

# On Synthesis

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## [First Article]

### I.

Legend maintains that Jesus Christ gave no response to the question of Pontius Pilate: "What is truth?" And it is very likely that in these tragic moments he hardly had the heart to concern himself with philosophical arguments. But even if he had had the time and the desire to engage in a controversy concerning the essence of truth, it would not have been easy for him to respond in a definitive manner.

Many centuries have passed since then. Humanity has made more than one step toward knowledge of the world. The question of Pontius Pilate has troubled humanity, it has made people think, work and seek in all directions, and it has brought suffering to a great number of minds. The ways and methods of the search for truth have varied many times... Yet the question always remains without an answer.

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Three principal obstacles arise along the path we follow to seek and establish objective truth, no matter in what direction or in what region we hope to find it.

The first of these obstacles is impressed with a purely theoretical and philosophical character. In fact, the truth is the great existing All: everything that exists in reality. To know the truth means to know what is. But to know what is, to know the veritable truth, the essence of things ("things in themselves") would appear to be, for several reasons, impossible at this time, and perhaps it will always be so. The essential reason for that impossibility is the following: The world would never be for us anything but the idea that we fashion of it. It presents itself to us, not as it is in reality, but as it is depicted to us by our (or more) poor, false senses, and by our incomplete and crude methods of knowing things. Both are very limited, subjective and fickle. Here is an example drawn from the domain of the senses: as we know, there exists in nature, in reality, neither light, nor colors, nor sounds (there exists only what we believe to be movements, oscillations); however, we have above all an impression of the monde consisting of light and colors (oscillations collected and transformed with the aid of our visual organs) and sounds (movements collected and transformed by our auditory apparatus.) Let us also not that a whole series of phenomena unquestionably taking place in nature elude the organs of our senses. To serve as an example in the domain of knowledge, it is enough to indicate the fact that, constantly, certain theories are rejected to be replaced by others. (A very recent example is that of the famous theory of Einstein on relativity tending to "devastate" all our systems of knowledge.) The only thing that I know immediately is that I exist (*cogito, ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am) and that there exists some reality outside of me. Without knowing it exactly, I know nonetheless that it exists: first, because if I exist, there must exist some reality that has created me; second, because some entity that is found outside of me communicates to me certain impressions. It is that reality, the essence of which I do not know, that I call world and life; and it is that reality that I seek to know as much as it will lend itself to the knowing.

Obviously, if we wanted to always consider that obstacle, it would only remain for us to say once and for all: everything that we think we know is only lies, deception, illusion; we cannot know the essence of things, for our means of knowing are far too imperfect... And on that basis, we would have to renounce every sort of scientific labor, every work in search of the truth and

of knowledge of the world, considering every attempt of that sort perfectly useless and destined to never succeed.

However, in the overwhelming majority of our scientific acts, acts of thought as well as practice—if we set aside the domain of purely philosophical speculation—we hardly consider that obstacle: first, because if we did, we would truly have to renounce all scientific activity, every search for the truth (something which, for many reasons, is entirely unacceptable to us); and then, for we have certain reasons to believe that our impressions reflect all the same, up to a certain point, reality such as it is, and that our understanding comes closer and closer to knowledge of that reality, to knowledge of the truth. It is this last argument in particular, together with other impetuses, that leads us to widen and deepen without ceasing our work of research.

Taking as data, — that is as having for us a real, concrete meaning, common to us all, — our impressions and especially our knowledge of the world and of life; taking as given the milieu, concrete for us, in which we live, work and act, — we think and we seek on the bases and within the limits of that reality as it presents itself: a subjective and conventional reality.

The question of truth is equally posed within the limits of that reality. And, above all, to decipher that reality, accessible to our understanding and our impressions, as well as to pursue the continual widening of its knowable limits — this already appears to us as a problem of the highest importance.

But, in this case as well, we see loom up before us, and the path of research and of the establishment of truth, two other obstacles, of a concrete character as well.

Second obstacle. — Like life, truth is undivided. Truth (like life) is the great All. To know this or that part of the truth still cannot mean that we know the Truth (although it is sometimes necessary to go from knowledge of the parts to the knowledge of the whole). To know the truth — this means, to be precise, to know all the universe in its entirety: all of existence, all of life, all the paths of life, as well as all its forces, all its laws and tendencies, for all times and all terms, in all its different secrets, in all its phenomena and separate details, as well as in its entirety. Now, even if it was only within the limits of the world intelligible to our faculties of impression and understanding, — to embrace the universe, to know life and penetrate its inner meaning appears to us impossible at present, and perhaps it will never be possible.

Third obstacle. — The most characteristic trait of life is its eternal and uninterrupted movement, its changes, its continual transformations. Thus, there exists no firm, constant and determined truth. Or rather, if there exists a general, complete truth, its defining quality would be an incessant movement of transformation, a continual displacement of all the elements of which it is composed. Consequently, the knowledge of that truth supposes a complete knowing, a clear definition, an exact reduction of all the laws, all the forms, all the combinations, possibilities and consequences of all these movements, of all these changes and permutations. Now, such a knowledge, so exact an account of the forces in infinite movement and oscillation, of the continually changing combinations,—even if there exists a certain regularity and an iterative law in these oscillations and changes,—would be something nearly impossible.

## II.

To know the Truth—that means to know life as it is, to know the true essence of things.

We do not know that true life, [so] we do not know the Truth.

However, we possess some knowledge of it.

As we receive impressions of life and we learn to know it through the testimony of our senses and through the means of knowing that we find at our disposal, precisely as we run up against the obstacles indicated,—we learn, first, that life is some great synthesis, as reality as well as personal feeling: some resultant of a quantity of diverse forces and energies, of factors of all sort.

We also learn that this synthesis is subject to a continuous movement, to incessant variations; we know that that resultant is never found at rest, but that, on the contrary, it oscillates and varies without ceasing.

To know the Truth—that would mean to embrace, know and understand the whole of this global synthesis in all of its details, in all its entirety and in all its eternal movement, in all its combinations and its uninterrupted variations.

If we know life in its details, in its entirety and in its movements, we will know the Truth. And that truth will be the resultant, constantly in movement, of a quantity of forces: a resultant of which we should also know all the movements.

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We know neither the true life, nor its synthesis; we know neither its reality, nor its meaning, nor its movements. For us, life in its entirety is the great enigma, the great mystery. We only manage, from time to time, to pluck some fragments of its synthesis from the air...

We do not know the authentic truth, the objective truth of things. Not only have we still not managed to discover the truth, but we do not know if we will ever discover it. We only succeed, from time to time, in finding some isolated grains of the truth—dispersed and brilliant sparkles of precious gold, from which it is still impossible for us to form anything whole...

But—we seek the truth (or to put it better, some of us do.) We have sought it for centuries and thousands of years. We scan on all sides, in all directions—obstinately, offering all our forces to the search, painfully, sorrowfully.

And if we know that life is a great synthesis, we know, consequently, that the search for truth is the search for synthesis; that the path of truth is that of synthesis; that in seeking the truth, it is important to always remember the synthesis, to always aspire to it.

And since we know that life is a continuous movement, we should, in seeking the truth, constantly consider that fact.

### III.

The field of interest that particularly interests us is not that of pure philosophy and speculation. The circle within which our interests, our aspirations and our attempts principally move is the much more concrete and accessible one of the problems of biology and above all of sociology.

Seeking to establish some social conception, to intervene actively in social life and to influence it in a certain direction, we wish to discover in that concrete domain the guiding truth.

What do we do to find it?

Generally we take up certain phenomena in the given domain of life, we analyze them, we seek to know them and penetrate their meaning.

It often happens that we succeed in drawing the exact assessment from some phenomenon and that, consequently, we manage to put our finger on a coin, on a part, on a fragment of the truth.

Four fundamental errors are very frequent—and very characteristic—in these cases.

1. Human analysis is not infallible. It does not lead directly to the exact and indubitable, absolute truth. In every analysis, in every human research, we inevitably encounter, along with some scraps of truth grasped on the spot, more or less great errors, lapses, sometimes oversights and clumsy false judgments—thus, [we make] assertions not in conformity with the truth. We generally forget that this is the case, and instead of seeking to establish and to eliminate these errors, to find and apply the necessary corrections, we disregard them or else we do still worse—we consider our errors as an expression of the truth, so that we disfigure it and distort its value.
2. Save for very rare exceptions, we are generally inclined to exaggerate the significance, sometimes very minuscule, of the bit of truth found by us, to generalize it, to make of it the whole truth, to extend it, if not to life in its entirety, at least to phenomena of much larger and more complicated order, and at the same time to reject other elements of the truth we seek.
3. We let ourselves be carried away by the analysis and a generalization, erroneous from its immediate results, we constantly forget to consider the second moment—and that is the most essential one—necessary to the search for the truth: of the true and accurate way of generalization; of the necessity,—the analysis once made and a phenomenon, a fragment of truth grasped and understood,—not to take hold of that bit and raise it to the rank of keystone, by making it the entire truth, but, on the contrary, to remember other phenomena relating to the same order of ideas, to seek to fathom their meaning as well, to compare them with the bit of truth discovered and to do everything in order to establish a correct synthesis. This problem of the second degree generally escapes us. We forget that life is a synthesis of a great number of factors.
4. We forget at each step that movement and variability never cease; we forget that there exists no apathetic truth, that in life “everything flows,” that life and truth are the dynamics par excellence. Habitually, we do not account for this factor of an extreme importance and value: the uninterrupted dynamism of life and truth. However, just as it would be erroneous to take the form adopted at a certain moment by an amoeba in motion for its constant form, it would be a mistake to suppose a similar rigidity in the essence of truth: what has just been (or what could have been) truth moment a moment ago—is not longer truth in the following moment. The synthesis itself is not immutable. It is only a resultant constantly in motion, which sometimes comes closer to one of the factors and sometimes to another, and never remains close to one or the other for long. We do not take sufficient account of this singularly important fact.<sup>1</sup>

The errors indicated have a particularly harmful importance pour for the domain of the human sciences, for the comprehension and study of our social life, which represents an exceptionally complicated synthesis of particularly numerous factors, the majority of which are of a special order, a movement and a series of combinations—both exceptionally complicated—of the most diverse elements (which, moreover, are far from being solely mechanical.)

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<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon of the “constant variability of the resultant,” as well as the importance of its application to the study of the facts of human history, will be examined in detail in another work.

It is precisely in this domain that the most serious errors most often take place. It is especially the numerous followers of the seekers of truth who are guilty of this. The mission to reexamine their “truths,” to redress their errors and make the necessary corrections later falls to others.

Here are some examples that could serve as an illustration: the definition made by Marx-Engels, and especially by their followers, of the role of the economic factor in history (the so-called “historical materialism”)—that excellent but unilateral (and consequently not precisely correct) analysis, and—the exaggerated and “firm” (consequently quite inexact) deductions that have been drawn from it; the theory of classes of Karl Marx and his followers—that analysis, just as brilliant, but narrow and insufficient (and thus erroneous on many points), and the perverse deductions that have been made from it; the “law” of the struggle for existence (Ch. Darwin and also, and especially, his supporters in the various branches of science) with all its errors and exaggerations; the unilateral individualist theory of Max Stirner (and especially of his followers) and so many others.

The economic doctrine of Marx and his theory [of] classes, the individualist conception of Stirner, as well as the law of the struggle for existence de Darwin, etc., etc., are always admirable analyses—well directed and called to give some important results—of one of the factors, of one of the elements of the complicated and vital synthesis, but in order to approach the truth of the synthesis, all these theories are lacking one essential thing: the understanding of the necessity of juxtaposing them with the analysis of other elements and other factors, with the deductions that can be made from the results of these other analyses. They lack the desire to account for phenomena of a different order, the aspiration to seek the synthesis. We forget that real life is a synthesis of different series of phenomena; that that synthesis is moreover the moving and variable outcome of these series, series that are also constantly in movement. We lose sight of the real and moving synthetic nature of life and the necessity of a corresponding synthetic character in scientific knowledge. This is the source of the errors of generalization and deduction. Instead of approaching the truth, we distance ourselves from it.

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This erroneous attitude with regard to the phenomena examined, to the bits of truth discovered, causes considerable damage to all our attempts at social construction, for they cause us to wander very far from the road leading to a precise solution of the problems that loom up before us.

Indeed, if in each truth found by us we inevitably find mixed an alloy of non-truth; if every partial truth established by us is never the entire truth; if truth, like life itself, is always synthetic and moving,—then in our constructions we approach the truth, we reckon and understand vital phenomena and processes that much more correctly and exactly to the extent that we verify more meticulously the bit of truth found, to the extent that we compare it with other phenomena and bits of truth discovered in the same domain, to the extent that we approach synthesis and that we constantly recall the essential fact of the uninterrupted movement of all things. And we distance ourselves from the truth, from a proper understanding of life, from a correct conception—that much more as we concern ourselves less with verifying, comparing and contrasting, to the extent, finally, that we distance ourselves from synthesis and the idea of movement.

It is very probable that we will never attain the knowledge of a correct and complete synthesis. But the principle that must guide us is a constant effort to approach it to the greatest extent possible.

Each time that we close our eyes to the defects and the vices of the bits of truth found by us, we distance ourselves from the result sought. The proper method consists, on the contrary, to carefully account for these errors and of seeking their correction.

Each time that we take a fragment of truth found by us for the whole and only truth, and we reject the other fragments, sometimes without even taking the trouble of examining them closely—we distance ourselves from the correct solution. The correct method consists of juxtaposing each fragment found with others, to strive to discover some always new parts of the truth and to seek to make them agree, so that they form one single whole. That is the only way that we can reach our goal.

Each time that we limit ourselves to drawing the appraisal of our analysis made from a single aspect of the question, and we forget the necessity of continuing our work of research by aspiring to accomplish its synthesis with the other aspects—we distance ourselves more from the goal, however brilliant and exact our work of analysis has been. Each time that we forget to take into account the constant factors of movement and variability, and we take the bit of truth found by us for something stable, firm, “petrified,”—we distance ourselves from the truth. The true path is to always account for the multiplicity of factors that all find themselves engaged in a continuous movement and to seek the resultant (also moving itself) of these factors.

#### IV.

If we would consider anarchism and its aspirations, we must also note, to our keen regret, that we find there, and at each step, the same errors, demanding the same work of rectification; that there as well we are still very distant from correct methods of seeking the truth and, consequently, from correct conceptions.

Here also our habitual method remains the same: after having found and established a certain bit of truth (often even long since discovered), we begin by closing our eyes to the errors and defects mixed in there, we do not seek to understand and eliminate them, then we begin to proclaim that bit as being a crown of creation, constant and unshakeable, we hasten to consider it as an immutable and complete truth, we forget the necessity of moving to a work of synthesis and end up neglecting to account for movement in its capacity as major function of vital development, especially in the domain of social creativity. This is also why we habitually entrench ourselves, with pettiness and blindness, in some very small nook of truth, defending ourselves furiously from the desire to enter into other corners, even [when] perfectly well lit,—and this instead of setting ourselves to work seeking synthesis embracing the work in its entirety.

I read, for example, the articles of comrade Maximoff (“Benchmarks”, in the Russian paper from America, *Golos Truzhenika*) and I see that he is concerned with establishing, in the most meticulous manner, not just the general plan, but even the most minute details to be adopted by the future social structure in the course of the social revolution. I say to myself: “All of that is very good and has already been sufficiently dwelt upon. But how does comrade Maximoff think that he can usefully stuff or pile the complicated, hectic ensemble of life, all that enormous, lively synthesis, within the cold margins of his dried-out plan made on paper?” I know that life will refuse to introduce itself into this scheme; I know that this scheme will only contain some few



bits of truth, surpassed by numerous faults and gaps. And to the extent that comrade Maximoff means to make of his formula a finished thing, polished and solid, in so far as he pretend that this formula (or any other similar in its place) contains the sole and only truth, and that everything that is not that truth must be criticized and condemned,—I am, myself, of the opinion that it (or any other precise schematizing) only exaggerates the importance of the factor of organization, correct by itself and having great significance, but far from being the only factor, and imbued with certain defects for which it is indispensable to account, without which and apart from the synthesis with other factors of an equal importance it would lose all significance.

When the “anarcho-syndicalists” say that syndicalism (or anarcho-syndicalism) is the single, only way of salvation and reject with indignation everything not adapted to the standard established by them, I am of the opinion that they exaggerate the importance of the bit of truth in their possession, that they do not want to account for the defects inherent in that bit, nor for the other elements forming, in concert with it, the correct truth, nor for the necessity of synthesis, nor for the factor of vital, creative movement. I am, then, of the opinion that they distance themselves from the truth. And I greatly fear that they will find themselves in no state, when necessary, to resist the temptation to impose and inculcate by force their scholastic opinion, which the true life will refuse to accept as being opposed to its vital truth.

When the “communist-anarchists” open the question by the same process and, admitting only their own truth, immediately reject syndicalism (or anarcho-syndicalism), they deserve the same reproach.

When the “individualist anarchist,” thumbing their nose at syndicalism and communism, only admits their “self” as reality and truth, and when they mean to reduce to this little “self,” the whole of the great vital synthesis, they still commit the same error.

When I read in the article “The Unique Means” (cf. *Анархический вестник / Anarkhicheskii Vestnik*, no. 1, July 1923) that the internal perfection of the personality and the reasonable of conscious personalities in agricultural community forms the one and only truth and the only path to salvation, I think of the anarcho-syndicalists and of their “unique means” too; and I realize that all these people, instead of seeking the truth in synthesis, each peck at their little grain of millet without ever being satiated.

And if it is “makhnovists” who believe that the only true form of the movement is their own and who reject everything that is not it, they are as distant from the truth as the others.

And when I hear it said that the anarchists should only do work of critique and destruction and that the study of positive problems does not fall within the domain of anarchism, I consider that assertion a grave error in relation to the synthetic character [synthéticité] indispensable to our research and ideas.

However, it is precisely the anarchists who more than anyone must constantly recall the synthesis and the dynamism of life. For it is precisely anarchism as a conception of the world and life that, by its very essence, is profoundly synthetic and deeply imbued with the living, creative and motive principle of life. It is precisely anarchism that is called to begin—and perhaps even to perfect—the social scientific synthesis that the sociologists are always in the process of seeking, without a shadow of success, the lack of which leads, on the one hand, to the pseudo-scientific conceptions of “marxism,” of an “individualism” pushed to the extreme and to various other “isms,” all more narrow, stiffer, and more distant from truth than the last, and, on the other hand, to a number of recipes for conceptions and practical attempts of the most inept and most absurd sort.

The anarchist conception must be synthetic: it must seek to become the great living synthesis of the different elements of life, established by scientific analysis and rendered fruitful by the synthesis of our ideas, our aspirations and the bits of truth that we have succeeded in discovering; it must do it if it wishes to be that precursor of truth, that true and undistorted factor, not bankrupting of human liberation and progress, which the dozens of sullen, narrow and fossilized “isms” obviously cannot become.

I am not an enemy of syndicalism: I only speak out against its megalomania; I protest against the tendency (of its non-worker personalities) to make a dogma of it, unique, infallible and ossified—something of the sort of marxism and the political parties.

I am not an enemy of communism (anarcho-communism, naturally): I only speak out against all sectarian narrowness of views and intolerance; I protest against its dogmatic perversion and against its mortification.

I am not an enemy of individualism: I only speak out against its egocentric blindness.

I am not an enemy of the moral perfection of the self: but I do not accept that it be recognized as the “unique means.”

I am not an enemy of organization: but I do not want anyone to make a cage of it.

I find that the work of the emancipation of humanity demands by equal title: the idea of free communism as the material basis of a healthy life in common; the syndicalist movement as one of the indispensable levers à the action of the organized masses; the “makhnovstchina” as an expression of the revolutionary uprising of the masses, as insurrection and élan; the wide circulation of individualist ideas that reveal to us radiant horizons, that teach us to appreciate and cultivate the human personality; and the propaganda of aversion towards violence that must put the Revolution on its guard against the possible excesses and deviations...

It seems to me that each of these ideas, that each of these phenomena contain a granule of truth that will manifest itself clearly one bright day, as well as faults, errors and perversions; and the exaggerations will be rejected.

It seems to me that all these granules—all these phenomena and these ideas—will find sufficient place under the wide wings of anarchism, without there being any need of mutually making a bitter war. It is enough to want [to] and to know [them] to unite and unify them.

In order to attain that goal, the anarchists must begin by raising themselves above the prejudices imported from outside into their milieu and absolutely foreign to the essence of the anarchist conception of the world and life, from the prejudices of human narrowness, from a petty exclusivity and from a repulsive egocentricity; it is indispensable that all put themselves to work,—each in no matter what sphere of ideas and phenomena, in conformity to their situation, their temperament, their preferences, their convictions and their faculties,—closely linked and united, and respecting the liberty and personality of the others; it is necessary to work hand in hand, seeking to mutually lend aid and assistance, demonstrating a friendly tolerance, respecting the equal rights of each of the comrades and admitting their liberty to work in the chosen direction, according to their tastes and their way of seeing—the liberty to fully develop every conviction. This posed, the task will fall to us to decide on forms that this unified collaboration should adopt.

It is only on such a basis that an attempt could be made at true union between the workers of anarchism, at the unification of the anarchist movement. For, it seems to me, it will only by on that basis that our antinomies, our exaggerations pushed to the extreme, our sharpness and our sourness could be mellowed, that our errors and deviations could be rectified, and that, tightening

more and more our ever vaster ranks, crystallizing in living form, burning with an ever more ardent flame, appearing always more clearly and with ever greater grandeur—the Truth.

VOLINE.

## [Second Article]

In the preceding article, we stopped at the question of the method of the search for truth, the general manner of theoretically considering the problem.

We have expressed the opinion that this manner must be synthetic, that instead of persisting in a single recognized part of the complete truth, thus disfiguring it and distancing us from it, we must, on the contrary, seek to know and embrace as many parts of it as possible, bringing ourselves as a result as close to the true truth as possible. In the opposite case, instead of a coordinated and fraternal labor, expanding and productive, we will surely get bogged down in interminable and absolutely senseless disputes and disagreements. We will always fall into those coarsest errors, which inevitably accompany exclusivism, narrowness, intolerance and sterile, doctrinaire dogmatism.

Let us now address, also in broad strokes, another essential question. Who, what forces will bring about the social revolution,—especially these immense creative tasks? And how? What will be the essence, character and forms of this whole magnificent process?

First of all, it is incontestable that the social revolution will be, in the final account, an extremely vast and complicated creative phenomenon, and that only the great popular masses, working freely and independently, organized in one manner or another, could resolve the gigantic problem of social reconstruction happily and fruitfully.

Whatever we mean by the process of social revolution, however we imagine the content, the forms and the immediate results of the great future social transformation,—all of our tendencies must reach agreement on certain essential points: an anarcho-syndicalist, anarchist-communist, an individualist and the representatives of other libertarian currents will inevitably fall into agreement that the process of the social revolution will be an phenomenon [that is] infinitely extensive, many-sided and complex, that it will be a most fundamentally creative social act, and that it cannot be realized without an intense action from the vast, free, independent and organized masses, in whatever form, united in one manner or another, linked among themselves and acting as a whole .

So what will these great masses do in the social revolution? How will they create? How will they resolve the task, so vast and so complex, of the new construction?

Will they concern themselves directly, precisely and uniquely, with building anarchist communes? Certainly not. It would be absurd to suppose that the only path and the only form of social and revolutionary action will be the construction of the communes, that those communes alone will be the foundations and instruments of the new construction, the creative cells of the new society.

In their revolution, will the masses follow exactly and uniquely the “syndicalist” path? Of course not. It would be no less absurd to think that the syndicates, and the workers’ organizations in general, would alone be called to achieve the great social reconstruction, and that precisely and uniquely they will be the levers and cells of the future society.

It would be as absurd to believe that the tasks of the social revolution will be resolved solely by some individual efforts by some isolated, conscious personalities and [by] their associations of ideas, which alone out of such unions, associations or grouping by ideological community will serve as the bases for the coming world.

It would be generally absurd to imagine that this enormous, formidable work of the social revolution—this creative and living act—could be channeled into one uniform path, that this form, that method, or some particular aspect of struggle, organization, movement, or activity would be the only “true” form, the sole method, the unique face of the social revolutionary process.

The fecund social revolution, advancing with a firm step, truly triumphant, will be executed by the oceanic masses driven to its necessity by the force of things, launched in this powerful movement, seeking widely and freely the new forms of social life, devising and creating them fully and independently. Either this will occur, or the creative tasks of the revolution will remain unresolved, and it will be sterile, as were all the previous revolutions. And if this is the case, and we imagine for a moment this whole gigantic process, this enormous creative movement of the vastest masses and its innumerable points of application, it will then appear absolutely clear that that they will move along a broad front, that they will create, that they will act, that they will advance in multiple ways at once—ways that are diverse, bustling, and often unexpected by us. The reconstruction by the great masses of all the social relations—economic, social, cultural, etc., given also the variety of localities, that of the composition of the populations, of the immediate requirements of the character and aims of the economic, industrial and cultural life of the various regions (and perhaps countries),—such a task will certainly demand the creation, application and creative coordination of the most varied forms and methods.

The great revolution will advance by a thousand routes. Its constructive tasks will be accomplished through a thousand forms, methods and means, intertwining and combining. The syndicates, the professional unions, the factory committees, the organizations of productive workers, etc., with their branches and federations in the cities and industrial regions, the cooperatives and all sorts of connecting associations [organes de liaison], perhaps also the soviets and every other potential organization that is living and mobile, the peasant unions in the countryside, their federations with the workers’ organizations, the armed forces for defense, the truly libertarian communes, the individual forces and their ideological unions,—all these forms and methods will be at work; the revolution will act through all these levers; all these streams and torrents will spring up and flow in a natural fashion, forming the vast general movement of the great creative process. It is through all their measures, through all their forces and instruments that the vast working masses engaged in the true revolutionary process will act. We are convinced that even the present reformist and conservative workers’ organizations will inevitably and rapidly “revolutionize” in the course of this process, and, having abandoned their recalcitrant leaders and the political parties acting behind the scenes, will take their place there, will reunite with the other currents of the impetuous, creative revolutionary torrent.

This movement will not be, naturally, a simple pulverization of society; it will not have the character of a rout and a general disorganization. It will aspire, on the contrary, naturally and inevitably, to a harmony, a reciprocal liaison of the parties, to a certain unity of organization to which, as well as to the creation of the forms in themselves, it will be driven urgently by the vital, immediate tasks and needs. This unity will be a living and mobile combination of the varied forms of creation and action. Certain of these forms will be rejected, others will be reborn, but all will find their place, their role, their necessity, their destination, amalgamating gradually

and naturally into a harmonious whole. Provided that the masses remain free in their action; provided that a “form” destroying all creation is not restored: power. On the thousand local (and other) conditions will depend the circumstances and the creative forms that will emerge will be rejected or gain a foothold. In any case, there will not be place for only one single form, much less for an immutable and rigid form, or even for a single process. From different localities, diverse conditions and varied necessities will arise as many varied forms and methods. And as for the general creative torrent of life, de the construction and the new unity of society, it will be a living synthesis of these forms and methods. (It is in this way that we understand, among others, a true federation, living and not formal. We believe that the icons that we quite often make in our federalist milieus, especially among the “anarcho-syndicalists,” of a uniform means, method or economic and social form of organization, absolutely contradict the true notion of a federation as a free union, exuding all the fullness and multiplicity of life, not molded, and, consequently, creative and progressive, natural and mobile, of social cells [that are] naturally varied and mobile.)

The economic essence of this synthesis will certainly be the successive realization, evolution and strengthening of the communist principle. But its constituent elements, its means of construction and its vital functions will be multiples, just as multiple as the cells, organs and functions of the body, that other living synthesis. Just as it would be absurd to affirm that it is precisely the nervous or muscular cells, the digestive or respiratory organs that alone are the creative, active and “true” cells and organs of a living organism, without accounting for the fact that the organism is a living synthesis of cells and organisms of various types and purposes, just so it would be absurd to believe that precisely one or another method and form would be the only “true” method and form of the future social construction, of the new, emerging social ensemble.

The true social life, the social creation and the social revolution are phenomena of plurality in synthesis, that plurality and that synthesis being made up of living, mobile, variable elements. (It is, particularly, the social life [that is] currently musty, stationary and fashioned by force, that inspires in so many among us, thoughtlessly, this erroneous point of view that the revolution must advance along some specific, unique and determined path. It is as if we do not know how to free ourselves from this anemic, miserable and colorless existence. It holds our thoughts, our ideas in a vise that involuntarily mold the future. But once that modeled existence is rejected, and the sources of a vast creative movement open, the true revolution will transform social life precisely in the direction of a spectacular general movement, of the greatest variety and its living synthesis.) We must resolutely account for this circumstance, that is to say, we must no longer trip ourselves up with a single model, but to seek to count on that plurality and begin as much as possible that synthesis (without forgetting the mobility of the elements), if we want our aspirations and our social constructions to match the veritable ways of true emancipation and become a real force, called to aid these means and aspirations to be clarified and realized.

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Thus, also, from the purely practical point of view, we come to note that the plurality and its living synthesis are the true essence of things and the fundamental foundation stone necessary for our reasoning and our constructions.

The answer to the questions posed at the beginning is:

The social revolution will be accomplished by the great masses with the aid of a connection and of a combined action of different forces, levers, methods, means and forms of organization

born from diverse conditions and necessities. In its essence, in its character and its forms, this whole magnificent process will consequently be “plural-synthetic.”

What good then to squabble endlessly and break lances over the question, if it is the workers’ syndicates, the communes or the individual associations, if it is the “class-based organizations” or the “groups of sympathy” and the “revolutionary organizations” that will bring about the social revolution, which will be the “true” forms and instruments of the revolutionary action and creation, the cells of the future society? We see in these disputes absolutely no reason to exist. In the light of what has come before, the object of these quibbles seems completely void of sense. For we are convinced that the syndicates, the workers’ unions, the communes, the individual associations, the class-based organizations, the sympathetic groups, the revolutionary organizations, etc.,—will all take part, each in its own sphere, in proportion to their strength and impact, in the construction of the new society and the new life.

Now, it is enough to note attentively our press, our organizations, to lend an ear to our discussions in order to see that it is for this empty question, rather than for some purely philosophical differences, that a bitter struggle takes place in our ranks, that we deck ourselves out, and that we highlight by dividing in this way our forces still more, with all sorts of labels: “anarcho-syndicalists,” “anarchist-communists,” “anarchist-individualists,” etc., and that our movement is thus crushed and broken in a senseless manner.

We believe that it is high time that the anarchists of different tendencies recognize, in this regard, the absence of any serious foundation for these scissions and divisions. A great step forward toward our rapprochement will have been made when we recognize this fact. There will be one less pretext for dissensions. Each can give preponderance to some particular factor, but admit at the same time the presence and significance of other factors, recognizing, as a consequence, the same right for other anarchists to give the preponderance to other factors. It is in this way that the comrades will take a step towards knowing how to work hand-in-hand in the same organization, in the same organ, in a common movement, by each developing their ideas and activity in the direction that interests them, by struggling ideologically, by confronting their convictions in a common camaraderie and not between hostile camps excommunicating one another. To establish such relations would provide a solid cornerstone to the edifice of the unified anarchist movement.

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Voline  
On Synthesis  
1924

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