diverse beings but one made up of inferiors and superiors, of rulers and subjects, inequality as a principle of command and a system of Domination” (M. Bascetta, “II Bimestrale”, *Ibid.*, my italics; for I feel like I am dreaming and reading the words of an anarchist!).

<sup>25</sup> A. Bertolo, *La gramigna sovversiva*, in “Interrogations”, no. 17–18, 1979, pp. 26–27.

<sup>26</sup> “Each infant differs from the others: no two, except for identical twins, share a common gene, and even identical twins may differ phenotypically because of gestational inequalities” (L. Eisenberg, in Montagu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 65).

<sup>27</sup> C. Castoriadis, *Nature et valeur de l'égalité*, in *L'Exigence d'égalité*, La Baconnière, Neuchâtel, 1982, p. 321.

<sup>28</sup> A. Bertolo, *Power, Authority and Domination*, *cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> R. Polin, *Les deux soeurs ennemies: égalité et liberté*, in *L'Exigence d'égalité*, *cit.*, p. 277.

<sup>30</sup> See, obviously, P. Kropotkin, *Il mutuo appoggio*, Salerno, Roma, 1981.

This call for a sense of community, however, must not distract from the fact that anarchist solidarity is not limited to small units. It goes beyond the family, the clan, the lodge, the corporation, the nation... to take in the entire human species, although *inevitably* in a series of concentric circles of decreasing intensity (and with particular attention for the weakest). The intensity of this solidarity may decrease but its nature remains unchanged, never becoming extraneous.

This, then, is a brief sketch of the context of the anarchist interpretation of freedom as a value. The first step in fleshing it out may be with the words of Bakunin.

Is this an appeal to *authority*? Nothing of the sort. This is rather due to the fact that I have quite honestly failed to find anything better to define the essence of that interpretation, its most *profound* meaning, even though Bakunin's definitions are intuitive (and must be understood intuitively) rather than being wholly explicable by logic. On the other hand, the anarchist conception of freedom, in its fundamental nature, probably lies outside the scope of logical analysis and cannot be reduced to a precise and complete rational definition. It is almost intangible and can only be explained in metaphors. However, even I, atheist and rationalist since my early adolescence, must cede – *a little* – before the fact that the founding principle of my system of values is not completely reducible to logic.

I am in no way ashamed of this, as Bakunin himself said that freedom is first and foremost aesthetic, a passion, before it is political and even, perhaps, before it is ethical. The grand old man said, "I am a fanatical lover of freedom". A lover, do you understand? This brings us entirely within the aesthetic dimension, the realm of "feeling". I *like* freedom, I like it to death (literally, I would even, in the last resort, die for it). I *love* freedom. But, getting back to the more tangible, if still slippery level of the ethical-political, Bakunin said, "I can say that I feel free only in the presence of other men and in relationship to them ... I am only free and human insofar as I recognise the freedom and the humanity of those around me ... A slave owner is not a man but a master." And he goes on to reach the heart of the matter: "... the freedom of others is far from being a limit to or a denial of mine, on the contrary it is a necessary condition which confirms it. I can only be truly free through the freedom of others so that, the more free men around me, the wider, deeper and more far-reaching their freedom, the wider, deeper and more far-reaching is my own."<sup>31</sup> And yet again, "I am speaking of that freedom in which each individual, rather than feeling limited by the freedom of others, sees it as his confirmation and his gateway to infinity."<sup>32</sup> What then is this freedom which produces an effect of "collective force",<sup>33</sup> so that the final result when individual freedoms are added together is greater than their sum, analogous to that which Proudhon described for the economy? Clearly, it is *anarchist freedom* which is strongly and *necessarily* tied to equality, solidarity and diversity,<sup>34</sup> strong equality,<sup>35</sup> strong solidarity, strong diversity. It is this "strength"<sup>36</sup> which makes them compatible, in contrast with the feeble

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<sup>31</sup> A. Ritter, L'individuo comunitario, "Volontà", 1/84.

<sup>32</sup> M. Bakunin, Dio e lo Stato, in Rivolta e Libertà (ed. M. Nejrrotti), Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1973, pp. 55–56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> With this question I would also like to say that Bakunin's definition is not at all a judgment based on fact. That is to say that it is not freedom that causes "collective force, but that a freedom can do so (the anarchist one: "my freedom grows rather than diminishes with the freedom of others") if it becomes a central element in the imagined institution of society.

<sup>35</sup> Bakunin again: "The unlimited freedom of each by means of the freedom of all; freedom through solidarity, freedom and equality" (Ibid.)

<sup>36</sup> An "exaggerated freedom", as Popper says (Società aperta, universo aperto, Borla, Roma, 1984, p. 26).



conception<sup>37</sup> of freedom and equality which weaken each other, retaining and even reinforcing their seeming contradictions ...

It is perhaps then this peculiar configuration of freedom, equality, diversity and solidarity understood in the strong sense, traceable, finally, to that very strong Bakuninist conception of freedom, which could represent the “hard core” of anarchism, and be a good and useful definition of anarchy. This is a definition of anarchy as a moral imperative of the kind, “be neither slaves, nor masters”, but expressed *positively*. It is a definition of anarchy as an organising principle of reality and action, as a central element of an imaginary, that precisely of the anarchist, which translates *as much as is possible* both sides of the Janus face of being anarchists: that of living with libertarians and acting for a social transformation in the libertarian sense.

*Posterior Digression.* In a recent article in “Volontà” [*Il fondamentalismo anarchico*, n. 1, 1996, pp. 173–191], Pietro Adamo utilises, for some reflections on anarchism, the epistemological model of Imre Lakatos. In Lakatos’ model (conceived of for “scientific programmes” in competition between themselves), for each programme, a “core” of founding ideas and a “protective belt” [of “auxillary hypotheses” – TN.] are identified which contain “everything that is useful for the ideas of the core and for the growth of the programme itself”.

Curiously, about a dozen years ago, while having no knowledge of Lakatos, I employed in “Volontà” a similar image in research/experimentation for a “post-classical” anarchism. I wrote about a “shared core of values” and added that starting from this “‘utopian’, hard core, of anarchism, all of the possible and imaginable wealth of experience, sensibilities, individual and collective creativity, visible and hidden, should be mobilised to think and make a living rainbow anarchism.” And two years earlier, again in “Volontà”, I wrote, with a slightly agronomic metaphor, of a “hard core” of anarchism that must be surrounded by a “pulp” of flexible, experimental, disputable, and absolutely non-dogmatic thought and action ...

This would be, in my opinion, both in theory and practice, a more proficuous definition than the more traditional and *negative* definitions of a society (or model of society) “without government” or, already better, “without a State”, or, much better, “without hierarchy or domination”. Even though, I admit it, there are no lack of good arguments in favour of a “negative anarchism”, that is, to cite the poet Eugenio Montale, “we can only say this, what we are not, what we do not want” ... Let us leave then to a kind of “protective belt” all of the positive attributes (classical and emergent) of an auspicious model of anarchist society and all of the strategic and tactical conjectures and experiences.

We have taken a step forward in the direction of a more complete verbal-logical, formal definition of the anarchist conception of freedom. At this point, it may be useful to distinguish between two categories which roughly correspond to the “public” and the “private” spheres. This is a logical distinction, rather than a real contrast or contradiction. The juxtaposition of freedom *from* politics and freedom *in* politics, to use Arendt’s term,<sup>38</sup> is not important here. The anarchist con-

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<sup>37</sup> Or, as Nico Berti said, in their “ulteriorization” (La dimensione utopica del pensiero anarchico, “Volontà”, 3/81). And again: “For anarchists, individual freedom can only be truly realized through the complete generalization of social equality and social equality can only be fully realized through the complete generalization of individual freedom” (Per un bilancio storico e ideologico dell’anarchismo, “Volontà”, 3/84).

<sup>38</sup> The use of the adjectives, strong and weak, may be misleading as it seems to indicate a purely quantitative difference; whereas, while certainly quantitative features of freedom, equality, etc. can be measured, it is, above all, qualitative.

ception brings together, in Benjamin Constant de Rebeque's term, the ancient and the modern ideas of freedom.<sup>39</sup> They are brought together, while remaining separate.

They *must*, perhaps, remain formally distinct, if, as Norberto Bobbio tells us, "the problem of freedom is how to act in such a way that we can distinguish a public sphere and a private one, so that man is not entirely reduced to the citizen."<sup>40</sup> This gives us two manifestations of the same phenomenon: of freedom as self-determination and self-realisation of the human being, of *all* concrete individual human beings. Human beings determine and realise themselves by actively and *directly* participating in the process of cultural determination, of socio-historical creation, the process of decision making in the "political" sphere. And human beings determine and realise themselves by their choices in the "private" sphere, that is, in everything that has to do with individual life styles.

The first sphere, the public or "political", is that of the generalised grid of social determinations of behavior. And these determinations may not be external or extraneous to (imposed on) the individual, but *only* if the individual participates in their continual creation and re-creation (modification or confirmation) on a basis of parity. Only thus is the second sphere, the "private", not a residual refuge of freedom (a "privatized" freedom), but rather the space of another game of freedom, that of individual freedom within the network of collective freedom, or rather (as the term "collective" freedom may be ambiguous) the collective game of freedom. I use the word "game" intentionally as all games have rules (and it is even a game to invent new rules).<sup>41</sup> There are, of course, games which *are almost completely governed* by rules or by chance, but these are the least enjoyable. Or at least I think so.

So the juxtaposition of freedom from politics and in politics has nothing to do with us (as anarchists), it is a dilemma which only faces those who see politics, the "public" sphere, social norms, as the sphere of non-freedom, of necessity, or, alternatively, those who want everything to be controlled, decided and predictable and see individual freedom as an absurd claim, an intolerable disorder. But for anarchists, as Élisée Reclus said, "anarchism is the highest form of order" ...

The problem of the distinction between *negative* and *positive* freedom, between freedom *from* and freedom *to*<sup>42</sup> is analogous. It may be useful on the level of logical analysis for studying and testing the different conceptions of freedom. It is well-known that positive freedom is prone to gross mystification. If "real" freedom is freedom to move towards the "Good", a good which may be defined in a hundred different ways, both religious and lay, everything is possible in the name of "real" freedom: the Gulag, the Inquisition and the like. But a purely negative conception of freedom is equally liable to mystification, particularly because it undervalues or even in fact deprives individuals (in the game of freedom) of that sphere of power, of functions instituted and controlled by society, which is fundamental to our humanity, to our being fully human. And even

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<sup>39</sup> Arendt, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>40</sup> "The ancient citizens wanted the division of social power between all the citizens of a State: this was what they called freedom... The modern aim is the safeguarding of private well-being and freedom is seen as the guarantee that the institutions offer for this well-being" (B. Constant, *De la liberté des anciens comparée a celle des modernes*, 1819, quoted in C. Viviani, *Enciclopedia filosofica*, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Viviani, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>42</sup> "...a system of conditional checks which allows the establishment of rules of the game which are able to cope with a considerable number of combinations of actions and wishes, without the threat of a radical rupture of the entire system with opportunities for qualitative transgression and complete renewal of the rules of the game which preside over the formation of a new and different system of freedom" (F. Riccio, S. Vaccaro, E. Fiordilino, *Il sapere e le sue parole*, Ila Palma, Palermo, 1989, p. 158)

in the private sphere we may only too likely see the return of an *interiorised* pseudo-freedom in the form of freedom *from: from sin... from our worse nature...*<sup>43</sup>

It is probably true, as Berlin says, that positive freedom and negative freedom have generally developed historically in different directions.<sup>44</sup> But it is not true, it is in fact absolutely false, in the case of anarchism, which represents the historically most complete synthesis of the two “freedoms”. To the anarchists, both freedoms have always been closely and strongly linked. They are two ways of saying essentially the same thing. To return to Bakunin, “...not that individualistic, egoistic, narrow-minded, sham freedom practised by the school of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and by all the other school of bourgeois liberalism, which consider *the so-called rights of all, represented by the State*, as the limits on the individual and which inevitably end by reducing the rights of the *single individual* to zero ... No, I mean ... the freedom that consists of the full development of all material, intellectual and moral activities that are latent in each and every one of us” (my italics).<sup>45</sup>

This brings us to the final knot to be unraveled in my train of thought (although obviously not to the end of the unending discussion of freedom). This last knot concerns the existence (or not) of a “neutral”, or better, a *lay* conception, acceptable to different “faiths”, even though a purely neutral conception of freedom, stripped of values, is a contradiction in terms.<sup>46</sup> Is there or not a conception of freedom which allows for communication and action, including *but not limited to* (and herein lies the problem), the specific anarchist conception of freedom?

Since we pose the question, we must obviously accept the idea that there is no *one true* conception of freedom (that is, ours). The anarchist idea is “obviously” (for me, us) the most beautiful, the richest, the most promising, the most in line with human nature... But it is not the only one, nor that one which is the most widespread in the collective imaginary today. Far from it. It will not, I believe, be difficult to accept this statement, which is both a statement of fact and a value judgment (and so in fact the anarchist conception is not and cannot be the only conception of freedom because freedom, by its very nature, cannot be reduced to one particular interpretation without denying itself),<sup>47</sup> and so we must determine whether or not the anarchist conception of freedom is not only essentially different but also incompatible with other conceptions.

If we apply the mix of utopia and common sense that I suggested to anarchists some years ago<sup>48</sup> to this dilemma (which is theoretical, but also – strongly – practical), I arrive at the almost obvious hypothetical reply: the freedom of the anarchists is fundamentally *irreducible* to other freedoms, however similar they may seem, (the utopian dimension), but at the same time it is *compatible* with them (the common sense dimension). I believe that there is, or at least may be, a lay idea of freedom in which different conceptions, including the anarchist one, can confront each other and coexist. *Some*, but not all, that is, as the fascist interpretation, to take one example, or

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<sup>43</sup> “If freedom is the absence of obstacles in the way of satisfaction of a person’s wishes... one way of achieving this freedom is to overcome one’s own desires... Rather than resisting the pressures crushing me or removing them, I can ‘interiorize’ them” (Berlin, op. cit., p. 37)

<sup>44</sup> Berlin, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>45</sup> Bakunin, op. cit., p. 70 (my italics).

<sup>46</sup> It is, of course, possible to look for (and perhaps find) a neutral definition of freedom, but only if we consider it to be a non-ethical term – as Oppenheimer, for example, tries to do. But a definition of this type has no sense and no usefulness in the context that interests us. We are concerned with freedom as a value, and with one particular conception of it.

<sup>47</sup> See N. Berti, Libertà dell’etica ed etica della libertà, “Volontà”, 5/87.

<sup>48</sup> A. Bertolo, Gli ex, il buon senso e l’utopia, “Volontà”, 3/85.

the Leninist one, would automatically be excluded once this lay dimension of freedom has been more or less broadly defined.

I will try to define it. This is not an easy task, partly because I have only just started to think about it. We need definitions which are not overly neutral, as otherwise everything could be included, from Wojtyła's "freedom is wanting what must be"(1983) to some pseudo-poets' "freedom to be enslaved by your beautiful black (or blue or green...) eyes". So not overly neutral, but obviously acceptable in principle to various doctrinal approaches. In view of my cultural make-up, I am thinking of the other two great schools of post-Enlightenment thought, liberalism and socialism (including but not limited to the Marxist variety). So I am seeking definitions which can appeal to the less hierarchical minds of these two traditions, to their genuine "weak" libertarian (and/or egalitarian) natures. I would like to start with Berlin: "Anyone who sees a value in freedom in itself has believed that freedom of choice is an inalienable element of what makes human beings human. This is the underlying factor in both the positive demand for a voice in the laws and practices of the society in which one lives, and in the demand for a personal space .. in which one is *one's own master*."<sup>49</sup> Freedom is also a "negative space in which a man is not obliged to account for his actions to anyone else as long as this can be compatible with the existence of an organised society."<sup>50</sup>

Although a somewhat "weaker" version than the anarchist one, it includes both freedom as participation in power and freedom as the arbitrariness of individual choice (limited only by the "equal freedom of others"). It is, or could be, a basis for a constructive dialogue, together with a series of struggles *for* freedom, for individual and collective freedom, in the "private" and the "public". We may move progressively, through "successive dislocations", towards a widespread acceptance of the anarchist conception of freedom, while still remaining within the "lay" context.<sup>51</sup>

"Having a voice" in politics may quite well lead to direct democracy in the political sphere (that is to say the negation of the State as a principle of hierarchical organization).<sup>52</sup> "Equal freedom" may provide equality and lead quite logically to self-management in the economic sphere. And the limit of the freedom of others may, also quite logically, come to seem a pseudo-limit. We may well discover and prove, both in theory and in practice, that (or better, *if*, keeping doubt alive) the equal freedom of all may not reduce but rather reinforce the freedom of each, of the freedom of all and of everyone.

As, after all, that "grand old man" Bakunin said.

*Notes*

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<sup>49</sup> My italics are to highlight the internal contradiction (an involuntary "slip" – possibly a significant lapse, on libertarian ground). Berlin in fact cites being one's own master as a category in the order of "positive" freedom and not in the "negative" as in this sentence.

<sup>50</sup> Both these quotations are found in Berlin, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> And then perhaps to its establishment (necessarily traumatic/revolutionary, as it is incompatible with the principle of domination) as a central element in the imaginary institution of society.

<sup>52</sup> "Anyone who is for freedom must be for being governed as little as possible and for having the least possible government, and so to moving towards the absence of government, towards anarchism" (Popper, *Società aperta, universo aperto*, cit., p. 26) "Participation in self-government is, like justice, a fundamental human need" (Berlin, op. cit., p. 55).

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Amedeo Bertolo  
Fanatics of freedom  
1989

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