

Interpretation of Kant in Eastern European Thought: The Case of Mikhail Bakunin

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Introduction

For many people Mikhail Bakunin is considered to be much more a political activist than a political thinker. And for many of those who regard him as serious political thinker Bakunin's philosophy is approached as another version of socialism mostly influenced by Marx, but more simplified and less scientific. To use the terminology preferred by Engels, Bakunin's thought closely resembles *utopian socialism*. It is a kind of primitive version of historical materialism. It is fairly easy to support this view. In his writings, especially in his later period, Bakunin accepts many of the principles which are linked to hard core materialism. Nonetheless, if we follow his thinking under this perspective we will fail to understand the passion with which the Russian thinker defends liberty. Liberty is almost metaphysical in Bakunin's thought. Anything that stands against liberty has to be terminated. Liberty is good, it is only good and it is the outmost of goods. It is difficult to reach this conclusion starting from a purely materialist basis. Moreover it is impossible to reach this conclusion from an authoritarian marxist basis. This is the reason why the most popular approaches of Bakunin fail to understand the depth of his thought. In contrary, if the scholar is willing to follow Bakunin's early tracks, to focus in his first philosophical readings that helped the formation of his thought, a different portrait will come to life. Bakunin's thought has been inspired by the readings on the field of German Idealism. Kant, Fichte and Hegel played a significant part in forming the core of Bakunin's thought. There is no doubt that Proudhon, Marx and others influenced him later on in his life. But the idea of liberty, the keystone of Bakunin's philosophy can not be fully understood independently of his early Kantian studies.

It is well known that Hegel's philosophy led other thinkers to the political Right and others to the Political Left. Hajo Holborn supported that World War II was nothing more than the conflict between the two opposing interpretations of Hegel¹. In a similar way Kant's philosophy is considered by many to be a kind of a conservative approach whereas for others Kantian maxims lead to revolutionary conclusions. The latter is precisely the perspective of Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin, even before he started studying philosophy, had a romantic approach to the idea of freedom. Being a revolutionary by nature, he perceived freedom as the absolute goal of human life. Naturally, when he started studying the works of Immanuel Kant, the young Russian discovered a rigid basis for his growing romantic idealism and his unlimited love for freedom.

I. In 1835, Mikhail Bakunin and his sisters Lyubov and Tatyana became friends with Nikolai Stankevich. Stankevich was the first important Russian romantic. He was the first to bring the ideas of German metaphysics in Russia. In the middle of October 1835 Stankevich visited Bakunin's house. He actually spent ten days in the Premukhino estate, two hundred and forty kilometers north-west of Moscow, that was the property of Bakunin family. During this visit Stankevich introduced Mikhail to the world of German Idealism.

As soon as Stankevich returned to Moscow he sent to his friend a copy of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. From then on the two friends were involved in "an almost daily correspondence" regarding the reading of Kant. Stankevich, a graduate of Moscow University, was afraid that his friend who was less familiar with the terminology of the German metaphysics would get disappointed by the complexities of the book. Therefore "he begged his pupil not to spend more than three hours a day on Kant, multiplied his explanations of difficult points and ransacked Moscow for German and French commentaries". But Mikhail assured his friend that he "could not rest until he had penetrated the spirit of Kant"².

At the time, Bakunin had started a military career. But suddenly he realized that "it was unthinkable that he should immerse himself in a bureaucrat's office and substitute administrative dossiers for the obscure but intoxicating pages of Kant"³. He decided to leave for Moscow in order to study philosophy. In Moscow a new school of Russian thought in the

¹ Hajo Holborn, *The Science of History*, in Joseph R. Strayer (ed.), *The Interpretation of History*, Princeton, 1943, 62.

² Edmund H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, London, 1975 (1937), 26-27.

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

fields of philosophy, literature, politics was being developed. Apart from Stankevich, Alexander Herzen, Nikolai Ogarev, Vissarion Belinsky, Ivan Turguenev were among the more prominent young intellectuals.

The cornering stone of moral philosophy is that all men are responsible for their actions. From this assumption follows that men are free. They actually have the power to choose how they shall act. Every man who possesses reason has a moral obligation to take responsibility for his actions. Kant holds that human beings, in order to act morally, have to be left free to choose their actions, to behave according to the moral law. For Kant, any individual who possesses Reason is able to understand the meaning of moral law⁴. If an individual is an end in itself, he has to be the author of the laws, which will determine his life, he is the legislator of the moral rules, which the individual is bound to obey.

In order to be able to act morally he has to be free to manifest himself. Thus, in order for an individual to be free, he has to be self-legislating, self-judging and self-governing. To use Thucydide's words, from his classic *Funeral Speech*, the person has to be "*autonomos, autodikos, autoteles*".

The conservative approach on Kant emphasizes on the necessity of *law and order*. On the other hand Bakunin's position was that order can not be maintained by "purpose-made" institutions of order. These institutions are acting *a priori* against human freedom. They do not respect autonomy, because in order to be free, one must be able to act morally. Any institution, which tries to legislate, to judge and to govern on behalf of the individual, sets a new unacceptable barrier to his freedom. State is an institution which is built upon the right to rule. The right to form norms and laws that people will have to obey. On the other hand every man that wants to remain autonomous has to refuse to be governed and ruled. This crucial dichotomy divides between the major schools of political thinking. Bakunin chose the side of autonomy. And it was Kant that paved his way.

Bakunin can not accept artificial institutions such as State, Church etc. He does not accept them because in these he identifies violations of personal freedom. His proposal is Anarchy, in other words the elimination of every institution and organization that act in such a way.

Many people tend to misunderstand the meaning of the word Anarchy. Anarchy is a Greek word that, contrary to common belief, does not mean "*chaos*" or "without order," it means "without authority," "without government." Surprisingly, to those who link anarchism to violent acts,

⁴ H.J. Paton, (ed.), Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, London 1993 (1948), 32-34.

the reason that makes anarchists act against authority and government, is precisely their belief that these factors disorder society. This point is not an antinomy, as someone who did not know the exact meaning of the word anarchy could think. This point is in total accordance with Bakunin's line of thought. Institutions actually disorder society because by imposing regulations on how people must behave, they do not allow the natural human order to manifest itself. This is the argument behind Anarchy is Order the celebrated dictum, which is falsely attributed to Pierre Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon argued that "absolute liberty... is synonymous with order"⁵. Actually, *Anarchy is Order* was coined by Anselme Bellagarique, an obscure figure of the 1848 Parisian revolt. The full expression of the phrase was "Anarchy is Order: government is civil war". In 1850 Bellagarique published a journal under the title *Anarchie Journal de l' Ordre*⁶.

A few years after his Kantian studies, Bakunin saw religion and organized society as the epitome of these institutions of order. Thus, he condemned *God and the State* as the major enemies, the main barricades against people's freedom. The work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte followed Kant, and made a strong impression on Bakunin. *The Way to a Blessed Life* became his everyday companion. Fichte took Kant's idealism into extreme subjectivism. The fundamental ideas of the Fichtean system, as they were perceived by Bakunin, are that "Life is Love...What you Love is your Life"⁷, "Humanity has remained a victim of the instinctive laws of unconscious existence... Absolute freedom and absolute love, that is our aim; the freeing of humanity and the whole world - that is our purpose"⁸.

In Fichte's work, Bakunin saw Religion as the means to obtain freedom. "God will free humanity"; "...reality is the will of God"⁹. One can wonder how reality can be the will of God and at the same time comprises a nightmare, a poor, miserable life for thousands of people. In his Fichtean days, Bakunin would argue that external reality is unimportant. Only the inner self is significant since "the soul must be its own object"¹⁰. The internal self is important, and one should be preoccupied with material issues. For Fichte, material reality can only exist as a product of inner self's creative force.

This position, which in a way reflects Stoic philosophy, characterized Bakunin's philosophical thinking and remained intact during his entire life.

⁵ Stewart Edwards, (ed.), *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, London, 1969, 95.

⁶ See Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, London, 1993, 434.

⁷ Edmund H. Carr, op. cit., 37.

⁸ Robert Cutler, (ed., trns.), *The Basic Bakunin, Writings 1869-1871*, New York 1992, 16.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edmund H. Carr, op. cit., 37.

Even when he declared that he was an atheist and a materialist, he saw material reality and needs as important, only when they were necessary conditions for the manifestation and realization of freedom.

After Kant and Fichte, Bakunin's next step into German Idealism was Hegelian philosophy. In 1837-38 Bakunin spent most of his time studying Hegel.

Bakunin was fascinated by Hegel, so he left Russia and travelled to Berlin in order to study philosophy. His transition from rural Russia into the hard core of Continental thinking signified his turn from theoretical idealism into action. In other words, it signified his stride from Right Wing Hegelianism into Left Wing Hegelianism.

At the time, Right Hegelians were the old expression of Hegelian political theory. The schism in Hegel's School after Hegel's death in 1831, has its roots in the different interpretation of Hegel's dictum "That which is rational is real, and that which is real is rational," from the *Philosophy of Right*¹¹. For conservatives this was a philosophical justification of the establishment, namely the Prussian State. For revolutionaries it was precisely the opposite. The formula goes as follows: if that which is real is rational, and given that the State is real because it exists, then the State has to be rational. If the State is rational we have got no reason to change it. That is why in the 1830's Hegelianism was a synonym to reaction.

Left Hegelianism was expressed by the Young Hegelians. Ludwig Feuerbach was one of their leading figures. His radical book *The Essence of Christianity*, was an attempt for a materialist basis of philosophy and religion. Feuerbach's intention was to uncover material humans from their ideal covers and to transform the philosophy of spirit into a philosophy of human¹². Feuerbach was Hegel's student and depicted himself as the one who would make the teaching of Hegel available to humanity. His work would be the "founding... of the Kingdom of the Idea" on earth rather than the "heaven" of Hegelian abstract philosophy¹³. Feuerbach's approach to Hegelian philosophy provided a new interpretation of Hegel. The impact that Feuerbach's work had in the German intellectual circles is clear in the writings of Friedrich Engels. As he puts it "then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*... we all become at once Feuerbachians"¹⁴.

One of the key issues of the philosophical problems of knowledge lies

¹¹ Karl Löwith analysis on the matter is invaluable for its clarity. See Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, N.Y. 1964, (1941), trnsf, *Apo ton Hegel sto Nietzsche*, Athens, 1987, 114-123.

¹² Karl Löwith, *ibid*, 128

¹³ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Cambridge, 1999, (1993), 323.

¹⁴ Quoted in Peter Singer, *Marx*, Oxford, 2000 (1980), 23.

in the fact that we do not understand that things change in time. That is because the moment of the change itself can not be identified. On the other hand, we are aware of the change, despite that we can not determine the precise moment of the change. In a famous passage Hegel argues, that philosophy always arrives late. We can obtain knowledge about the change, only after the change has happened¹⁵. Acceptance of the fact that change is continuously linked with human history was crucial in the development of Bakunin's thought. Hegel's approach of Reason as a Spirit is often connected to Parmenides and it is well known that the idea of permanent movement has its archetypal expression in the Classical Greek philosophy of Heraclitus, "*ta panta rei*", everything is in flux. If everything is in flux, then reality changes too. According to Hegel, a philosopher has to think in the same way as the object changes. If reality changes, then everything that is real is in flux. Therefore, inertia and stagnation can never be rationally justified. To remain still is to act irrationally. Reason forces you to change what you accept as reality. And if the Prussian State is real, then Reason forces you to revolt against it. After Feuerbach, in the 1840's, being a Hegelian meant to be a political revolutionary.

II. Bakunin admired Feuerbach's approach and in the winter of 1841-42 he started reading the illegal revolutionary pamphlets that the Young Hegelians were circulating in Berlin. As mentioned earlier, the main organ of the Hegelian Left was *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, a journal of philosophy and politics, established and directed by Arnold Ruge. Bakunin placed himself among the left wing of the newly formed *Hegelian Army*. In October *Deutsche Jahrbücher* published his *Reaction in Germany: from the Note-books of a Frenchman*, under the pseudonym Jules Elysard. Fichte supported that history of mankind is the battlefield for the fight between instincts and reason. The State exists in order to help people beat their instincts and fulfil their ideal aims. If in the future people become morally perfect the State would have no reason to exist. Hegel saw history as the actualization of the principle of personal freedom in permanently higher levels. In *The Reaction in Germany* Bakunin names the actualization of freedom, as the "Supreme End of History." The quest for freedom is the meaning of history. For him the State does not serve the cause of this quest. He wants to overthrow the State and let society pass to the next historical phase (the fourth and fifth season of human history as Fichte used to put it or Hegel's final phase). He identifies the people, the

¹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, Berlin, 1840, 20.

poor class, and the masses as the social group with the best reasons to revolt against the State, because the poor class is the one that is mostly deprived of freedom. Bakunin employs Hegelian arguments in order to justify a concept of perpetual socio-political revolution. For Bakunin, the aim of political philosophy is not just to change the current regime and replace it with a new establishment, which would immediately become the new *status quo*. The aim of political philosophy is to fight, to attack any given *status quo*, because the idea of the static model, which the preservation of the establishment enforces, is bad by nature. *Status quo* is an enemy by definition.

Bakunin has been criticized that, in *The Reaction in Germany*, he does not provide a socio-economic basis to support his arguments. For that he was blamed of being too abstract. Critics have to consider that this text was just an essay of limited length. It would be impossible to provide all the answers. The most important lesson of the pamphlet is a clear indication that the system which Bakunin formed later in his life, has its foundations in the world of Ideals. As it was discussed earlier, in German Metaphysics Bakunin discovered a sound basis for his romantic idealism. New Hegelianism provided Bakunin with a political field open to his philosophy. Later on, after studying theories of economic socialism he found an explanation; not the cause, but a good explanation, an explanation based on reason, a material reason, which could be the new basis for his romantic idealism.

Bakunin had a wealthy noble background, and when he was living in Russia socio-economic problems were distant. Therefore, whenever he mentioned freedom in his early years, he did not have in mind the “emancipation of the labour from capital,” but freedom as a Supreme End. To use his favourite Fichtean language, in the days of *The Reaction in Germany* he was still looking for “internal” freedom. I will subsequently argue that, this was the kind of freedom he was pursuing, even in his later days.

On the contrary, other political philosophers, which were born and raised in poverty, and came face to face with social inequalities, based their thinking on materialism. They perceived social inequality as the major problem, and they started to form theories to terminate it. The fact that along with the extinction of inequality, other benefits would appear on scene was welcomed; however it was not their motive. In other words, the ideology of Marxism has its roots in materialism, when Bakunin’s materialism has its roots in idealism. Later on in his life, Bakunin declared

himself to be a materialist. His use of the word confuses, because it is different to the meaning we give it today. In the essay *The Hypnotizers*, Bakunin demonstrates that he identifies idealism with theology and “traditional sciences”, while; on the other hand, he calls natural sciences “expressions of materialism”¹⁶. Knowing that most of his writings were propagandistic one can understand why he insisted using such simple, general terms, to describe more complex issues. The fact that the cornerstone of Bakunin’s theory can be found in the purely metaphysical conception of freedom is irresistible.

Up to this point, we have seen how Bakunin, with some assistance from Feuerbach, interpreted Hegel’s dictum. Bakunin supported his *thesis* with another argument, which, again, arises from his studies on Hegel. Bakunin’s conception of the dialectic is clearly expressed in *The Reaction in Germany*, and it characterized his philosophy for the whole of his life. Neither his anarchism and his anti-State attitude nor his idea of permanent revolution and *pandestruction*, can be understood without reading this pamphlet, and connecting it to its roots, the great tree of German Idealism.

III. Bakunin argues that the motive force of history is the Negative, and not the Positive¹⁷. For Bakunin, the struggle between Negative and Positive is “not an equilibrium, but a preponderance of the Negative, which is its encroaching dialectical phase. The Negative... includes within itself the totality of the contradiction, and so alone has absolute justification”¹⁸. The Positive can only exist in denying the existence of Negative. It has to resist the Negative and exclude it from itself, in order for the Positive to remain Positive and to preserve its positive nature.

In other words, if we want to show what “A” consists in we firstly have to show what “A” is not. Positive has to retain its purely Positive character, because otherwise it would be impossible to distinguish itself from the Negative. The problem of the Positive is that while in its static nature it does not contain anything Negative, and one could say that by remaining still, the Positive would be safe, the Negative changes. Therefore, the Positive has to move, in order to distinguish itself from the “new” Negative. But, from the moment in which the Positive becomes mobile,

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism and Anti-theologianism”, in K. J. Kenafick, ed., trnsl., *Marxism Freedom and the State*, New York, 1990, 74.

¹⁷ This analysis owes much to the work of Robert M. Cutler, in Robert Cutler, (ed., trnsl.), *The Basic Bakunin, 1869-1871*, New York, 1992, “Introduction”, 17-18.

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, “Reaction in Germany”, in, Sam Dolgoff, ed., trnsl., *Bakunin on Anarchy*, New York, 1973, 48.

it loses its pure, static character, it accepts the existence of Negative, and starts to contain parts, which were, or still are parts of the Negative. Therefore if the Positive continues to resist and deny the Negative, in the end it has to deny itself.

For Bakunin, the dialectical struggle ends with neither the thesis nor the antithesis on the scene. The appearance and the inevitable victory of the Negative destroy both Positive and Negative and something new is being created.

For Hegel and Marx, there are elements of the Positive and the Negative, which survive the struggle and both appear in the final level, with the Positive having the upper hand. In Marx's model the State is the surviving factor. It existed in Capitalist society, it was destroyed by the revolution and it reappears again as the socialist State.

Bakunin's vision is totally different. In Bakunin's dialectic, synthesis is the immense result of the appearance of the Negative. There is no affirmation of the Positive through the Negation of the Negative. Negative and Positive destroy each other, and the Revolution terminates all the elements of the Positive, all the institutions of the pre-revolutionary social order. The State has no place after the Revolution.

Bakunin's model can be schematically represented as follows:

- a. Positive – Thesis - The State
- b. Negative – Antithesis (which acts synthetically) – Revolution against the State.

The result is a new society without the State. This concept of the dialectic explains the foundations of Bakunin's philosophy

Once again we can see why, for Bakunin, Anarchy is the only system where Order, that is natural order, can exist. This concept of the dialectic also explains the dichotomy between Bakunin and Marx, a dichotomy that was going to dominate the scene of the socialist movement in the days of the First International. Nothing different could have happened because, despite the positions that Marx and Bakunin shared; there was a chasm between them regarding their approach to issues such as State and Revolution. Marx and the Communists wanted to capture the State and then somehow present it to the people, while Bakunin and the Anarchists wanted the people to abolish the State. This line clearly separates the two major phalanxes of the Left. Bakunin is keen to emphasize that point of departure: "The Communists believe they must organize the workers' forces to take possession of the political power of the State. The Revolutionary Socialists [anarchists] organize with a view... to the

liquidation of the State”¹⁹.

Marx’s self described “scientific socialism” held a strong belief in the historical role of the workers, as being the revolutionary force in the history of humanity. He also regarded all the other classes as reactionary. On the other hand, Bakunin was not interested in one particular class, although in *The Reaction in Germany* he declared the working class as the force that is going to move history forward and despite the fact that in his later days he praised the revolutionary nature of the peasants. Bakunin was interested in the working class, only because its members were the most dissatisfied with the existing order, hence they would have more reasons to demand change. It would not be rational to ask the members of the upper class to revolt against the existing order, because the existing order was in favour of their interests. It would not be rational to ask the petit bourgeois to revolt, because they would prefer to work their way to the upper class, than to risk their lives in a fight. Especially if this revolutionary fight did not have a clarified end, and the control of the post revolutionary society was not to be appointed to them. The Jacobin paradigm, was there to scare the middle class forever.

Therefore, Bakunin, in wanting to change society, would have to call the working class to arms. But his motive was not the overthrowment of the existing State, in order to create a new State, which the workers, the previous social order’s victims, would now control. His motive was to destroy all the mechanisms of the State, and burn down every organization of the establishment. He was positive that from its ashes, spontaneous, natural order would be generated. For Bakunin, revolution against the State has to be permanent. In the final lines of *The Reaction in Germany* he calls us to “trust the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is unfathomable and eternal source of all life.” And the conclusion, leads to the phrase: “The passion for destruction is a creative passion”²⁰. This phrase is possibly the most characteristic of Bakunin. In a way it is the equivalent of Marx’s *eleven thesis* on Feuerbach.

The popular accusation that Bakunin’s political theory is no more than a nihilist anti-human cry was triggered by this particular phrase and by the notorious *Nechayev case*, later in his life.

The urge for destruction appears to be nihilistic and it most certainly would be nihilistic if Thomas Hobbes’ political theory is accepted. If we

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism and Anti-theologianism”, op. cit., 18.

²⁰ Mikhail Bakunin, “Reaction in Germany”, in Sam Dolgoff, ed., trnsl., *Bakunin on Anarchy*, New York, 1973, 68.

agree that *homo hominis lupus* and that human beings are unable to live in harmony without the existence of a powerful *Leviathan*, then by destroying everything, we bring down the walls that society raised against the fear of eternal *war of all against all*. For classic Hobbesian liberalism, Bakunin would be the outmost preacher of nihilism. But, before surrendering to this notion, we have to remember that the point of departure between authoritarian and libertarian political thinking is the approach on the issue of human nature.

For Hobbes, human nature is imperfect and incomplete. Humans are bad by nature and if they are left free to survive in the State of Nature, they will start to kill each other. Humans build societies and then powerful states in order to protect themselves from their killing instincts. John Locke's State of Nature was far removed from Hobbes's hell. For Locke, people lived harmonically until the appearance of private property and money. It was protection of accumulated private property that forced them to establish states²¹.

The same point is regarded by Rousseau as the moment of birth for the institution of State. For him, those with accumulated property established laws to protect it from those who did not have any, thus perpetuating inequality in the human race. The difference between Locke and Rousseau is that the former is positive about the appearance of property and accepts it as natural, whereas the later is negative because he does not accept it as natural. For Rousseau the transition from the pre-property to the era of property is analogous to the decline from the Garden of Eden.

Marx also connects property to the formation of primitive states. He links the development of private property to the union of several tribes into a city. But, he sees private property as an abnormal form of property subordinate to communal ownership²².

Marx and the anarchist thinkers followed Rousseau in his argument that a self-interested minority which possessed property deceived the propertyless minority into thinking that formation of a state contributed general good. This notion was technically cultivated and later penetrated deep into human consciousness; even the enemies of the State, came to see it as a necessary evil²³.

Anarchists share a very different view on the crucial issue of human

²¹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, XI, 134, in Peter Laslett, ed. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Cambridge, 1960.

²² Karl Marx, "The German Ideology", in Christopher Pierson, ed., *The Marx Reader*, London, 1997, 96.

²³ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, Fontana Press, London, 1993, 246.

nature. They believe that humans are good by nature, and much more capable than Hobbes was willing to accept. They argue that, people lived harmonically in the State of Nature, until the crucial moment that protection of property led to the formation of states. Those who accept this transition as explained by classic liberalism believe that the State is a factor of security. From that point of view, abolition of the State will bring disorder. But, those who see the negative side of this transition, anarchists among others, share a completely different approach.

This line of thought has many branches. Rousseau and Marx cultivated two of them. Nonetheless, it leads us to the anarchist theory of spontaneous order. This theory argues that, given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation. Peter Kropotkin reached the conclusion that this order would be more durable and more closely related to their needs, than any kind of order which could be provided by externally imposed authority²⁴.

An objection to this argument can be supported by Darwin's evolutionary theory. For Darwin, the meaning of natural history is the survival of the fittest. According to that, in human society the absence of any institution, which provides safety to the people, would lead to the survival of the fittest; hence the weaker would be defenceless. Bakunin's answer is that, in State dominated societies; all State institutions defend the interests of the State and the bourgeoisie, leaving the poor utterly defenceless. Kropotkin's interpretation of the evolutionary theory was more scientific: for him, the meaning of the evolution is that it is not the fittest, but the most co-operative who survives. Given that humans are co-operative by nature; their co-operation in post-revolutionary world will spontaneously lead to order. "Sociability is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life... those animals which know best how to combine have the greatest chances of survival and of further evolution"²⁵.

For anarchists, State is the major factor that destabilizes and disorders society by preventing the true human capabilities to develop. The next rational step, if this basis is accepted, is that the abolition of State is a necessary condition that will liberate people, thus leading to true order. This is the argument behind *Anarchy is Order*.

If we accept the anarchist arguments regarding the socio-political origin and role of the State institution, then we can fully understand

²⁴ Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, in Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, New York, 1996, 31.

²⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, Pelican, 1939, 60-61.

Bakunin's uncompromised anti-State attitude. To these arguments the Russian thinker added his own.

Contrary to the common belief that derived by his passion for destruction, Bakunin never argued that human freedom demands the destruction of every norm and every law. He was not against the natural, economic and social laws, which for him were inherent in things, in relations, in situations. In contrast, he wanted to eliminate all the authoritative laws imposed by the right of force, in order to let the natural laws govern human lives. Bakunin was not an enemy of society; he just wanted to protect it from the State. Because, for Bakunin, the State is not a natural form of human society, it is no more than an abstraction, the result of violence, war and conquest, which is destructive to a living society²⁶.

From Kant, Bakunin learned that one can be held responsible for his morality only if he is free to manifest individual free will. We can not accept responsibility when the cause behind an action is obedience to an imposed law.

The struggle between individual morality and State imposed morality, as expressed by the State institutions, is not new in political philosophy and Bakunin was not the first to condemn it. Greek tragedies are full of expressions of this struggle, the most famous being Sophocles's Antigone. Heroic Antigone wants to bury her dead brother, acting in accordance with the moral law that she respects. On the other hand, Creon, the governor who symbolizes the State, declares that the laws and rules of the State forbid this burial, because her brother is found unworthy. Creon's behaviour is not solely the outcome of his character. He acts in such a way because he expresses the State. For Bakunin, State is arrogant, bureaucratic and authoritarian by nature. This is the reason why he is not interested whether the State is republican, dictatorial, or monarchical. It does not make any difference for him. State is evil because it is State, in the way that, for Proudhon, constitutions are wrong because they are constitutions. This belief forced Proudhon to declare, "I vote against the constitution because it is a constitution"²⁷. State demands obedience. Obedience is not a matter of doing what someone tells you to do. It is a matter of doing it because someone tells you so. This externally imposed authority is not a legitimate or a *de jure* authority. According to the Kantian inspired anarchist line of thought, the individual does not

²⁶ G.P. Maximoff, (ed.), *The Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*. Glencoe, London, 1953, 206-208.

²⁷ Edmund H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, London, 1975 (1937), 30.

have to obey.

Defenders of the modern liberal democratic State, such as John Rawls, could argue that State represents the common interest, which curtails a part of individual liberty, in order to ensure society's liberty. Yet, for Bakunin, this is security, not liberty. Under the light of the approach he developed based on Hegelian philosophy, liberty is indivisible; a part of it can not be curtailed, without destroying it as a whole. This conception of liberty was common during the days of French Revolution and it can be clearly seen in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which proclaims that the slavery of one man is the slavery of all. In a similar way Bakunin declared that he was "a fanatical lover of Liberty". "The liberty, which far from halting as at a boundary before the liberty of others, finds there its confirmation and its extension to infinity; the illimitable liberty of each through the liberty of all"²⁸.

IV. For classic 19th century anarchism, elections and universal suffrage were useless because, once again, they would inevitably lead to a State. This State might be a "revised" one, but would still remain a State. Bakunin's opponents during the second part of the 19th century were divided into two major groups. There was State capitalism, the system proposed by bourgeois democrats and State socialism, the system developed by Karl Marx.

Bakunin did not identify significant differences between bourgeois democrats and Marxists. They both believed that universal suffrage under a republican regime would finally bring the power of the State in the hands of the masses. Bourgeois democrats hoped for democracy, and Marxists hoped that, after the elections, the proletariat would be in control of the State, which would work beneficially to the working class, thus leading to the new socialist State. This notion signifies the crucial point of partition between Bakunin and Marx. Bakunin wanted to abolish the State and State apparatus. On the other hand, Marx just wanted to capture it and present it to the workers.

Bakunin's objection to Marx can be distinguished into two levels. The first one is linked to his idealism. He did not find it natural to transfer individual rights to representatives. Classical political philosophy, the kind that flourished in ancient Greece, only recognizes direct democracy as such. The concept of representation is unknown. Representation is a

²⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, op. cit., 17.

barrier against individual autonomy.

The second level employs the element of materialism. Universal suffrage is an illusion when rough economic equality is absent. Proudhon argued that “universal suffrage is counter revolutionary” and Bakunin knew that in 1848 French elections paved the way to reaction and also that in 1851, it was elections and not *a coup*, which gave the Emperor the right to rule. Bakunin prophetically declares that universal suffrage is a fraud, because “it does not prevent the formation of a body of politicians, who devote themselves to the administration of the nation’s public affairs, and form a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy”²⁹.

Anarchist disapproval of universal suffrage is enforced by the fact that those who possess socio-political and economic power can and will control the elections. The establishment has the means to control education, culture and mass media. It can and will use them in order to mislead people and make them believe that those in power act for their benefit. Those in power not only pretend that they act for the benefit of the people, but they also convince them that only they, the socio-political elite, can defend society’s interests. They try to convince them that the fate of society and humanity can be secure only when authority and power are in the hands of the experts, the hands of the political oligarchy.

Bakunin’s political philosophy identifies only one real difference between State capitalism, the system proposed by bourgeois democrats and State socialism, proposed by Marx. It is the class origin of each system’s dominant political oligarchy.

The success of oligarchy’s attempts to transform reality is more than obvious in modern democracies. If what is real is rational and that which is rational is real, then the only thing that hegemony has to do is to mislead society by offering a false perspective of reality. Adorno and Horkheimer have brilliantly analyzed how hegemony uses the culture industry for this purpose³⁰.

It is often argued that despite all its disadvantages, the State is necessary because it is the stabilizing factor of society and guarantees security. At this point, we have to ask ourselves if security is more important than autonomy, and more important than order. The question of course is valid only, if we do not accept Bakunin’s fundamental position,

²⁹ G.P. Maximoff, ed., 1953. *The Political Philosophy of Michael Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*. Glencoe, 240.

³⁰ Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York, 1944, 120-167.

that State disorders society. In any case, as Castoriadis suggests, “Nobody can protect humanity from suicide”³¹.

It is often argued that modern democracies are based on the model of Ancient Greek democracy. More specifically, that the current, State regimes, are the modern expression of the Greek *Polis*. Those who support this argument tend to forget that contemporary democracies are dominated by the belief that there are experts in politics and their expertise justifies their power. These so called experts are the politicians. The inexpert populace is then called to pass judgments on the politicians.

In reality, the Greek *Polis* is much closer to the anti-State anarchist approach. Naturally, *Polis* is far from being an example of anarchism put into practice. Nonetheless, it forms an example of one perfectly ordered community, which does not need a watchman State to keep it organized. The concept of the State as an institution distinct from the citizens was totally unknown in the Greek *Polis*. Greeks developed an (anonymous) administrative mechanism, which did not have any political function. Permanent bureaucracy was left to the slaves. However, today the idea of slavery is totally unacceptable, yet we can use technology and the products of science, such as engines and computers, for those purposes. The most clear difference between anarchism and *Polis* is that the latter accepted the majoritarian principle. Bakunin was not in favour of majoritarian principle, because in a majoritarian environment, minority has to obey rules, which are not in accordance with its morality. Consent is the anarchist proposal.

As already discussed, *Polis* had its technical-administrative mechanism. Today we call this mechanism “State”, but this kind of “State” does not have any political function or other similarities with the current meaning that political sciences attribute to the term. This is precisely the core of Bakunin’s anarchism. He does not aim to the formation of a society without order. Not even animals can live without a basic level of order. Humans are created to live in communities, in accordance to natural laws, or laws, which they actively decide that they are beneficial. Anarchists did not argue that society can operate without any kind of administration. They declare that this administrative system does not have to be part of an institution with the size, character and nature of the modern State.

Legitimacy in politics presupposes the agreement of the governed³².

³¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, Oxford, 1991, 115.

³² See Jean-Marc Coicaud, *Legitimacy in Politics*, trnsl. D.A. Curtis, Cambridge, 2002, 54-55.

If the people do not participate directly in the formation of the law, if they have not been asked whether the law is compatible with their personal morality or their material interests, it is immoral and irrational to be called to obey it. Under these conditions, representative democracy is considered as a factor of heteronomy; hence it can not form an expression of freedom. This approach is clearly linked to Bakunin's interpretation of Kant. It is also evident as a more general expression of German idealism. Wilhelm von Humboldt argued that actions, which do not derive from the individual's free will, are alien to human nature³³. American libertarian thinkers such as Emerson and the New England's Transcendentalists, and civil rights pioneer Henry David Thoreau³⁴ share the same position.

Through the light of both anarchist and libertatirian critiques, modern democratic regimes are much more sensitive to public opinion; an elected government imposes its will harder than an authoritative one does. Democratic regimes need the covering veil of agreement and participation, which democracy secures. However, since real democracy is improbable and thus dangerous, those who control it prefer to transform it into a simple typical procedure. Democracy is being used as a shiny cover, which sanctifies unsacred actions and creates an easy alibi of the necessity to obey. As long as States and majoritarian representative democracies exist, the one and only authentic freedom left to the citizens is limited to the freedom of choosing their master. In order to make the people act in accordance to the State laws, the State organizes the system of justice, which forces people to obey because of the fear of punishment. The system of punishment, along with social inequalities, operate as a barrier against the people's natural call for autonomy. This argument explains the State's mechanism, which strangles individual autonomy. Nonetheless, it should not be regarded as a justification of the people's silence, stillness and final acceptance of such an immoral situation. Remember that in Bakunin's dialectic, stagnation is reactionary, because it perpetuates the Positive, the thesis. The Negative, the antithesis, needs people's participation; it needs the active membership of people in an attempt to overthrow the existing social order. As Kant pointed out every human who possesses reason has a moral obligation for his actions. If an individual uncritically accepts the commands of others, he ceases to be autonomous. In continuing to behave like this, letting others decide for

³³ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, (1792) Cambridge, 1969, 28.

³⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, (1866), London, 1986, 385-386, and *Walden; or Life in the Woods*, New York 1960 (1854), 74, 78.

him, the individual disobeys the moral law. He departs from reason.

It comes as no surprise, that in a 1863 letter to Bakunin Alexander Herzen describes his good friend as: "Cut off from life, thrown from early youth into German Idealism... you have lived to the age of fifty in a world of illusions, of student expansiveness, of great aspirations and petty failings... with a streak of discreet but stubborn epicureanism and with an itch for revolutionary activity that lacks revolution"³⁵.

Conclusion

The analysis of these arguments exposes that Bakunin's philosophy, although it seems to be built entirely on materialism, is nonetheless strongly influenced by Kantian ethics. Bakunin wanted to destroy the existing social political and economic order, so that the people would be free to express and manifest their autonomy. Even if he had to use material means, as a necessary condition, these were just a step, a stage that would lead to the fulfilment of freedom as an idealist concept.

Both Bakunin's conception of Kantian inspired autonomy and his interpretation of Hegelian dialectic lead to the idea of perpetual revolution and form the basis of the Russian thinker's uncompromised anti-State approach. Under this perspective, Bakunin's call for destruction acquires a different, deeper and more substantial meaning. For him, destruction is anything but the outcome of nihilism. Destruction is a creative force. Bakunin calls for demolition not because he wants to exterminate what already exists, but because he does not want to hinder that, which tries to be born.

³⁵ Herzen's letter to Bakunin, 20 August, 1863, see Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, London, 1993, 275.