The Smith of the Gods

7 - «When the paradigm of the inside and the outside feels shaken, the principle of individual and collective autonomy finds itself strengthened.»

70- Complex thought contains the principles which lead together to individual and collective autonomy. And it is to this project of individual and collective autonomy, in the extension of Charles Fourier's ideas, that Gabriel Tarde set about elaborating the project. In his eyes, it is the only way towards social progress. It is in the surpassing of imitation that the ferment of creation and of innovation feeds the economy of culture, the corollary of an agrarian and domestic autonomy. For one innovation, a speculative capital, or “Cotyledon” (a Tardian term meaning nourishing), takes eighty per cent of the value in replications, until the exhaustion of the resources. A creation on its own is worth as much as all the exploitation made of it downstream. In fact, the creative capacity of a population multiplies economic movements exponentially. By minutely exploring Gabriel Tarde's works in economics, we can perceive, as a weft, the definition of what could be the principles of an informal economy issuing from this creativity, the ferment of the classical economy.

71- And his motto, recommended for every awakened man, connected to his intuition and mindful of his fellow citizens, would be, in this case, as Charles Fourier declared: “My reservoir of ideas is comparable to the source of the Nile: it is not known, but it provides in abundance.” Such are the universal laws drawn from nature, like a law of fertility. Gabriel Tarde's thought straddles the dialogue between Darwin and Marx on the laws of biological and social evolution. For Gabriel Tarde, evolution has more of the character of an indescribable and teeming cultural biodiversity than of a mechanism of elevation of the conceptions of a logic shared in a unilateral manner. At the time of Gabriel Tarde, the entry of the doctrine of monism into the philosophy of science in the debates tends to pulverise the social universe and to multiply beings indefinitely. But it tends no less clearly to unify the Cartesian duality of matter and of spirit. According to him, “by this one runs, not towards an anthropomorphism, but towards a psychomorphism”, a pan-semiotics of form which would, in this case, carry the soul of the world in a flagrant way.

72- Quoted in his book “Monadology and Sociology”, he tells us that one can effectively conceive of monism in only three possible ways:

– Either by looking at the movement of cerebral matter and of consciousness, “the vibration of a cerebral cell, for example”, and the corresponding state of mind, as two faces of one and the same fact, and one risks deluding oneself through the reminiscence of the ancient Janus.

– Or by making matter and spirit, whose heterogeneous nature one does not deny, derive from a common source, from a hidden and unknowable pseudo-spirit, and one gains by this a primitive phenomenal trinity in place of a psychic duality.

– Or finally by resolutely positing that matter is spirit, nothing more.

But there are two ways of understanding it. With the idealists, one can say that the material universe, including the other egos, is mine, exclusively mine, that it is composed of my states of mind or of their possibility insofar as it is affirmed by me, and one risks the “solipsist” pitfall. All that remains for us is to admit, with the monadologists, that the whole external universe is composed of souls other than mine, but at bottom similar to mine (Buddhist vision). It may be that these three states of fact are not only possible but complementary and simultaneous. Thus, as he thinks, we carry the Universe within us.

73- In his time, there were physicists like Tyndall, naturalists like Haeckel, philosopher-historians like Taine, theorists of every school, who suspected that the hiatus between the inside and the outside, between sensation and vibration, is illusory. Their arguments and the concordance of their convictions are troubling, on condition of understanding the concordance of movement and of sensation, which Bergson would approach in 1904 through the “psycho-physiological paralogism”. Between the purely quantitative variations of movement, whose deviations are themselves measurable, and the purely qualitative variations of sensation, as Henri Bergson knew so well how to describe them, whether it be colours, smells or tastes, the contrast is too flagrant for our mind. But Freud taught us that the origin of the psyche comes from the libido, a physical process fed by the whole body supplying energy to the drives. This within a duality of the life drive and the death drive. From this follow the two states of the soul, or rather the two forces of the soul invested with these drives, called belief and desire, from which derive affirmation and will, presenting this eminent and distinctive character (the central theme of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer).

74- From the slightest inclination to believe and to desire, up to certainty and passion, and finally through their mutual penetration, belief and desire play in the ego, with regard to sensations, precisely the exterior role of space and of time with regard to the material elements. We should examine whether this analogy might not cover a similarity. Whether, instead of being simply forms of our sensibility, space and time might not perchance be primitive notions, or continual and original quasi-sensations, through which would be translated for us, thanks to our two faculties of believing and desiring, the common source of every judgement and consequently of all notions, degrees and modes of belief, degrees and modes of desire, of the psychic agents other than ourselves. In this hypothesis, the movements of bodies would be only species of judgements or designs formed by monads. Thus, “In truth, one has the right to ask oneself, when comparing to the inventions of molecules, to the industries of cells, to the cellular arts, such as a spring day displays them to us, our arts, our industries, our little human scientific discoveries spread out in our exhibitions, whether it is quite certain that our intelligence and our will, we great egos endowed with the vast resources of a gigantic cerebral state, prevail over those of the little egos confined within the minuscule city of an animal or even vegetal cell. Certainly, if the prejudice of believing ourselves always superior to everything did not blind us, the comparison would not turn to our advantage. It is this prejudice, at bottom, which prevents us from believing in monads.”