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PORNOCRACY, OR WOMEN IN MODERN TIMES

Selections translated by Stefan Mattesich

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

What is marriage?—The union of force and beauty, a union as indissoluble as that between form and matter, in which divorce implies the destruction of both. It is precisely in this that marriage differs from an essentially atomizing civil and commercial society, in which the object is gain. Force and beauty unite in gratuitous title: between them there is no reciprocal payment, the first for services, the second for favors; there is no possible commensuration between the fruits of labor and the gifts of the ideal. Marriage, in the purity of its idea, is an absolute pact of devotion. Pleasure figures only as secondary: all exchange of wealth that produces the man against the joys that procure the woman, all voluptuous commerce, is combined, in order not to be mutual prostitution. It is thus that marriage becomes for spouses a cult of conscience, and for society the very organ of justice. A sacred marriage, if it doesn't put each spouse beyond reproach, nonetheless immunizes them, vis-à-vis others, against all crime and felony; while concubinage, a union of man and woman, secret and solemn, but formed solely in view of pleasure—however excusable this might be in certain cases—is the habitual resort of parasites, of thieves, of forgers and assassins.

Oh! Ladies, I know well how much this moral appears severe to you, who take pride in force and even more in beauty, and for whom pleasure and wealth are definitively the true social contract, the true religion.¹ Admit, however, that in the conditions of work and frugality that nature imposes on our species, if you want to make marriage solid, and society virtuous, this theory of devotion is worth more than your epicurean maxims. In any case, you can't mean that I do wrong to woman, the weaker being, in my opinion; it is as such, more or less, that I treat her.

As for the family, the economy of existence divides in two principal parts: *production* and *consumption*. The first is much ruder: I make it the attribute of man; the second is more facile, more joyous: I reserve it for woman. Man labors, sows, reaps, and grinds the wheat; the woman bakes bread and cakes. All her existence, in that which concerns work, comes down to this distinction: it is of little importance in what manner, in the future, work will be divided, organized, or picked up again; in the final analysis, all operations, whether virile or feminine, are respectively dependent on plow or stew. How can you tell me that this division is unjust? . . . The table made, and the dinner served, why should I tell the woman to sit in a corner; wait, before eating, for her lord and master to make her a sign, force her to make do with stale bread, while the bread he eats is white and fresh? Far from this, I instruct spouses that all that is best in a household must be always for the women and children, and that his pleasure, for him, should be composed of theirs. Without doubt, I omit many things; I don't deny, let it be understood, that I seem in this not very gracious or good-natured; but all the same you will admit that mine are not the ways of an egoist, an exploiter, a tyrant. If it's the happiness of women that you pretend to serve, count on me to number among your partisans.

I say, following Auguste Comte, and better than him, that woman, incarnation of the ideal, seems of a superior nature to man, who has nothing but force to offer; while he procures needs, she alone gives felicity; for this reason she must be, as much as possible, freed from all utilitarian work, especially rude and repugnant work. I make of monogamy the fundamental law of the androgynous couple; I prohibit divorce; I say that, in a truly dignified marriage, love must be subordinated to conscience, to the lesson that for genuine spouses good conscience can and should take the place of love: All this to whose benefit, you ask? Obviously to the benefit of woman, of those in marriage who rule above all by beauty, who, consequently, are the most at risk of degradation.

As for matters on the outside, I don't want, for the same reasons, war, since war suits beauty as little as servitude.

I don't want politics, because politics is war.

I don't want legal, police, or governmental functions, because this too is always war.

The place of woman is in the family; the sphere of her influence is the conjugal home; it is thus that man, in whom the woman must love not beauty but force, will develop his dignity, his individuality, his character, his heroism and his grace, and it is in order to make man more and more courageous and just, and his wife consequently more and more of a queen, that I attack centralization, bureaucratization, financial feudalism, exorbitant government, and the permanence of a state of war. For this I protested, from the month of October 1848 on, against the re-establishment of the Empire, which I considered a national prostitution, and for this I have not ceased to demand economic reforms that, in making pauperism, revolt, and crime less frequent and less intense, progressively reduce the number and the tenure of magistrates, and little by little return to social order a pure and simple liberty, which means the complete restoration of the family and the glorification of woman.

I criticized, with all the energy of which I was capable, seduction, adultery, incest, stupor, rape, prostitution, all the crimes and offenses against marriage and the family, which is to say against women. I denounced them as signs and instruments of despotism: and I dare flatter myself that my words will not appear to you suspect. If, in a certain measure, and before the gravest authorities, I have on occasion excused concubinage, it was again in the interest of women. I have no doubt that it hasn't been possible to speak better in this regard than I have; but in any event I spoke as best I could according to my feeble means, and if I look around me, if I look back into the past, I don't see another author, not one, who took equally to heart the cause of your sex.



There is no power without beauty, and, reciprocally, no beauty without power, no more than there exists matter without form, or form without matter; for this reason one speaks of a *male beauty* and a *female strength*; this is why woman has her place in domestic production, the same as man has his in the art of living well, which is nothing but housekeeping all over again.

But power and beauty, as intimately united as matter and form, are not the same thing; their nature is not identical, their action even less. No effort of thought can reduce them to a single expression. In

organic sexuality, there exists a difference that everyone feels and that reason proclaims irreducible between man and woman.

But is this difference not illusory? Is it really, as you pretend, ladies, nothing but an effect of education and habit, to such a degree that one can hope, by a change of regime, to make it disappear and to leave between the sexes no difference but that constructed by social device? In other words, must the system of relations between men and women, which I sought to establish in the *equivalence* of their attributes, be grounded on the contrary in the EQUALITY and IDENTITY of these same attributes? The entire dispute is here.

Note that the law of the sexes depends on that of the family, and it extends also to the order of society, to the constitution of all humanity.

I said the facts reveal that which every individual of good faith glimpses and knows: That man is stronger, but less beautiful; woman more beautiful, but less vigorous. At this you laugh. You deny the facts, because, contrary to your own thesis, you imagine that I cite them with bad intent. You go so far as to say that I don't produce facts; even more, that the facts favor you. The woman surprised in adultery always denies; her husband still has an obligation to believe her. Remember then the facts, at least roughly, and the manner in which one passes over them in silence . . .



To speak only of sensual relations, it is a law of nature among all the animals, that the female, lured by the reproductive instinct, and employing many means, seeks out the male. Woman does not escape this law. She has naturally more of a penchant for lasciviousness than man; first because her ego is weaker, and liberty and intelligence struggle less in her against the inclinations of animality; then because love is the great, especially singular occupation of her life, and in love, the ideal always implies the physical . . .



From the point of view of intelligence and conscience, as from that of the body, man and woman form a complete unit, a being in two persons, a veritable organism. This couple, called by Plato *androgynous*, is the true human subject. Considered in isolation, each of the two halves that compose this organism appears mutilated. You cannot deny it,

you, ladies, who prevail upon this pretty word *androgyné, man-woman*, to conclude in favor of what you call the equality of the senses. But recall that this androgyny doesn't exist, if the two people are equal in everything, if they are not each distinguished by the special qualities the combination of which precisely constitutes the organism . . .



Can one sell modesty? The modesty that is sold, you know what one calls that: prostitution.

Even beauty, the word by which I summarize all the prerogatives of the woman, can be neither sold nor discounted: it is outside commerce. This is why between husband and wife there is not, as one says and you imagine, association of goods and gains as between negotiators or landlords: there is the mutual and free gift, absolute devotion. The marriage contract is then of a completely different nature from that of the contract for sale, exchange, or payment: it is exactly the opposite.

Man, expression of force, is attracted by beauty. He wants to appropriate it, to unite with it in an indissoluble union. How will he attain it? What price will he offer for it? None. Nothing of what man possesses, of what he can create or acquire, can pay for beauty. Even the caresses of love are not a fit price for it: lovers who take for their cause mere voluptuousness are egoists, their union is not a marriage, universal conscience they call fornication, bawdiness, licentiousness. A dignified man, for whom the heart aspires to the possession of beauty, understands one thing straight off, that he cannot obtain it except by devotion. He who has force goes down on his knees before the woman, he consecrates to her his service and makes himself her servant. He who knows the woman to be weaker, drunk on love, becomes respectable, he moves away from all voluptuous speech and thought. His fortune, his ambition, he sacrifices for her pleasure; only his conscience he will not sacrifice, because his conscience is his force and it is only in the union of force and beauty that marriage consists. Absolute devotion, devotion of strong and stainless conscience, is in reality all that the groom offers his bride, the only thing that he can offer and that she, on her side, can accept.

The same movement [occurs] on the side of the woman. The more predominant beauty is in her, the more she inclines to force. This force, so desirable, she dreads at first; all weak creatures experience a certain

fear of the strong creature. In order to tame this force, the offer of her beauty must be free or it is an act of prostitution. In order to conquer the man's force, the woman's beauty is as impotent as force itself is impotent to conquer beauty. Here, as before, there remains only one means: devotion.

Devotion for devotion, a call of attraction that proves for one and the other both force and beauty; this is then, definitively, the conjugal pact, of all pacts the most sublime, which older pacts of chivalry imitated. Can you see how for voluptuousness, for love, a more elevated sentiment is substituted, a sentiment that doesn't exclude voluptuousness and love, but commands them, dominates and effaces them, and even of necessity beseeches them? Ladies, here is the essence of marriage, which you appear to me not to understand. Without it, take note of my words, there is nothing for woman but shame and prostitution. The man and woman who are thus married know, you can take my word for it, what justice means: no felony will enter into their common conscience. For that it would be necessary that they become, in common, what they didn't want to be, what they swore to one another they never would be, impure cohabitators [*concupinaires*]. Their marriage is one more column added to the eternal temple of humanity that Christ wanted to build in our souls, and that I accuse you, you and your adherents, of destroying . . .



Once the household is formed, the husband is in charge of work, of production, of all exterior relations; the wife of the administration of the interior. This division is determined by the respective qualities of the spouses. To the stronger, action, struggle, movement; to she who shines and loves, but who must shine only for her husband, love only him, domestic cares, the peace and modesty of the home. Both are responsible, and yet free in their functions; always the husband will have the right of control over the wife, while the wife offers only that which aids, advises, and informs the husband. The reason for this is manifest: control over the household depends much more on virile production than vice versa, and as the man is charged with working, and since the superior power and responsibility incumbent on him is greater, he finds himself, by right and by power, MASTER of the community. And the right as much as the duty of the wife is to

recognize this power, to demand its action, to provoke it, to serve it, to devote herself to it. Take this marital mastery away, remove the devotion to beauty and force, and you fall into concubinage, you destroy marriage . . .



Man, by his efforts alone, is at pains to provide for his proper needs; for even stronger reasons he is at pains to provide for the maintenance of his wife and children. It is necessary that he combine his industry with the industry of his equals. From this we get political society, of which the family is only the embryo. This society has its laws and its proper destiny, of which philosophy understands but little; one cannot doubt, however, that it has for its aim, on one side, the increase of dignity and virile liberty, on the other, the augmentation of the wealth and well-being of all. The relation of the family to the State, in a word the *Republic*, is, for the male sex, a problem to be resolved. Women intervene only in an indirect manner, with a secret and invisible influence. How could it be otherwise? Embryonic organ of justice, husband and wife make but one body, one soul, one will, one intelligence; they are devoted one to the other in life and in death; how could there be a different opinion or a different interest? On the other hand, the politics that bear on families have no other end than to constitute their solidarity, and to assure them all guarantees of liberty, of property, of labor, of commerce, of security, of education, of information, of circulation that they demand, all things that exalt the attributions of man. How could women be even nominally consulted? To suppose that the woman could express in the assembly of people a vote contrary to that of her husband is to suppose their discord and prepare their divorce. To suppose that the reason of the first could balance that of the second is to go against the wish of nature and degrade virility. To admit, finally, to the exercise of public functions a person that nature and the conjugal law have consecrated to purely domestic functions is to infringe familial modesty, to make the woman a *public* figure, to proclaim the confusion of the sexes, the community of lovers, the abolition of the family, the absolutism of the State, the servitude of people, and the feudalization of property.

This is how the subordination of wife to husband is set up in marriage. Such subordination has nothing arbitrary about it; it is neither a

legal fiction nor a usurpation of force, nor a declaration of indignity for the weaker sex, nor an exception to her positive right as given by the necessities of domestic and social order; this subordination results from the patent and incontestable fact that virility embraces the great majority of both public and domestic affairs; it does not constitute, for man, and to the detriment of woman, the least prerogative of well-being or honor; to the contrary, in imposing on him the heaviest charge, it makes him the minister of feminine fidelity, for which alone it follows that he must hold on to his own.

Change, modify, or interfere with this relation between the sexes, in whatever fashion, and you destroy marriage in its essence; from a society where justice is predominant you make a society where love is predominant; you fall back again to concubinage and infidelity; you can still have fathers and mothers, as you still have lovers, but you no longer have the family; and without the family, your political constitution will no longer be a federation of men, of families and of free cities, it will be a theocratic and pornocratic communism, the worst of tyrannies.

To make this clearer, suppose that nature, which, on my account, has endowed the two sexes, constituted marriage, and the family, and civil society, in such a manner that we see, or at least it is easy for us to determine, the types—suppose, I say, that this same nature had wanted to establish human society in another mode. What would it have made? The plan would have to go against what we have here ruled out: it would have to distribute equally all the faculties between the sexes, give them both an equal force and beauty; make the woman vigorous, productive, warrior, philosopher, judge, like the man; the man, pretty, nice, adorable, agreeable, angelic and all that follows, like the woman; in a word, it would have to displace every difference between them except the genital . . .

In these conditions, it is clear that man and woman, having each the fullness of attributes that we find only in the couple, when equal and similar in all things would exist in relations completely different from those that should characterize marriage today. Man would not be devoted to the beauty he seeks to possess; woman would not be devoted to force, to which he had been equally devoted in sharing. The influence that man and woman exert on each other, in the present [i.e., egalitarian—TRANS] state of their constitution, would not be the

same: there would be between them neither admiration nor worship, no devotional inclination; no need of praise, confidence, or encouragement, nothing more than protection, service, or support. Things would become between man and woman what we see between persons of the same sex: service for service, product for product, idea for idea. Without doubt there would be love, since we conserve, in this express aim, the sexual distinction. But men and women would be affected in another manner: their love would not transcend mere voluptuous excitation; they would have nothing in common with the conscience they prize; not being transformed by an absolute devotion, they would not hold to an indissociable monogamy. They would live in a zone of liberty and concubinage; not arousing jealousy,² not excluding any idea of infidelity, on the contrary, exalting themselves through emulation of those with vast wealth; ensuring that the general tendency would be to enclose a community of lovers, children, and households in the unique family that would be the State.

This organization, outside both monogamy and the family, has been dreamt of by all those who, like our modern emancipated women and their emancipators, have believed in the equality of power and beauty in the two sexes; mystics placed this distinction in heaven, where, they say, there will no longer be either male or female; nowadays, it seems to a great number of people, even well-informed people, the singular means to destroy antagonism, and consequently to extinguish crime and misery. But could such a society really exist? I dare to affirm it would be one hundred times worse than ours; to be more precise, I consider it radically impossible.

Society subsists in the subordination of all human forces and faculties, both individual and collective, to justice. In the system I've just sketched, the individual, having in himself the fullness of attributions that accords, as well as we have been able to convince ourselves, only with the couple, would be exorbitant in his personality; the idealist element would become in him predominant; conscience would be subordinated; justice reduced to a pure idea; love, synonym for voluptuousness, a simple *jouissance*. Thus is exposed, with an indomitable violence, the contradiction between the individual and society: this same individual, which one flattered oneself had been linked to public order by the community of lovers, women, children, families, households, would be all the more repugnant to social communism the more

completely he was emancipated. It is even possible that one could not stand in defense of women, since, according to the egalitarian hypothesis, and with regard to the physical and moral constitution of the individual, there could be no jealousy [and so no interest in the opposite sex—TRANS]; but competition would be all the more intense for loot, for riches, for comfort and luxury, for all things the production of which, submitted to the same laws in a society drunk on love and the ideal, would be even more insufficient than it is today. Establish, with the community of lovers, a celibate universality, and, I fear to say, you will have a surfeit of consumption, less labor, less saving, more misery; in the final analysis, along with a police state, a society devoted to thievery or, otherwise, to the most degrading servitude. This result, for any man who reflects on the relations between the family, marriage, work, production, and the accumulation of wealth, as well as on the conditions for justice in Society, is as certain as the fact that two plus two equals four.

Thus we confirm, by the development of the contrary thesis, the theory of marriage. Society, that is, a union of forces, rests on justice. Justice has as an organic condition a dualism, outside which it reduces quickly to a pure and inefficacious notion. This dualism is marriage, the union of two complementary people, and in which the essence is devotion, the preparation love.

Thus we resolve this apparent contradiction, which says to the man: *command, to better serve*; to the woman: *obey, to better reign*, a contradiction that expresses with full force the matrimonial spiral, and contains all the law and mystery of the sacrament. The world is full of these oppositions; it neither lives nor progresses except this way. If the sense of the famous maxim *The king reigns and does not govern* is obscure only to demagogues who aspire to absolute power, all the more reason why these two propositions: *command, to better serve, obey, to better reign*, must appear clear to every man who has the sentiment of his duty and his right, to every woman who has a respect for her husband and his proper dignity.



Just as man, in his manifestations, is not always strong, or his virility sufficiently accentuated, woman is not always beautiful either: in morals, as in physical looks, she is subject to a thousand disfigurements.

Often she acts beneath herself: she is loose, slack, and beastly, as George Sand put it. One can say then that she abuses the permission of nature, which wishes her, not inept, but relatively weaker, and yet more beautiful than her companion. Sometimes even a contrary phenomenon presents itself. While man expands in plunging into the *delights of Capua*, one sees the woman emancipate herself; take, as it is said in the Bible, the vestments of man, affect his forms, his language, his virile allures, and aspire to the exercise of his functions.

Everywhere and in all times, one meets with these eccentric creatures, ridiculed by their sex and rejected by our own: they are of several species. In one, a chic masculinity is the effect of temperament and a great bodily vigor; one calls them *viragos*. These are less fearsome; they don't make good proselytizers, and all that suffices is a critique from other women to bring them to order. In others, the emancipatory tendency prevails, whether in the mind, or in the professions they make, or even finally in libertine excess. These are the worst: there is no fixed price with which the desire for emancipation can be managed in them. In certain epochs, sex consciousness gets mixed up; the cowardice of men becomes an auxiliary of the woman's audacity; and we see appear these theories of enfranchisement and promiscuity, of which the last word is PORNOCRACY. At this point society is finished.

Pornocracy combines very well with despotism, even with militarism: the Roman Empire has furnished an example with Elagabalus. Pornocracy unites equally with theocracy: This is what tempted the Gnostics from the 1st to the 11th centuries of our era, and to it the mystics equally tended, as late as the 17th century. In our day, one has seen pornocracy ally itself with bankocracy! Malthus and *Enfantin* are the double expression of modern decadence . . .

Don't complain, ladies, that I treat your ideas as things of little importance, as a man who hasn't sounded and measured the high import of your doctrines. I know in what spirit you live and have no difficulty avowing that it is this spirit, spirit of luxury and shame, spirit of confusion and promiscuity that, for the last thirty-five years, has been the plague of democracy and the principle cause of defeats for the republican party. Also I hold on to what the public says of you, *intus et in cute*.

Beginning with the cases that are beyond any doubt.

Parent Duchâtelet, in his book *Prostitution*, has remarked that public women were gluttonous, drunken, immoderate, quarrelsome, given to a chaotic and inscrutable gossip.³ In these traits one recognizes the woman fallen into a state of nature or simple femininity: Where does this corruption come from? From excessive frequenting with men, which takes from them, along with their reserve, timidity, and diligence, the essential quality of their sex, that which makes the soul and life of the honest woman: modesty. Parent Duchâtelet could have added that the figure of these women alters in the same way as their mores: they deform and adopt the look, the voice, and the allure of men, and preserve nothing either physical or moral of their sex, except the gross material, the strictly necessary.

—What is there in common, you will say, between these prostitutes and us?

I would ask you first, ladies, what you mean by the word *prostitute*? Note that these women do nothing, after all, but exercise free love; that, if more than one began in being seduced, the mass of them elected to be prostitutes; that even, from the point of view of an amorous democracy, they act with a spirit of philanthropy and charity, as the Gnostics understood it; that for the rest of them, always following your maxims, erotic delectation has nothing immoral in it, being licit as well as natural; it forms the greatest benefit and the greatest part of humanity, and that consequently a pretty woman who, for the happiness of a man pricked by love, consents to give him the sacrifice of a day of her time, is perfectly in the right to receive compensation in exchange. She has all the more right, by exercise of the amorous function, insensibly to damage and degrade herself. There is not, there cannot be, free love, do you understand? The notion must be abandoned, in the name of conscience, in marriage. Either there is marriage, by which lovers unite forever, according to the law of devotion and in the highest sphere of love, or there is remuneration. Do emancipated women, who live in concubinage, have the pretention to give themselves for nothing? At the very least they receive pleasure, and the proof is that the moment the thing no longer pleases, she reserves for herself the right to withdraw. The lover who gives herself for nothing is a phoenix that doesn't exist except for the poets; this is why when she gives herself outside marriage, she is a libertine, she is a prostitute; she knows this so well that if, later, she finds someone to marry, she will

present herself as a widow; she will lie; to impudence she will join both hypocrisy and perfidy.

Here we see how the commerce of men, as free love, affects a woman: it devastates her, denatures her, travesties her, and makes her appear like a man, hideous to behold. Now, I predict to you, all excessive frequentation with men, even if confined to simple conversation in salons, in academies, in bars, etc., is bad for the woman. It deflowers and insensibly corrupts. I say, moreover, it is impossible for a woman, not attending to men more than is expedient, to concern herself habitually with things not of her sex, and without this experience [i.e., in proper marriage—TRANS.] her natural grace suffers, and in some cases, her imagination consumes itself, her senses inflame, and the door of sin opens large before her.



A propos my last book on Justice, you have found it smart to say that it embarks on a new voyage in search of the *absolute*. You consider it a very unfortunate lapse for me, well known today for the war I have waged against the *absolute*, and who in the past has been well known for my attacks on property, to go thus in search of the absolute under another name. Also, a propos this absolute with which I am infatuated, you miss no opportunity in accusing me haughtily of misinforming people about justice. The accusation is serious: if I am convicted of absolutism, I should be suspect; I no longer merit being listened to in anything; I don't have the right, among others, to speak either of marriage or women. In truth, it is disquieting.

Examining below, not my conscience, which in absolute fact reproaches me for nothing, but yours, I have asked myself if you know yourselves what you mean when you speak of justice and the absolute. And this is what I have found . . .

If by ABSOLUTE one understands the *certain*, then certainly I believe in the absolute and I affirm it, since I believe in certain ideas, in ideas of an absolute certitude, such as the truths of mathematics, the law of the series, the succession of time, the relation of causality, the notion of equilibrium, etc. If by ABSOLUTE one understand the *universal*, I respond again that I am a partisan of the absolute, since I believe in universal ideas, since I admit universals and categories, to which I attribute a truth equally objective and subjective; and that of

all these universal ideas or categories, the most universal to my eyes is *JUSTICE*.

But never, to my knowledge, has one considered these terms: the universal, the certain, the absolute, as synonyms, unless they are associated in this manner: when something has absolute certitude, the absolute becomes then an adjective that applies to all sorts of ideas and objects, in order to mark the highest power, ideality, or reality.

When I push back into the absolute, I understand, with all logicians it seems to me, an essence or entity that reunites in itself at once, and to an infinite degree, all power, all justice, etc. The absolute takes then a logical, ontological, aesthetic, juridical acceptation: nothing is clearer than this.

Justice, which I take as the foundation of my philosophy, is not absolute, even if it is for me a reality and an absolute certitude. The proof is that I can subtract from the notion of Justice all human legislation and all morality, but I cannot, with this same notion, give being to a fly; I will not discover the system of the world; I will not make a statue of a *gladiator*, I will not invent algebra. I will not even invent, with this sole notion of *law*, a political constitution, since, to apply the law, one has to understand in depth other relations not directly relevant to law; political, economic, geographic, historical relations, etc.; none of which prevents Justice from being absolutely certain of its nature, in all times and in all its decrees; absolute the way science and arithmetic are certain, limited to the formation of numbers that one can extend as far as logarithms.

You, ladies, on the contrary . . . understand neither justice, the absolute, the universal, nor certitude.

For you, nothing is certain, nothing is universal, nothing is just in itself. EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE, *mutable, variable*, like waves in the sea. To sustain the contrary, that is, to admit certain ideas, universal notions, immutable principles of justice, is to search for the ABSOLUTE, to degrade morality; wisdom consists in taking things according to circumstances and from the point of view that seems most profitable. Today republic, tomorrow monarchy; once marriage and family, later free love; sometimes socialist democracy, sometimes industrial and landlord feudalism; Christian of the Middle Ages, Protestant with Luther, deist with Rousseau, Malthusian speculator in the nineteenth century. Dare then to speak clearly, if you want to see yourselves clear;

admit what you have in your heart, and what judges you. What you qualify and discover as *absolute* in me, madame, is reason, truth, reality, justice, certitude, all morality, all natural and social law;—and your *relativism* is Pyrronism, the destruction of all reason, all science, and all morality, all liberty. For you society is arbitrary power, economic speculation, concubinage—I use the most honest phrase—in the family, prostitution of conscience, everywhere manipulation of credulity, cupidity, and all the bad instincts of man.



All truth implies harmony, symmetry, serial terms, that is to say, RELATION. The moment harmony is interrupted, the series mutilated, there is no longer relation; the *relative* does not exist.

Another cause of your error: certain beings, certain ensembles produce themselves by continuous increase; such are living beings, such also is justice.

You say, in your own logic: slavery is better than cannibalism, service is better than slavery, the proletariat better than serfdom, etc. Then, you conclude, slavery is relatively good, the proletariat relatively good, etc.; and, as one never arrives at the perfect, at the absolute, everything is relatively good and bad.

But all this is the myopic logic of people who reason only approximately, or who take conventional phrases as dialectical maxims. Truth, logical, philosophical, exact, severe, is altogether different. Justice, true to itself, in all its parts, develops *progressively* in humanity. To the extent progress is achieved, humanity raises itself above the condition of the animal, in order to enter a state of society and justice. The result is that slavery is not more true, either in itself or relatively, than cannibalism; it is still animalistic; serfdom, the proletariat, are still animalistic, fatalistic, progressively reduced by the action of liberty and justice . . .

Thus, your skepticism rests on absolutely nothing, only on confused ideas and arbitrary definitions: your philosophy, I repeat, is chaotic, promiscuous, I will tell you later that it is prostitution . . .

You speak of the *relative*, of *relative* truth, and you oppose this word to the *absolute*.

But there again you are not in the true, and you see only confusion. All truth is true from a double point of view: in itself, and considered

individually; and as an integrated and constituent part of a system of things, of which full intelligence gives us, in effect, an aspect of the absolute.

Thus, each proposition by Euclid is true in itself, and abstraction is made of all geometry; and it is true like serial terms in geometry, of which the set is true also.—The theory of tides is true, independent of the Copernican system;—the circulation of blood, the system of nutritional functions are true facts in themselves, independent of any theory of reproduction; that which does not impede these functions is also true, in their relations with generation, the cerebral system, etc. Here we find the absolute and the relative; and you speak of imaginary things, in an uncertain light, when you oppose them to each other; they subsist together, and even when you take apart each idea, each phenomenon, each created being, and see that it still forms a whole, a universal, an *absolute* (even philosophy does not hesitate here to apply this term), you recognize that the *absolute* and the relative are once again identical.

Truth is double-sided; and its most luminous side is that of relation, since when one understands a proposition in itself, one doesn't understand the truth in all its scope; one knows something, but one doesn't know everything.



All this means for you, madame,⁴ who professes to cultivate the ideal, that there is not really any ideal, there are only objects that more or less attract desire, concupiscence. The *ideal*, for all men who search within themselves, is a word by which one expresses the conformity of a being with its type. It speaks also of the faculty of mind by which, in view of realities that are always more or less defective, we find again the perfect model we suppose invincibly to exist in the thought of creative nature, in the reason of God. In this sense, the *ideal*, a thing not real, but perfectly intelligible, is an absolute, since it reunites truth, harmony, exactitude, proportion, force, beauty. We attain it not, this is certain; but we seek after it, as we seek after the law of justice; we degrade ourselves when we follow something else. The renunciation of the ideal is a sign of our decadence.

You, on the contrary, deny a priori this ideal, since you deny it as absolute, you deny, in your thought, that *absolute* is synonymous with

truth, law, certitude. For you there is as a result, and paradoxically, only the ideal; and that which you call by this name is all that pleases you. This is the very essence of ugliness. The ideal is a word that you should accordingly delete from your dictionary, just as you should the *absolute*, the *relative*, the *certain*, the *universal*, because they signify nothing, absolutely nothing for you. You must replace them with another, called, in Latin, *libido*, in French: *fantasy*.



Today, the multitude of artists and people of letters know only one thing, *fantasy*, and, with *fantasy*, they estrange themselves equally from the *real* and the *ideal*. There is neither truth nor sublimity in their works; truths are fashionable merchandise, articles of pornocracy.

But we are not yet at the bottom of this. You mistake everything about the character of the ideal; after having denied the absolute, you make your GOD that which understands itself very well as a religion without principles, without law, without certitude, without universal ideas, without notion, without justice, without mores, in a century where all these things have been replaced by *fantasy*, that which implies inconsequence, contradiction.

I have explained, in the theory of progress I've tried to present, how progress had its principle in justice; how, outside of justice, any political, economic, literary, philosophical development became subversive and dissolute, how the ideal had been given as a means to bring us to justice, and how finally, if this same ideal, instead of serving as an auxiliary instrument of law, was taken as the rule and end of life, there would follow for society decadence and death. In a word, I subordinated the ideal to justice, the idea of which is, from the point of view of speculative reason, less universal; and the sentiment of which is, from the point of view of practical reason, less social than lawful.

You, on the contrary, subordinate law to the ideal, in the decadent manner of idolatrous polytheists: in this you accord perfectly with the modern bohemian, for whom the maxim is, as you know, *art for art's sake*.—For the principle of art for art's sake produces corollaries of all sorts, which enter naturally into your catechism: power for power, war for war, money for money, love for love, jouissance for jouissance . . .

The school of fantasy, by which you give to us, without knowing it, and by the sole fact of a perversion in your brain and a malady in your soul, an absurd metaphysic, is *jouissance*, it is vice, immorality, political degradation: it is PORNOCRACY.



For you who, on the contrary, see nothing in society but abstraction, who consequently recognize in it neither attributes, functions, relations, nothing of what constitutes existence and life, the social state is the result of relations that are, according to you, essentially mutable and variable. For you there is no constitution of society, no international law, no economic system: everything is governed by fantasy, by the whim of circumstances and according to the wisdom of that which chance, caprice of the multitude, corruption, or force has proposed for the management of the general interest . . .

For certain centralizers, society or the State is all; the individual, nothing; the first absorbs the second.—For you, society is nothing; the individual alone exists, male or female; society is a word that serves to designate the ensemble of relations of individuals among themselves (as if individuals could sustain these relations, and not create, ipso facto, an entirely concrete superior [i.e., still abstract—TRANS.] reality that transcends them!) The centralizers end up with communism, which is the same thing as despotism; you end up with anarchy or fantasy; but as fantasy and anarchy are impracticable by their nature, force exists to nominalists like you in the need for force; it is thus that, dividing the two extreme points of the horizon, tyranny is born.



I remember one day, in 1848, a meeting where I explained the principles of the People's Bank. Pierre Leroux⁵ tried to refute my system, arguing that it contradicted, from one end to the other, the *law of the Triad*. Impatiently, I observed to the philosopher that the Triad, in the matter of finance, of discounting [*escompte*], was inapplicable, considering that everything goes there, as in accounting, under two terms: *debt* and *credit*, *active* and *passive*, *sale* and *purchase*, *consumption* and *production*, etc.: "Your political economy," wrote P. Leroux, "is false; your accounting false: I tell you, in the name of the Triad, that book-keeping must be divided in TRIPLE parts, not in *two parts*, which is

absurd!" P. Leroux then went on to accuse double bookkeeping of having engendered misery and the proletariat . . .



The old kings of France went so far as to pretend that money was nothing but a sign, they had the right to give to a 1-franc coin the value of 5 francs, 10 francs and 50 francs; they became counterfeiters.

I say, on the contrary, that money is a pure convention, a manner of abridging the multiplicity of exchanges; that at bottom, *products* are exchanged for *products*; that money is itself only a product, despite the privilege it enjoys; that, as commonly happened in primitive societies, one could again today easily go without it; that in any case, commerce is in its nature free and has no right to pay anyone.

Same thing for the Bank. Here Mr. Enfantin,⁶ defending his [triple] synthesis, fights for his altar, for his hearth.

Since in *weighing* the intervention of a third term is necessary [for Enfantin], and the same is true in the act of exchange, so it will be the same in the operations of credit, which are nothing but a more complicated application of the use of money and exchange. The intervention of a third term will here then also be necessary; this intervention will come from the Bank of France, authorized by the State, from joint stock banks, equally authorized, from privileged stockbrokers, etc. For all these services, a right will be perceived to *discounts*, to *charges*, to *commissions*, or to *interest*; all these words express nuances of one and the same thing: the right of intervention.

I say, to the contrary, that the establishment of a social Bank has no need whatsoever of the intervention of a third power; that this third power is a pure fiction; that the State here represents only the *mutuality* of citizens, which mutuality originally supposes only *two* terms as in accounting, *debit* and *credit*, lender and borrower; that this is how a *credit union* organizes itself, of which there are many examples in Belgium; that consequently, credit-like commerce can and must one day work without any other fee than the *costs* of the operation.



Catholicism, the religion of divine right, which affirms the necessity of a priesthood, which makes the priest the intermediary between man's conscience and his liberty; the judge, an intermediary between parties;

the banker, an intermediary in commerce; the prince, an intermediary in all social and political relations; Catholicism, nonetheless, never went so far as to suppose, in marriage, the existence of any intermediary. The priest gave blessing to the spouses, but he left them the liberty to make their own choices; he did not meddle in the union. The same goes for the municipal officer in charge of civil marriage; he receives the *declaration* of the spouses and registers them, so that the world would know that this man and this woman are husband and wife.

Mr. Enfantin lacks the same scruple. Man and woman, he tells you, are the first two terms of the equation. But where is the third power that unites them? This power is once again society, he tells you, that of the prince or pontiff, authorized agent of its powers. Not only, then, does this intermediary witness the union, but he makes it: it is he who, in the Enfantinian theory, judges the aptitude of the spouses, their mutual *suitability*; it is he, in a word, who distributes to men their brides, to women their grooms, according to the science he has for their sympathies and their antipathies; it is he, it follows, who pronounces their separation, when their mutual love is extinguished; he who commits them to new bonds; the androgynous priest, in a word, makes and unmakes amorous unions, determining their duration. For everything is *relative*, the *ideal* changes, don't forget; love, finally, is FREE.

But if one supposes that here, as in the bank, as in politics, etc., the *go-between* has the right to tax, I wonder what can play the role of the same *go-between* in the conjugal relation? Up until now, we haven't had pornocracy; but what name would you give to the prince-pontiff charged with the purveyance of wives and husbands? What do you say of this synthesis? It has a name in the language of prostitution.

I'll stop: I've said enough to make it clear to whoever reads these pages that your metaphysics, that the metaphysics of Mr. Enfantin, is nothing but confusion, waste, chaos, realization of abstractions and negation of realities; that you don't understand the meaning of the words: *abstract, concrete, absolute, relative, certainty, truth, universal, law, thesis, antithesis* and *synthesis*; that all your philosophy reduces to a promiscuity of notions, and that the promiscuity of notions directs you to *pure fantasy*, in *law, science, art, and morals*; to the arbitrary in government, to speculation in business, to shocks in the realm of justice; to prostitution and hustling in love; in one word, to PORNOCRACY.

Notes

1. Proudhon's text is a response to feminist critics and also to writers who influenced them. The former he addresses without full attribution; in the edition from which I have worked, posthumously published in 1875, initials indicate their names. One was Jenny D'Hericourt (1809–1875), who wrote an influential response to Proudhon, incorporated into the book *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman* (1864). The other was Juliette Lambert, author of *Idées anti-proudhoniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage* (1858). A background target for Proudhon is a utopian socialism associated primarily with the name of Saint-Simon and committed to positivist principles and social reforms (including the abolition of coverture laws and the legalization of prostitution), in coordination with a strong technocratic state.

2. Elsewhere Proudhon makes it clear that marriage is a means of sublimating jealous feelings that are nonetheless also indispensably part of the man's virile force.

3. Alexander Parent Duchâtelet (1790–1836) was a medical doctor who wrote a monumental social history of prostitution in Paris, published in 1836.

4. Here he addresses Juliette Lambert in particular.

5. A philosopher and political economist (1797–1871), associated with the Saint-Simonian sect.

6. Barthelemy Prosper Enfantin (1796–1864), social reformer and a founder of Saint-Simonianism, whose influence on his feminist critics Proudhon traces in a pamphlet by Juliette Lambert, presumably *Idées anti-proudhoniennes*.