

Beyond the Ideal

Ricardo Mella

1913

Do not think like the old believers who mourn at the feet of their fallen idol.

Believe, fight and cling to the dead cult—all the believers do the same. It doesn't matter whether the idol is made of clay, bronze or meat. It doesn't matter whether it is dissolved in the mental haze or in the whirlwind of passion. For the ideal, first living and then dead, the inhuman law of sacrifice is fulfilled. It comes from the biblical Jehovah, the evangelical Christ. Everywhere there is a holy book that in some language proclaims the language of the holocaust [bloodbath]. You must bow down to something. The mystic falls to his knees, the fanatic surrenders his life and, by a reversal of terms the revolutionary rambles [about] the miraculous madness of marvelous transformations.

Do not strip away their illusion, their precious illusion. They will defend themselves like lions, tear at you like panthers, howl like hyenas. There is no animal more fierce than the believer.

To declare a mistake, to alter the course, to expose to the light of truth what sprouts, suddenly, from the arcane? Impossible! Struggling with himself, the man of the ideal will stubbornly persist in error, will insist on the aberration, will fight stubbornly against the current that seeks to sweep them along. Faith, unwavering faith, will always be on guard. And whether it is called religious, political, philosophical or social, it will impugn all the excesses [insolence] of thought, locked up in its fanatical, unshakeable dogmatism.

They change the men, the figures, the representations, the cults; they change the tricks of logic, the mental constructions; they change the vocabulary and the rhetoric. One thing alone remains unalterable: the myth.

Like old believers, we weep at the feet of the fallen idol and, if we cannot rebuild it, we create a new one. It is necessary to always be kneeling before something.

That is why, through all ideological transformations, the ideal remains irreducibly identical with itself. Even at the greatest heights, the demolishing battering ram is not very different from the junk that flatters the gods and exalts the lords of the earth. They are different instruments of different cults.

It seems as if the habit of worship has become petrified in the souls of men: in his brain, the idea of the marvelous; in his flesh and bones, the terrible tendency to servility.

You will clamor in vain for independence of spirit. The freest will clutch desperately at the straw of their idea.

They could not live without the master of articulated organs or the master of ideological consistency. It is necessary to feel directed by something and for something. We are made for slavery. The lash is also an icon.

The battle of the centuries has brought us to a time when dogmatic idealism is going to crash against the rocks of the free spirit. Beyond the ideal, there is always truth, always justice, always reason. No one would dare to show that the development of ideas has insurmountable barriers. The limit is absurd, impossible. Do not build walls around thought. The same thought will topple them like a fragile masonry of rubble. Open your understanding to the most daring analysis and surrender to all the truths that arise; do not petrify yourselves in the quietism of a beautiful conception, however broad and profound it may seem to you. It is advisable to keep the mind ready for all transformations. Beyond the idea is always the ideal.

We do not speak only of the incurable believers of the past. We speak rather to the believers of the revolution, of the happy future, of the happiness to come. We speak to the dreamers who, believing they demolish, reconstruct; who, believing themselves revolutionaries, are the dogmatic, blind, persistence of the old aberrations.

Everywhere it seems that new people are emerging, new legions of brave fighters for new things. Do not trust it. They bring back hereditary fanaticism. Maybe they advance enlightened by the spirit of sect. Perhaps they are guided by the distant vision of a new age. Just in case, light all the lamps. And you yourselves, reveal yourself completely to the multitude so that they see you are free of idolatry and servility.

Anyone who considers himself at the end of his journey is a man lost to the revolution. He will die worshipping his idol or mourning its end. He will be like all the old believers.

Beyond the ideal, there is always the ideal.

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Retrieved on 6th May 2023 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *El Libertario*, núm. 22, Gijón, 11 January 1913. Working translation by Shawn P.
Wilbur

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