

## From Christ to the Bourgeoisie\*

Gilles Deleuze

*For Mlle Davy*

- 93 We proclaim the bankruptcy of Spirit (*l'Esprit*) in the modern world, and curse the advent of materialism. On exactly this point, there is perhaps a confusion. That what we want to say is that today many people no longer believe in interior life, it no longer pays to do so. But this is no novelty. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the aristocracy lived on that idea that spiritual life is nothing more than the body, it coincides with the body; and that, on the contrary, politeness and honesty consist in making the body an object.

- It is for completely different reasons, doubtlessly, that the interior is today despised. I think first of all about revolutionary consciousness in an industrial and technical world. This technical world, the larger its power is, the more it seems to drain mankind, like a chicken, of any interior life and to reduce it to total exteriority. One knows the famous caricatures of the following kind: *there is this lever* and it *gives way* as if *before being* turned to the right. Still, the problem is more complex and the bolt of an engine becomes easily the symbol of a serious question. Is there no spiritual life apart from interior life? In this purely objective world where the workman works with companions, the Leader [*Chef*], the Instigator [*Meneur*] can emerge. The Leader, is the one that reveals a *possible world*, in which for example the workman would no longer work for masters. But this world, thus revealed, remains external, no less external than the first world in which he was born. So much so that the first objective world envelops in itself the principle of its own negation, without reference to any interiority. The Leader is the one that offers a *friendship*, not love, a friendship within a team [*équipe*]. Out of friendship, the team consists in realizing the possible outside world that the chief revealed. Technical friendship, if you wish. Technique is known as a relation of means to an end; but the more it affirms itself, the more the end affirms itself, only itself. And the revolutionary spirit proposes an end to us, which must be realized in the force and the quantity of the team-members. Let us not shout too quickly that it is here a matter of morals in which the end justifies the means. It would be to transpose the spirit of externality in the field of the interior life. That what no longer makes sense, is the very concept of means. The revolution should not be made within us, but on the outside—and if we make it within ourselves, it is only a way of not doing it on the outside.<sup>1</sup> This does not prevent, for that matter, that revolutionary friendship is primarily self-sacrifice. But the

---

\* This is a draft translation of 'Du Christ à la bourgeoisie', *Espace*, 1946, pp. 93-106. See also my introductory essay: [http://www.raymondvandewiel.org/from\\_christ\\_to\\_the\\_bourgeoisie.pdf](http://www.raymondvandewiel.org/from_christ_to_the_bourgeoisie.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> There would be an opposition easy to establish between the government of Vichy and the government of de Gaulle. Vichy invoked guilt, and every Frenchman had to manage the interior revolution on his own account; as if interior life and the revolution were compatible. Begin, they said, by repentance; and they instituted a kind of cult of remorse. The government of de Gaulle, on the contrary, reveals us as leader a possible exterior world, in which France was great. As for means to guarantee that greatness, this is not much of an issue. Some people will see it as idle chatter. In fact, it is idle chatter, and worse: contradiction, unless the current government is not revolutionary, and with certain formal characteristics of a revolution is nonetheless a reactionary government. Which, for that matter, is possible. (December 1945.)

95 sacrifice here does not tend towards an interior transformation; it is the possible price that must be paid for the replacement of worlds. The team always rebels against someone, against something. We speak of a revolution in action [*en acte*].

That would be, in rough lines, good enough if our problem was to characterise revolutionary consciousness. But it is about something else. And it is not only on the revolutionary plane that interior life goes bankrupt, it is also on other planes, more individual, less naturally open to exteriority. Why is it that so often interior life cannot be evoked without dragging along the image of large soft flowers, drivel and stomach growling, sweaty palms, white larvae and hints of disrobement. To the point that these images already begin to be worn out. In short, we revile interior life, we no longer understand it except in the form of sweatiness. “In vain would we seek the caresses and fondlings of our intimate selves, like Amiel, or like a child who kisses his own shoulder, since everything is finally outside, everything, even ourselves: outside, in the world, among others. It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men.”<sup>2</sup>

Is there for some people a new notion?

That the Gospel has, in part, this aspect of exteriority, is certain. It suffices to think about miracles. And also: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace, but a sword. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever keeps his life will lose it.”<sup>3</sup> These words refer to an exterior world. Christ is the Leader who reveals to us a possible exterior world, and offers us a friendship. Its presence hatches less in the intimacy of hearts than that it makes itself  
96 felt on the main road, in the bend of a street, in the fields, by the abrupt revelation of a possible world. Man in his intimacy is powerless to find *his interior relation* with God. But this is the dangerous word. Christ reveals us an outside world, but this outside world is not a social, historical, localised world; *it is our own interior life*. The paradox of the Gospel is, in abstract terms, the exteriority of an interiority.

The topicality of the Gospel is bad news as much as good news, and the one does not exist without the other. Christianity brought about the dissociation of Nature and Spirit. Perhaps it will be said that in the times of the Greeks the union no longer existed. That is of little importance. The identity of Nature and Spirit exists as nostalgia in the modern conscience; whether one defines it referring to Greece, to a state preceding original sin or, if one likes psychoanalysis, to a state preceding the trauma of birth, is again not very important. There was once a union of Nature and Spirit, and this union formed an outside world. Nature was spirit, and spirit, nature; the subject did not intervene, other than as a margin of error. Christianity subjectivised [*a subjectivé*] nature in the

---

<sup>2</sup> [trans: This unattributed quote is from Sartre, ‘Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l’intentionnalité,’ originally written in January 1939, reprinted in *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). This translation is by Joseph P. Fell, ‘Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology’, *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermont Moran and Timothy Mooney (London, Routledge, 2002), p. 384.]

<sup>3</sup> [trans: This unattributed quote reproduces several sentences from Matthew 10:35-39. This slightly altered translation is from the New English Translation (<http://www.netbible.org>)]

form of the body and of natural life where the sin bites, and on the other hand it subjectivised spirit in the form of spiritual 'life'. But Christian consciousness [*la conscience chrétienne*] is so torn that it cannot grasp in itself the relation of natural life to spiritual life. And consequently, the misery of this consciousness is such that to establish a certain unity of body and spirit, it is necessary to see outside of it, on the outside of this very unity as interior life. It must look outside of itself, outside its own interiority. Such is the need for a Mediator, bringing the good news. The Gospel is the exteriority of an interiority; and this paradox is expressed primarily in the concept of the *parable*. The Christian grasps in himself the dissociation of natural life and spiritual life; and the union of these two as interior life, he grasps it only from the outside. Its paradoxical task is to internalise interior life. To internalise Christ.

At first sight, the Christian opposition between Nature and Spirit seems to be very different from the bourgeois opposition between the private life and the State. And yet, it is not. The bourgeois has managed to internalise interior life, as mediation of nature and spirit. Nature, in becoming private life, was spiritualised in the form of family and good nature [*bonne nature*]; and Spirit, in becoming the State, was naturalised in the form of homeland; without contradiction, for that matter, with bourgeois liberalism and pacifism. How is all that done? We will see this later. But the important thing is that the bourgeoisie is defined above all by interior life and the primacy of the subject. We would like to call upon the simplest, and even most puerile examples. There is bourgeoisie as soon as there is submission of the exterior to an interior order, to a ceremony. The fable has it that the bourgeois, whatever the time, does not leave without hard collar and bowler hat. Heat is no longer what one *expresses* through a quasi-nudity of the body, at least through light clothing, it is that onto which one *projects* a meaning. And this meaning is: "In spite of that... Such is the Order. I tidy my papers and put my pencil to the right. I *know* that, when I would want to write, I will only have to extend my arm a little to the right. The order transcends time; and the bourgeois knows a great deal. (it would be interesting to show, for example, how much the classical theory of the perception of the 19th century is bourgeois: one perceives only what one knows, and any perception is an interpretation, etc.)"<sup>4</sup>

The bourgeoisie is essentially interior life internalised, that is to say, mediation of private life and the State. But of these two extremes, it is equally frightened. It is the famous struggle between two opposites. Its field is that of the happy medium. It hates the excess of a too individual private life, of a *romantic* nature; the bourgeois position with regard to sexuality shows this clearly enough. But it is no less frightened of the State which, insofar as it is introduced into the interior life without having the appearance and excuse of a threatened Fatherland, is no more, in its turn, than a pure nature, a pure force. It is enough to think here about the Physiocrats of the XVIII<sup>e</sup> century. And also about the socialists of the XIX<sup>e</sup>, and about the spirit of 1848. Renouvier for example wanted free associations, that is to say, "credit organized by the State in support of freely formed

---

<sup>4</sup> On bourgeois Order, Credit and Knowledge cf. the important article of D. Groethuysen 'L'Encyclopédie' in *Le tableau de la littérature française* (N.R.F.) [trans: *Le tableau de la littérature française: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris : Gallimard, 1939), pp. 343-9.]

associations” and claimed, as fundamental guarantees, the right of property and right to profit. The domain of the bourgeoisie is that of humanism, apparently quiet, of Human Rights. The bourgeois Person is substantialised mediation; defined formally by equality and reciprocity, materially by interior life. That the formal equality is contradicted materially is no contradiction, in the eyes of  
99 the bourgeois, nor reason for a revolution. The bourgeois remains coherent. One sees here all that the bourgeois “crew” can put up against a revolutionary crew. For if the second is really a team, the first is at bottom a contract.

Substantialised mediation? The philosophers [*philosophes*] gave a name to the mediation of nature and spirit, that of Value. But it is here about a mediation-substance, isolated from the extremes. Likewise substantialised value is *having*. When the Physiocrats spoke about nature, they spoke about having. Property is a natural right. The XVIII<sup>e</sup> century believed readily that the man is nothing, but he *has*; he has impressions, and by these he acquires: everything is received. And if the bourgeois has the desire to have, he remains on the contrary insensitive to the desire to be, where, with his skilful eye, he easily sees the traces of romanticism and that awkward age [*l'âge ingrat*]. (that awkward age, his great concern; because the bourgeois has a family; he lives on his property. From interior life [*la vie intérieure*] to indoor life [*la vie d'intérieur*], is only a small step, a letter.)

In order to be able to establish a mediation between private life and the State, it remains necessary that nobody can say: the State, that is me. The State will remain a subject, certainly, but an impersonal subject. The situation of the bourgeoisie before 1789 was paradoxical: they had a private life, they had mediation of private life and the State, and they did not have the State. The State was not an impersonal subject, and to make it so they needed the revolution. But didn't this very constitution found the possibility of another mediation? That of *Money*. Having as money, no longer as property. And this new mediation is not substantialised; on the contrary, it is flowing.  
100 Whereas in property the two extremes (private life and State) were in the shade, money on the other hand establishes between them a contact by which the State dissipates and spreads into the hands of private wealthy persons, and these private subjects rise to power. Hence the threat and the danger. The merchant class [*bourgeoisie d'affaires*] replaced the landed gentry [*bourgeoisie de propriété*]. This is the well-known capitalism. Money denies its own essence, solidifies by giving power to the capitalists, by restoring a form of personal power, in short by giving up its role of mediation, its reference to interior life and indoor life. And if the communists negate the bourgeoisie, if they want a truly impersonal power, where for example there are no more owners, it is above all because the bourgeoisie negates itself. It is natural since, when the communists speak about the bourgeoisie, and they often speak about it, they do not know exactly about what they speak.

Let us invoke a small case: it is well known that the bourgeois is enormously fraudulent. It is useless, however, to appeal to the tax department. The bourgeois simply loves to enter by the back door and leave through the front door. Everything has meaning. But the two most extreme assumptions are to be excluded: 1. the bourgeois would give the entrance the meaning ‘exit’, thinking that it is better thus. 2. the entrance keeps its meaning, and the bourgeois would put *aside*, in an act of defiance, the meaning exit. In fact, there is neither reform or correction, nor revolt. In fact, the legal meaning is recognized, but it is shrouded, incorporated in the form of “In spite of

that...” The entrance, that’s what it is in spite of me getting out. But what goal does the bourgeois pursue thus? One could say that fraud is the opposite of war. The State lets the private subject be  
101 caught up in a centrifugal movement, in the form of family and association; but through war, it is able to bring him back to itself, to remind him that he is primarily citizen without private life. Conversely, the bourgeois had let the social spiritual Order be caught up in a centrifugal movement, which manifests itself to him from the outside in the form of entrance, exit, of crossings, that is to say which comes back to hit you flat in the face as nature. And fraud is only the reaction of the bourgeois to make sure that the State, as impersonal subject “is not so far that it...” To ensure, reassure himself, to see what happens... One does not take fraud seriously, deep down one is in agreement with the law, it is to see what happens. But above all it is to take the rest more seriously, to adhere more quietly to the social and national order, to make sure that this order indeed concerns the family, and is projected by the subject. If the bourgeois cheats, it is to make sure that he is free, and that the State is “each of him”. And the reassured bourgeois will thus go to war, because there are things about which one does not make fun. One thus sees in what sense cheating is still a mediation between the private life and the State. It is what for the Christian is the proof, the observable appearances [*manifestation sensible*] that Pascal claimed. Neither reform, nor revolt, on the contrary, it is extermination of doubt.

No less than cheating, and in the same way, the bourgeois *interprets* a great deal. Not completely in the same way however. Cheating is negative, and through it the bourgeois pulls the State toward him. In interpretation, positive on the contrary, he raises himself towards the State. The bourgeois has a taste for secrecy, for insinuation, for allusion, he likes to ‘go beyond appearances’; because the interpreted object becomes divided, or rather sublimates itself and rises  
102 above itself, at the same time as it rises above appearances, and, in the same way, the subject which interprets seems to also go beyond, to sublimate himself, to reach a superhuman clarity. Let’s stick to the political interpretation. Jules Romains thinks that the miracle of bourgeois democracy is that, of the million absurdities released by all those who have political life, by all those who say: If it were me..., it spurts and spouts finally a coherent and valid direction for the country. And in a general sense he is right, obviously, as opposed to A. France who told the socialist Bissolo: “A silly thing repeated by 36 million mouths does not cease being a silly thing.” Because it is seldom the *same* silly thing which is repeated, in democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Insofar as the bourgeoisie internalises interior life and Christ alike, they do it in the form of property, of money, of having; all of which Christ hated, and that he had come to fight, to substitute it for being. It is thus the paradox of the Gospel, as exteriority of an interiority, which continues. But can we already draw this conclusion? Because we have by no means shown how the Christian opposition between Nature and Spirit was transformed into the bourgeois opposition between the private life and the State.

In relation to the bourgeois opposition we talked about interpretation. There also seems to be an interpretation of a completely different kind, a religious interpretation. The interpreter then is

---

<sup>5</sup> He was thinking about the Dreyfus affaire.

called the prophet. Christ said: “They told you that... And I tell you...”, “In truth I tell it to you.” Lastly, a third interpretation, science, replies to a new opposition, this time between reality and truth. Reality of observable qualities and truth of the objects of thought: heat is movement.

103 So we here are confronted with a triple opposition: first the scientific opposition, between the real, observable object and the object of thought, an exterior opposition; second the interior religious opposition, between the corporeal subject and sinner and the spiritual subject; third the political opposition, between the private subject and the impersonal subject or State. And if in the first opposition nothing is personal, and if in the second everything is personal, the third is the irreducible difference between the personal and the impersonal. Therefore, the private subject will be determined by the State, determined hollow, negatively, as what escapes the State and which the State, nevertheless, *rules*. Consequently, installed in the mediating field, the individual of Human Rights is interchangeable; and within this very field, one will find the opposition of form and matter.

Moreover, political mediation is all the more unstable as it is based on a unilinear and progressive development of private life, of the family and associations, and of the State. This is absolutely false. But the other interpretations are not able to reduce the corresponding oppositions. Under the religious opposition, one will recognize the duality of Devil and God. Undoubtedly Christ was made man to save us from Devil. But we saw that this salvation through interior life was always on the outside of us, on the exterior. The same is the case, finally, for the scientific opposition “in reality - in truth”; one will shift the terms in vain (“in appearance – in reality” one will say) what one will not explain, is appearance as such.

104 How to pass from the scientific opposition to the religious opposition? The whole philosophy of Malebranche is an answer to this question, in the sense where it substitutes for the order of the relations of greatness [*rappports de grandeur*] the order of the relations of perfection, and moreover for the apparent disorder of things, the disorder of heart and sin.

This leaves us to show the identity of the religious opposition and political opposition. Or at least the transformation of the couple natural life - spiritual life, into the couple private life - State. Yet it seems that there is a certain rupture between spiritual life of God and the State, one that is essentially spiritual and temporal. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. The religious Truth is of another kind. “From the Gospel, one could say, one will never draw a technology; the Gospel has not come to save the world, it comes to save us from the world.” Admittedly, Christ is the mediation of Nature and Spirit, and this mediation, this revelation by Christ is established between the two terms; but the good news that it brings us is not about the world, it concerns that part of the world called human nature, where the sin bites. The Gospel does not deal with politics and the social, in the sense that the social would pose specific problems; it brings everything back to the possibility of sin, and the possibility of saving man from sin. The Christian interior life is entirely tended towards an interior spiritual life; it is in this *very particular* sense that one can speak about Christian ‘indifference’. But, conversely, the State claims to own man fully, to reduce man entirely to citizen. Between the will to power of the State over the interior man, and the will to indifference of the interior man with regard to the State, opposition is born. And the State will persecute. But

105 the Christian will greet the persecutions with mildness. (He will be martyr, and will receive the suffering like an extermination of sin.)

With mildness? But the evil is done. Man will be able to be atheistic, but he will nonetheless still be Christian, we no longer have the choice; he will oppose the private man to the State. The interior man, the indifferent and gentle martyr, which is surely the worst revolt, will become the private man, aggressive, worried about his rights, and only in his worry wants to call upon Reason. “These days man dehumanizes himself quickly, because he ceases to believe in irrational and immediate rights against the State. The direction of the revolt is lost, it is sublimated, o irony, in grumbling... it manifests itself in bad temper.”<sup>6</sup> It is a secularization of the church. But let us not be misled here, this secularization is double: 1<sup>st</sup> Christian interior life revealed by Christ, was what propelled mankind out of nature, to rush towards Spirit. But it loses its traction towards spiritual life with God, to the very extent that it loses its irrational and immediate “indifference” towards the State; and in the sense that it no longer exceeds itself, it evolves from Christian humility to the opposition contained in itself. It is thus that Christian spiritual life is nothing more than *bourgeois nature*. But this new nature kept something of its contact with Spirit; and if when talking about the bourgeoisie we pointed out that nature was spiritualised as private life and was made good nature, we understand now, this is because Christian Spirit was naturalised. 2. But which place did vacant Spirit occupy and abandon? Spirit becomes that which it was indifferent about. That which it regarded as the world, and in which it was only interested because it indirectly brings back the possibility of sin. [106] That very thing that could exercise force over him. The Spirit becomes the State. God becomes the impersonal subject; and in the Social Contract, a magisterial attempt to reduce interior man to citizen, the general will has all the characteristics of Divinity.

It is not a contingent connection that binds Christianity and the Bourgeoisie.

*Translation: Raymond van de Wiel (August 2010)*

---

<sup>6</sup> M. de Rougemont, *Journal d'un intellectuel en chômage*.