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Fragment on life and spirit

Mikhail Bakunin

September 4, 1837

Yes, life is sheer happiness; to live means to understand, to understand life; evil does not exist, all is good; only limitation is evil, the limitation of the spiritual vision. Everything that exists is the life of the spirit, everything is penetrated by the spirit, nothing exists apart from the spirit. The spirit is absolute knowledge, absolute liberty, absolute love, and especially absolute felicity. The natural man, like everything that is natural, is the finite and limited moment of that absolute life. He is still not free, but he contains the potential for unlimited liberty, for unlimited felicity. That potential resides in the consciousness. Man is the conscious creature. The consciousness is the emancipation, the return of the spirit from the infinite and from limited definition into its infinite essence. The degree of consciousness of the man is his degree of liberty, his degree of humanity, of love, and consequently, his degree of happiness. The side of his liberty, of his consciousness is good, happiness. His limited, unconscious side is evil, misfortune. Evil and misfortune only exist for the finite, limited consciousness, and yet that some consciousness contains the possibility and the necessity of emancipation. So evil does not exist and all is good; life is sheer happiness.

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Hegel said that only thought distinguishes the man from the animal. That difference is infinite, and it makes man an independent, eternal creature. The natural individual is subject to the same implacable necessity, to the same slavery all everything that is natural. He is a mortal creature; he is a slave; he is nothing even as an individual. He has reality only in the species and is subject to the necessary laws of that species. But consciousness frees him from that necessity, renders him independent, free and eternal. Man in himself is always free and eternal, as a consciousness, as a concept of that spirit that will develop in his life. But for himself, he can be in part a slave; he can be a finite man. The finite man is the one who is still not entirely imbued with the spirit of independence, the one in whom there still persists some spontaneous aspects that the spirit has still not illuminated. It is these aspects that make him finite, by limiting the horizon of his spiritual eye; now, every limitation is evil, misfortune, separation from God. The dark sides of the man hinder him, prevent him from merging with God, making him a slave of contingency. Chance is the lie, the shadow; chance does not exist in a life that is real and true; everything in that life is holy necessity, divine grace. Chance is powerless in the face of true reality; only the shadows, only the interests and the ghostly desires of the man are subject to chance. Chance hampers the liberty of the finite man; chance is the dark, somber side of his life. Consciousness is emancipation from [natural] spontaneity, the illumination by the spirit of human nature. The less conscious the man, the more he is subject to chance; the more conscious he is, the more he is independent from it. Only the ghostly is killed by chance, and the ghostly must die. The shadows is destroyed by the shadow, and therein resides the liberation of the man.

Everything lives; everything is animated by the spirit. Reality is only dead for the dead eye. Reality is the eternal life of God. The thoughtless man also lives in that reality, but he is not conscious of it, for him everything is dead, he sees death

everywhere because his consciousness has still not come into being. The more living the man is, the more he is imbued with the spirit of independence, the more reality is living for him, the more it is close to him. What is real is rational. The spirit is the absolute power, the source of all power. Reality is its life, and everywhere reality is all-powerful as will and thing of the spirit. The finite man is cut off from God; he is cut off from reality by the shadows, by his defect of immediacy; for him reality and good are not identical; for him good and evil are separated. He can be a moral man, he is not a religious man, and because he is a slave of reality, he fears it, he hates it. Whoever hates reality and does not know it hates and does not know God. Reality is the divine will. In poetry, in religion and finally in philosophy is accomplished the great act of the reconciliation of man with God. The religious man feels, believes that the divine will is the absolute, unique good, and he says: "Let them will be done", he says that, although he does not understand the reason why the divine will is in reality the real happiness and why it is uniquely in it that finite satisfaction exists. The moral point of view is the division of good from evil, the separation of man from God, and consequently from reality. For him evil is as essential as good. He fears evil, he is troubled, and a ceaseless struggle between good and evil, between happiness and misfortune takes place within him. Evil does not exist for the religious man: for him it is the shadow, the death, the limitation vanquished by the revelation of the Christ. The religious man feels his individual powerlessness, because he knows that all power comes from God, and he awaits illumination, grace from Him. Grace purifies the man of the influence of the shadow, it disperses the fog that separates him from the sun.

Philosophy, as the independent development and purification of thought, is a human science, for it issues directly from man and it is a divine science because it contains the power of grace: human purification from the phantoms and

its union with God. The man who has traversed all three of these spheres of development and education is a perfect man, and all-powerful; for him, reality is the absolute good, the divine will is his conscious will.

Genius is the living consciousness of contemporary reality.

A great deal of time has passed since the idea came to me to record here the facts of my inner life. My soul has undergone many upheavals, and I have nearly fallen again. No, I am still not sufficiently illuminated by the truth; I still do not possess enough love to prevent myself from observing myself, from giving myself up to all impressions indiscriminately. There are still many obscure sides in me and these aspects still make it impossible for me to obtain uninterrupted harmony. I still know moments of desiccation, of coldness, and in these moments I must be firm; I must consider them passing instances of illness and I must study the proper means of destroying them.

Next year, in the spring, I will go abroad. — It is essential; it is time to leave indeterminacy behind and make a decision. To this end, I must prepare myself 1) morally and 2) materially: at present, I am reading the Phenomenology.

Nature does not pass, it contains the entire totality of the negation, time is within it and not outside it, so it has no power over it, it performs as a power over the realizations and the realities of nature, isolated and subjective, which are one-sided and do not contain the notion of totality of the negation; that is why time is all-powerful over them, they are born of time and unfold in time. The human personality, the human subject, as an isolated realization of nature, is subject to that same law of time, they pass in the same manner. But it contains the

entire totality of the negation, as an entirely abstract equality Self = Self [Moi = Moi], and in that equality they are outside of time and time is within them; it manifests its power over the contingent and non-corresponding definitions of that pure equality, and in that regard, time is the abstract basis of the external life of nature as well as the internal life of the Spirit. And it seems to me that the isolated realizations of nature concern the totality of nature in exactly the same manner as the contingent, unilateral qualities or definitions of the subject concern the pure subject.