

CONTEMPORARY ANARCHIST STUDIES

Making Another World Possible

Anarchism, Anti-Capitalism
and Ecology in Late 19th and
Early 20th Century Britain

Peter Ryley

B L O O M S B U R Y

Making Another World Possible

CONTEMPORARY ANARCHIST STUDIES

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All my postgraduate studies were undertaken part-time in hours stolen from a frantically busy and precarious career in adult education. It has been a bittersweet experience that I would not have missed for anything. Sweet, because adult education is entirely voluntary, genuinely loved, hugely creative, life-transforming and emotionally intense. Bitter, because it is being lost. Several of the subjects of this book worked in adult education's early years, investing it with their idealism; today successive governments have eroded its funding and ceased to value it. Much has gone. The ultimate irony is that following an early retirement from the now-closed Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Hull, I currently teach standard undergraduate students part-time at Manchester Metropolitan University in a building that used to be the College of Adult Education in Manchester, which was where I started my career some thirty years previously. Over the years, I have worked with some tremendous managers, William Tyler, Terri Kelly and Daniel Vulliamy, and made lasting friendships with many of my colleagues, too numerous to name here. It also gave me a rich social life, not least with our troika nights. Many of my ideas and attitudes towards anarchism were developed through my teaching and though most of the programmes and projects I established and the institutions I worked for are no more, I still owe a debt of gratitude to the hundreds of students without whom I would not have made a living, let alone such a stimulating one. This book would not be what it is without them. And so, if I have a dedication for the book, it would be to adult education, with the profound hope that it will once again be valued, together with its aim of individual and communal empowerment and its spirit of liberty.

INTRODUCTION

Much of this book has been written in Greece. My house is in the southwest of the Pelion peninsula, a crooked finger of land enclosing the Pagasitic Gulf. It is an area of breathtaking natural beauty associated in mythology with the Centaurs and Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. In 1839 David Urquhart wrote of his visit to the region:

This district exhibits what the soil can produce, and what happiness man can attain to when relieved from the intrusion of laws.¹

What could be a more appropriate location to write about anarchism? And today, it could be hardly more relevant.

The book has had two manifestations. The first was a PhD thesis, completed in 2006. Then Greece was booming and it would have been easy to shrug off the dysfunctional bureaucracy of the Greek state and romanticize local idiosyncrasies in the light of Urquhart's observation. By the time the opportunity arose to update and significantly rewrite the manuscript for publication, things had changed dramatically.

At the time of writing, the country is at the epicentre of a pan-European financial crisis; the result of banking failures and sovereign debt, exacerbated by the flaws in European Monetary Union. Reeling from austerity measures imposed from outside by a 'troika' of lenders, Greece's economy is spiralling downwards, poverty growing, whilst street demonstrations are met with clouds of tear gas and police brutality. Now anarchist ideas seem more urgent. Self-conscious anarchists are on the front line of protests whilst autonomous organizations respond to the collapsing living standards with mutual aid and alternative economic action.²

Yet, this is not the only on-going crisis and may not even be the most profound. Whilst the Greek protest movements call for measures to promote economic growth, the uncertain impact of a warming climate points to a contradiction. Any growth requires increases in consumption, and that additional production and consumption, at least if it is dependent on fossil fuels, could exacerbate climate change, threatening catastrophe. Calls for ecological sustainability then are becoming integral to any radical political economy.

And this is where the anarchist ideas that developed in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries are startlingly prescient. Global warming may not have been apparent at the time, but anarchist writers were acutely aware of the limits to growth and of the unsustainability of ever-expanding consumption. They also developed alternative political economies that explicitly addressed the financial failings of late Victorian capitalism, all within a much wider libertarian philosophy. Whilst it is hard to see an immediate anarchist solution arising from these twin crises, anarchist ideas have become increasingly prominent and some have been adopted as part of a popular response, most notably by the Occupy movement and its counterpart in the debtor European nations, the Indignant Citizens Movement.

At this point, nearly every book on

I look at launches into a lament about how it is misunderstood and stereotyped in popular imagination as an extremist doctrine advocated by bomb-wielding nihilists.³ I won't join in, but when reading them something interesting struck me. When writers try to move from saying what anarchism isn't to trying to define exactly what it is, it turns out to be an elusive beast and few definitions wholly satisfy.⁴

Definitions of anarchism tend to break down into three main types: political, economic and social. The first focuses on the anarchist rejection of the state and advocacy of autonomous direct action. The second tries to define anarchism in terms of its political economy, most frequently in its relationship to socialism; whilst the third focuses on personal liberation from what John Stuart Mill called 'the tyranny of the prevailing opinion',⁵ thereby creating, in John Moore's words, 'an entire art of living, which is simultaneously anti-authoritarian, anti-ideological and antipolitical'.⁶ The book will touch on all of these – the logic of anti-statism; the importance and growth of counterculture, especially in relation to gender and education; but my central focus will be on political economy. And that will involve a critical scrutiny of the relationship between anarchism and socialism.

Ruth Kinna gives a pretty good political definition of anarchism, describing it as a 'doctrine that aims at the liberation of peoples from political domination and economic exploitation by the encouragement of direct or non-governmental action'.⁷ But the moment we start asking about how domination and exploitation are to be countered, the central divisions in anarchist theory become apparent.

Let's start with Amster *et al.*, who place classical anarchism 'firmly within the socialist movement, in opposition to capitalism and private ownership of the means of production'.⁸ The problem with this is that it is self-limiting; it excludes the individualist anarchists who favoured private ownership and who are a major feature of this study. This inconvenience is often dealt with by denying the validity of individualism as an authentic anarchist perspective. For example, Seán M. Sheehan, in his short book '*Anarchism*',

mentioned the egoist Max Stirner, but was dismissive, describing him as being ‘far removed from mainstream communist anarchism’ and talks of the ‘communist heart of anarchism’.⁹ Sheehan goes even further and, rather like an over-optimistic marriage guidance counsellor, hopes to reconcile anarchism with Marxism.¹⁰ Given the mental and physical cruelty dished out by Marxists over the years, I feel that irretrievable breakdown is the only sensible option. Let’s hope that this time the anarchists get to keep the house.

Even one of the best modern anarchist writers, Colin Ward, writes off individualism. Though fairer to it than some, he sees it as an American phenomenon, thereby ignoring the substantial British contribution, and concludes that in the twentieth century ‘their inventiveness seems to be limited to providing an ideology for untrammelled market capitalism’.¹¹ In one sense, he is right. After the nineteenth century, individualists made their peace with capitalism and, enthusiastically promoted by Murray Rothbard, morphed into right libertarians. Despite this, a left libertarian strand remains, combining elements of classic liberal economics with social libertarianism, emphasizing its radical inheritance and challenging the dominance of anarcho-capitalism. This is far closer to the individualists discussed in this book. Whatever the later developments, it cannot be denied that individualists have made a considerable contribution to anarchist thought, sharing the same antipathy to hierarchy but reaching for different solutions. They were particularly prominent in the period I am writing about and deserve to be included in the anarchist pantheon, yet their inclusion would deal a blow to the idea of anarchist political economy as *solely* a variant of mainstream socialism.

So how do we reach an inclusive definition? David Goodway gets closer with a neat aphorism describing anarchism’s ‘thoroughly socialist critique of capitalism ... combined with a liberal critique of socialism’.¹² This is not quite there though, because individualism’s critique of capitalism is not socialist,¹³ based as it is on extensive property rights and equitable exchange. I think we need to take a step back and get some additional perspective.

There are two ways to approach the problem. The first is to break with the idea of anarchism as a doctrine. Instead, I see anarchism as being rooted in an ethical choice, to live without hierarchy. Once that choice is made, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which this may be possible. Of course, in a deeply stratified society we are drawn into discussions about class and economics and these have dominated one view of anarchism. But then hierarchy manifests itself in so many other ways – in gender relations, in education systems, in social status, in the structure of organizations, in managerialism, in our approach to the natural world and other species, through to the inequitable constraints on our personal liberty and simply in everyday life. And so, anarchists are drawn into discussions on all these

and more for the simple reason that hierarchy permeates our existence. Being good anarchists, and given the many possibilities and existential contradictions of our social, economic and personal lives, they don't agree. So anarchism is not fixed, it is a debate, an exploration of an ethical commitment and a living way of thinking. In this way, I am inclined to see anarchism as a process rather than a prescription.

The second is narrower, concentrates on political economy and is more directly relevant to this book. It is drawn from the anarchist anthropologist David Graeber's stimulating book on debt,¹⁴ a sustained essay on the interlocking of economics with ethics. Graeber puts forward this interesting proposition:

I will provide a rough-and-ready way to map out the main possibilities, by proposing that there are three main moral principles on which economic relations can be founded, all of which occur in any human society, and which I will call communism, hierarchy, and exchange.¹⁵

And this is where the divergence in anarchism occurs. Rejecting hierarchy means that communism and exchange remain and different strands of anarchism attach themselves to each. Anarcho-communism emphasizes collectivism, mutual aid and social solidarity, whereas individualists favour ownership, mutualism and markets.

Graeber is critical of modern markets, seeing them as impersonal frameworks, 'in which it was possible to treat even neighbours as if they were strangers'.¹⁶ However, another interesting and original book, Paul Seabright's *The Company of Strangers*,¹⁷ turns this on its head and argues that actually markets enable us to treat strangers as if they were neighbours. He contends that we are the only primates that collaborate with others outside our immediate kin network and we do so without direction through markets; '... even some of the simplest activities of modern society depend on intricate webs of international cooperation that function without anyone's [sic] being in overall charge'.¹⁸ So here we have two views: one that sees markets as an impersonal instrument of dehumanization, exploitation and commodification, and the other that argues that they are, or can become, networks of global cooperation and mutual dependency.¹⁹

It has become commonplace to associate markets with capitalism, as if the two were intrinsically linked. However, the individualists challenged that notion and opposed the emerging corporate capitalism of their day. They argued that cooperative markets could only exist in the absence of the distorting power of the state and through free currencies as the medium of exchange. Above all, the equality of each party in the process was to be ensured by extensive property rights. In doing so, they divorced the free market from capitalism, distinguishing between markets as a method of exchange and capitalism as a pattern of ownership. And it was this

question of ownership that became another fault line, dividing the anarchist movement into those who viewed property itself as the main instrument of exploitation as opposed to those who felt that the problem lay with its accumulation and monopolization.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were attempts to reconcile this division through the promotion of ‘anarchism without adjectives’. At its simplest, this meant recognition of commonalities and a toleration of diversity. But this was not all. A more synthetic approach was emerging that partly centred on ecology. And it was this approach that systematized something that was inherent in all the anarchist thought of this period – a rejection of the dominant model of progress based on endless increases in consumption driving permanent economic growth.

The critique of progress encountered in the writings of the British anarchists of this period needs to be distinguished from two other commonly held anti-progressive views. The first was the ‘back to the land’ movement, popular in Victorian England,²⁰ arguing for rural resettlement and a predominantly agrarian economy. The second is more pervasive and is more often associated with the political right – Traditionalism.²¹

Traditionalism is a doctrine that repudiates scientific rationalism in favour of a mystical understanding rooted in perennialism, a belief in the unity of spiritual truth that is expressed by all religions. It rejects modernism and yearns for a return to a traditional, utopian and largely invented past. The Traditionalist idea of progress is cut from the same cloth. In a process referred to as ‘inversion’, they argue that what is perceived to be progress is really decline. The reason why this should be so is that the more Western society advances, the more it moves away from the spiritual truths that were embodied in the traditional societies of the East. This always struck me as another example of Orientalism and, following Andre Gunder Frank’s convincing and provocative critique of Eurocentrism in economic history,²² marginalizes the important contribution of the East to the development of the very modern society Traditionalists deplore.²³ This type of anti-progressive thinking has become popular in Green politics, though I like Michael Bywater’s splenetic response:

In short, the Ancients spent what thinking time they had trying to make phenomenological bricks without ontological straw. They were wrong about almost everything, hopelessly confused sequence and causation, left the scantiest record of their thinking, and croaked in short order...

Those who believe in the Wisdom of the Ancients disbelieve in any progress in human understanding. It is the intellectual equivalent of saying *There’s nothing worth watching on the telly any more* or *This so-called music the young people listen to, it’s rubbish*. In truth, it is not the Wisdom of the Ancients that we have lost; it’s any fathoming of their true Ignorance.²⁴

The problem is that both Bywater and Traditionalists are missing the point. Other peoples, particularly simple societies that have persisted into our era, have enormous knowledge and expertise in the management of their local environment. Some too had developed social ethics that certainly impressed Peter Kropotkin. However, their expertise and ethics were wrapped in metaphysical explanations that were clearly wrong. Both the Traditionalists and their critics focus on the metaphysics as being the source of either wisdom or ignorance depending on their point of view, whereas it is the expertise that is deserving of our respect.

Traditionalism certainly has links with some aspects of anarchism. Partly this was the result of personal journeys. For example, Alan Antliff in his fine study of anarchism and aesthetics²⁵ devotes much space to the 'arts and crafts' anarchism of Ananda Coomaraswamy. But, as the historian of Traditionalism, Mark Sedgwick, points out, by the 1920s he had moved to become a leading Traditionalist writer.²⁶ Modern anarchism has also taken up Traditionalist discourses. Arthur Versluis²⁷ and Mark Sedgwick²⁸ have also commented on its influences on the work of Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey), whilst the anarcho-primitivist Fredy Perlman pays direct tribute to one of the leading Traditionalist writers, Mircea Eliade.²⁹ Certainly, Perlman's book is a striking evocation of the idea of inversion.

Though there may be some traces and cross-influences, neither of these critiques were central to the ideas of the subjects of this book, who remained scientific rationalists, often enthusiasts for modern technologies and firm believers in the necessity of human progress. It is just that the progress they envisaged was not the same as that of the mainstream of both left and right. It was neither linear nor inevitable. They saw limits to growth, stressed the importance of intellectual, ethical and cultural development, and argued that the maximization of human liberty and self-determination was integral to human progress. What is more, their social and economic theories drew lessons from the natural sciences, specifically from Darwin's evolutionary biology and Ernst Haeckel's concept of ecology. And they often eschewed a simplistic monism. Progressives glorified the city, nostalgics yearned for arcadia, yet many of these anarchists argued for the unity of urban and rural, together with an ecological understanding of the place of humanity in both the natural and built environments.

This was a more commonplace view in the nineteenth century than is often perceived. For example, John Stuart Mill wrote in support of the 'stationary state', an end to economic growth, though only after technology had reduced the hours of labour and ensured sufficiency for all. Even then, he was adamant that 'a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement'.³⁰ And it is this sense of the possibilities of human and technological evolution that permeates the anarchism of this period. What anarchists were arguing for was a change in

social relations, social evolution and an understanding of humanity's place in nature that would make such progress possible.

I suppose that the next question that arises is, why choose history to explore these themes? The obvious answer is that I am an historian, more comfortable in the byways of the nineteenth century than in the modern, but there is obviously more to it than that. Firstly, I want to reassert the importance of history against the arrogance of the present, which stresses its own novelty and originality. Instead, I am with Graeber's view that almost all social possibilities are present in all periods of history and with Frank's suggestion that 'all manner of relations of production were and remain widely intermingled even within any one "society", not to mention world society as a whole'.³¹ The nineteenth century was not such a different world as it seems and the relevance of many of the ideas is manifest, even if some widespread beliefs, such as phrenology, now strike us as either sinister or comic.

In the same way, an understanding of modern anarchism is helped by knowledge of the evolution of anarchist ideas. It is one of the strengths of anarchism is that it takes its history seriously and not dogmatically, refusing to see its classic texts as holy writ. And this book tries to contribute to this historical exploration. It is an exercise in genealogy as elucidation; knowing what we were is often a way of enhancing our understanding of who we are and of where we are going.

My final aim is purely historical. There is a move in intellectual history towards empiricism as a way of counteracting anachronistic interpretations of ideas.³² This means looking at ideas in context rather than as isolated abstractions. This book is attempting to widen our understanding of the nature of anarchism and its place in the radical milieu that developed in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And what a milieu it was. The interconnections between groups and ideas and the sheer breadth of thinking are fascinating. Anarchism is often included in studies these days, but even where it is, the picture is incomplete. In particular, individualism is often absent or, if included, misunderstood, and a key synthetic figure like Patrick Geddes is well regarded but rarely included in the anarchist canon.

This book aims to provide a more inclusive picture of the anarchism of the period and to do so means that it has to explore minor journals, archives of correspondence, less famous writers and the idiosyncratic as well as the renowned. In reading this material, a remarkable picture emerges of a broadly non-sectarian milieu,³³ a free exchange of ideas, robust but comradely debates, profound disagreements but a mutual recognition that all were combatants in the struggle for liberty. Again, the tendency to exclude individualism is a perfect example of how our view can be shaped by anachronistic readings, in this case seeing individualists as neo-liberal capitalists, rather than the anti-capitalist radicals that they really were.

The book begins by looking at relevant modern anti-capitalist and Green politics before moving on to an historical discussion of how a distinctive political economy developed that questioned the conventional economic notion of progress. The second chapter discusses the development of anarcho-communism's thinking on revolution and mutual aid through the work of Peter Kropotkin, before subsequent chapters introduce the reader to the work of two groups of individualists: the English Individualists, a group of anti-statist libertarians, and the individualist anarchists. Next, it charts the development of communist anarchism, focusing on three main groups: working class revolutionaries, British and European writers and activists mainly clustered around the Freedom group, and the rarely included Christian anarchists. Finally, it examines the emergence of a distinctive ecological anarchism in the work of Elisée Reclus and Patrick Geddes.

Inevitably, the book cannot be comprehensive. I have not discussed syndicalism and Patrick Geddes is the only figure included who continued to be active for long after the First World War. For those interested in the later development of a distinctive British anarchism, Carissa Honeywell has written on some of the key people who followed.³⁴ However, I hope that what follows will give the reader an understanding of the foundations of an indigenous British anarchist tradition, though also one with strong European links and influences as well as contacts with the United States, and will show its enduring importance both to the milieu of its time and to the wider development of anarchist ideas in the years that followed.

PREFACE

New politics in a time of crisis

It was back in 1996 that Brian Morris wrote: ‘I think that Socialist Anarchism is the only viable political tradition that complements ecology, and offers a genuine response to the social and ecological crisis that we now face.’³⁵ In the same year, the Zapatista rebels of the Chiapas region in Mexico, who had first emerged two years previously, held the International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. As economies boomed and the brash confidence of market fundamentalists laid claim to the future, these two disparate movements bore witness to the fact that all was not well. The one reminded us of the natural limits of the capacity of the planet to sustain human activity; the other that famine was the constant companion of feast. More surprisingly, both elevated anarchist ideas from a fringe enthusiasm to play a central role in developing a new political strategy to combat both environmental degradation and global poverty. Today in 2012, the confidence of the boom years has evaporated. The financial bubble has burst, Arctic sea ice is melting at an alarming rate and a new politics is emerging, of which, as the activist and anthropologist David Graeber optimistically wrote, ‘Anarchism is the heart of the movement, its soul; the source of what’s new and hopeful about it’.³⁶

As a movement, this new politics has two main strands, economic and ecological, which have both taken many different forms. The movement for economic change was initially described as anti-globalization; it then tried to reclaim a positive image by referring to itself as the global justice movement; later it once again began to be described in terms of what it is against, becoming anti-capitalism. Most recently, the crisis in the Eurozone has created the Indignant Citizens Movement whose actions were copied by Occupy Wall Street, becoming known as the Occupy Movement after its model of protest by camping out in significant public spaces.³⁷ This youthful and noticeably leftist movement certainly draws on anarchism, despite efforts to co-opt it in more orthodox directions. What is more, the movement as a whole has not coalesced around a single, identifiable ideology or programme and has not spawned any centralized organization, much to the confusion of mainstream commentators who really don’t know what to make of it.

Green politics, in contrast, is older, better established and has a number of recognizable organizations and political parties standing for office in liberal democracies. Yet, even though Green organizations are becoming more conventional in the way they operate, Green politics itself has generated a variety of perspectives, many of which still sit way outside the comfort zone of mainstream politics. The convergence point of the two movements is scepticism about the direction of contemporary industrial societies and the urgent need to place the primary focus on the universal well-being of the person and the planet. However, on the specifics, there is little agreement and there is a sense that what both branches of this new politics have created is not a coherent movement but a radical milieu, a place of experiment and discussion – one similar in many ways to the milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before concentrating on its historical antecedents, it is good to hold some of the modern ideas fresh in our minds so that we can sense the resonances of the past running through the ideas of the radicals of today.

The origins of modern Green politics are conventionally traced back to the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, one of the first attempts to popularize worries about the use of chemicals in agriculture, although one of the aims of this book is to show that the politics of ecology is the offspring of a much older response to the rise of industrial society. Meanwhile, serious research into the consequences of increasing greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere had commenced more than a decade previously. Though global warming is top of the list of environmental threats today, in the 1960s this did not impact on the public imagination in the same way as the death of birds. Popularized environmentalism became the force behind new pressure groups, but, of course, the only real implication of Carson's book was to stop using DDT, not to revolutionize society. That environmentalism developed a political and social analysis to accompany its ecological one was by no means inevitable, nor was it necessary that it should have taken the form that it did. After all, romantic nature worship had played a part in Nazi ideology. Fortunately, eco-fascism has mainly confined itself to fictional dystopias and Greens chose to gaze leftwards, seeing that the environmental issues that had energized them were linked to the social, economic and cultural conflicts highlighted by the political left. To solve the former meant dealing with the latter. And so, ecology, as with nuclear weapons and peace politics before it, provided a vehicle for the activism of left-leaning radicals who were uncomfortable with both conventional mainstream politics and the constraining orthodoxies of the Marxist left. Left libertarians could now rally behind a green flag.

This Green ideology bore strong echoes of the past. Partly, this was a simple case of reinvention; arguments were put forward that reached similar conclusions to forgotten nineteenth-century discourses. However, there was also a process of rediscovery, a conscious choice to revive that

analysis, sometimes with the participation of people who connected the old and new movements. The most conspicuous of these was Murray Bookchin's attempt to combine anarchism and environmentalism into what he called Social Ecology,³⁸ despite his disdain for the 'tyranny of ossuary guardians ... who can be expected to lift a bony finger from out of the crypt and reprove us for ignoring nineteenth-century anarchists' passages on ecologically oriented social relationships and humanity's relationship to nature'.³⁹

The traditional divide in Green political thinking has conventionally been described as being between deep and shallow ecology. The coining of these terms is widely accredited to the Norwegian writer Arne Naess, who described shallow ecology, somewhat unfairly, as being concerned with 'the health and affluence of people in the developed countries' through fighting pollution and resource depletion. Deep ecology, however, is based on 'biospherical egalitarianism' ... 'a deep-seated respect, even veneration, for ways and forms of life [and] the equal right to live and blossom'.⁴⁰ Naess was making a clear distinction between an anthropocentric and ecocentric approach, one that has human well-being as the central concern and the other that sees the planet, or a sacralized nature, as the heart of environmental politics, of which humans are merely a dependent part.

One way to comprehend the scope of Green thought is to think of it as a spectrum. Each point on the scale reflects the extent to which contemporary industrial societies are accepted or rejected, each with a differing explanation as to the nature of oppression. Feminist critiques of patriarchy, socialist notions of exploitation, opposition to the domination of other species by humans and many other perspectives combine and recombine into a range of different variants of Green thought. At each end sits two sharply polarized extremes, the buoyant celebration of modernity of the 'new ecologists' and the decidedly gloomy outlook of the neo-primitivists.

'New ecology' is a combination of Green and ethical consumerism with an acceptance of the controlling role of humans in the biosphere. Because of this, it falls to the very people who have created the crisis to fix it. Modernity and advanced technology are not the problem; they provide the solution. 'New ecologists' are not anti-state or anti-capitalist; they favour nuclear energy to combat global warming, genetically engineered food to eliminate hunger and malnutrition; and, above all, urbanization as the most ecologically sustainable form of human habitation, promoting sociability, community and inventiveness. It is as if they were being deliberately heretical. They may be thoroughly realistic about the environmental dangers we face, but they are also hugely optimistic about our ability to solve the problems through continuing advances in technology. The environment requires the problem-solving skills of the engineer, not the romantic dreams of the social revolutionary. As one of their leading lights, Stewart Brand puts it,

If Greens don't embrace science and technology and jump ahead to a leading role in both, they may follow the Reds into oblivion.⁴¹

In contrast, deep green anarcho-primitivists are utterly hostile to modernity. For them, there is a dystopia and it is now; we are living in it. In fact it isn't just modernity that concerns them, they think that it all went wrong in the Neolithic era. They base much of their thinking on an historical narrative that combines a partial reading of archaeological and anthropological evidence to assert that 'life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health'.⁴² This is contrasted with modernity, which is written of as a catalogue of alienation, mental illness, misery and despair.⁴³ That humans were expelled from Eden is not down to the displeasure of God, but the rise of the state, itself intrinsically linked to settled agriculture, as a system of domination, slavery and exploitation.

In all anarcho-primitivist writing two themes are present throughout. The first is the Traditionalist notion of 'inversion', the idea that progress is, in fact, regression and that everything is getting worse. In this way, the Renaissance is seen as another step in the death of human communities and the Enlightenment as a further elimination of wisdom. The second is an existential notion of nature, not seeing it as being merely our material environment, but as something integral, spiritual and life-enhancing. Both are evident in this extract from Fredy Perlman's idiosyncratic account of human history:

Reduced to blank slates by school, we cannot know what it was to grow up heirs to thousands of generations of vision, insight, experience.

We cannot know what it was to learn to hear the plants grow, and to feel the growth.

We cannot know what it was to feel the seed in the womb and learn to feel the seed in earth's womb, to feel as the Earth feels, and at last to abandon oneself and let Earth possess one, to Become Earth, to become the first mother of all life. We're truly poor. Thousands of generations of vision, insight and experience have been erased.⁴⁴

These sweeping generalizations do not impress; however, at least they do not lapse into the misanthropy of nostalgic conservatism.⁴⁵ Neo-primitivists advocate human freedom, though seeing it as freedom *from* civilisation, and argue that individual and communal self-realization can only take place in 'wilderness'.

These mark the extremes of the Green movement. So, what do the subjects of this book have in common with them? Well, despite the shared view of the state as an imposed form of oppression, very little with anarcho-primitivists. They do have contemporary antecedents in the 'back

to the land' movement and some of their esoteric notions can be found in Theosophy, but nineteenth-century ecological anarchism was actually closer to the 'new ecologists'. For instance, the celebration of the city is to be found in Kropotkin, Reclus and Geddes. They too felt that a living city was an organic community shaped by the actions of its people rather than being ruled, or even planned, from above. Both groups also supported city gardening and bio-regionalism. Importantly, the 'new ecologists' are advocates of the rights of urban squatters to security of tenure, giving them possession and/or property rights to their living space. Most of all, the anarchists discussed here were hugely enthusiastic about advanced and ever-improving technologies, seeing in them the potential for human liberation and social evolution. Many came from the secular rationalist Freethought tradition. They were enlightenment thinkers who would have shared the despair of Murray Bookchin, who raged against what he called 'the current apostles of irrationality'.⁴⁶

Where these early anarchist would diverge from 'new ecology' is in its failure to develop an emancipatory political economy and its complacency about existing power structures. This is what Bookchin attempted to redress with his Social Ecology, firmly rooted in a critique of the hierarchical nature of capitalism and capitalist society and the need to replace it with a form of ecological socialism, administered through a decentralized municipal libertarianism.

Bookchin's refusal to countenance the philosophy of deep ecology led him to finally break with anarchism, advocating a new (and thoroughly anarchistic) communalism in its place. A bridge between the two was suggested by John Clark, who argued for 'An authentic social ecology ... inspired by a vision of human communities achieving their fulfilment as an integral part of the larger, self-realizing earth community'.⁴⁷ And it is this that best characterizes mainstream modern Green politics, bringing together opposition to hierarchy with the idea of self-regulating sustainable communities, sitting within ecologically coherent bio-regions whose borders are determined by natural features rather than political and ethnic divisions. It is a picture that envisages humans living freely as an equal partner with nature, rather than being its sovereign. It is a broad church, more critical of modern industrial society than the 'new ecologists', accommodating a range of positions, and it has also been a spur for activism. Its political model is participatory, communal and non-hierarchical. Its focus on environmental issues meant that it could reach out beyond its ideological soul mates, creating, for example, a coalition with conservationists over road building, as well as with one with animal welfare organizations to campaign against fox hunting and the use of animals in scientific research. The impact of its broader political style and ideological message has been more limited, however. Rather than convert mainstream politics to a distinctly Green non-hierarchical approach, it is the mainstream that has reformed Green

political parties in its own image. As a result, there was space for another political movement that would articulate more than ecological issues.

This new movement would be a voice for political and economic change concentrating on the impact on people and the planet of turbo-capitalism and growing corrosive inequality. Its target was the elite consensus around neo-liberal political economy, often described as ‘free market economics’, it saw it as anything but free. Instead, its opponents argued that just as the state reduced its role in social welfare and demand management, it was active in creating and policing an environment that allowed transnational corporations to operate as they wished, whilst reducing social protection against corporate power and the ability of people to resist. Neo-liberalism was also an international project, with rules enforced by international organizations, going by the shorthand term of ‘globalization’. The movement was to gain renewed strength and purpose in reaction to the austerity programmes adopted in the wake of the financial crash of 2008. But its first manifestation was as a rural protest, right at the intersection between ecology and political economy.

The Zapatista rising is often seen as the inspiration for the mass protests that developed against a particular version of global capitalism. It bore all the familiar hallmarks of a Latin American insurgency, but it actually subverted the genre. The young urban intellectuals who went into the Lacandón jungle were changed by the experience and abandoned Marxist/Leninist revolutionary orthodoxy in favour of an acceptance of the limits of ideology and of revolutionary violence. Instead, they have tried to establish a localized, participatory, non-hierarchical movement, supporting the land rights of indigenous peoples and peasants against the impact of globalized free trade. Their revolutionary experiment struck a chord with many younger activists who were increasingly disillusioned with the mainstream and were seeking alternatives. Its lack of a prescriptive ideology also allowed a wide range of individuals and groups to vest their hopes in *Zapatismo*.

Yet, the Zapatistas were not the first to fight for the right to land ownership and the preservation of the cultures of indigenous peoples. They shared prominence within the protest movement with groups like the Brazilian landless peasants movement, *Sem Terra*, but I want to concentrate on something very different, communities that not only came into conflict with global trade and resource depletion, but also with the environmental movement. These are northern peoples who earned their living through whale and seal hunting.

Unlike agricultural land, where forms of ownership or secure occupation can be more easily defined, the seas are typical of what Elinor Ostrom called ‘common-pool resources’.⁴⁸ These are theoretically open to all to use. Ostrom’s most celebrated work was to show how seemingly unrestrained access to the commons, conventionally thought to result in overuse and

ecological damage, was, in reality, limited by the users acting collectively through institutions of their own making that were very different to either the state or the market. In this way, people have managed local ecosystems with considerable success.

This is precisely what Terry Glavin's book, *The Lost and Left Behind*,⁴⁹ describes. The book is a defence of diversity and reports on some of the damage being done by our era, the age of the Sixth Great Extinction. Glavin does not confine himself to bio-diversity and the loss of different species; he also includes the loss of cultures and languages together with the stories that unfold from them, a vernacular literature that is slowly slipping from our grasp. And culture is one of the tools of ecological self-regulation. It is because of this that he writes in support of rural communities that have lived off hunting and trading in the products of marine mammals in the far north. Consequently, he pits himself against Greens on some of their most emotive causes: the Canadian seal hunt, Norse whaling and the Faroe Islanders' harvesting of pilot whales. There's a reason for this. The preservation of human communities against the forces of exploitation and the conservation of natural species go hand-in-hand. For example, some of the first protests against industrial-scale whaling were riots by Norse whalers against Norway's new whaling stations in the early twentieth century. They had a vested interest. The unsustainable slaughter of whales being ushered in would not only deprive them of their livelihoods, but of their culture. The two were bound together in the practice of sustainability. The contrast between the ecological expertise of small whaling communities and the industrialized whaling fleets, together with the blunderings of international regulatory organizations makes one point clear: human liberty, self-determination and ecological sustainability are inextricably linked, something that would not have been lost on the earlier ecological anarchists.⁵⁰

Rural communities and developing countries were the cradle of protest. They had felt the impact of neo-liberalism first, mainly as a result of the structural adjustment packages forced on them as a result of the earlier debt crisis that followed the Mexico default of 1982. At the World Trade Organization convention in Seattle in 1999, the developed world caught up. The mass demonstrations and the battles with the police presaged a period of fluctuating outbursts of urban protest that continues to this day. The financial crisis has brought a new dimension. The movements in Greece and Spain have a direct cause and target – the austerity programmes imposed by international lenders in response to the Eurozone debt crisis – but the broader Occupy movement is harder to pin down. Some of the ideas being pitched seem to be simply a nostalgia for paternalistic capitalism, some call for a revival of Keynesian social democracy, others indulge anti-industrialist ideas such as degrowth, Marxists hope that this is the start of the final crisis of capitalism, anarchists that think they can subvert the state. It is indeed a 'movement of movements' and this seeming lack of coherence

has been a target of its enemies and critical friends alike. For example, Featherstone, Henwood and Parenti describe the protesters as ‘activismists’ who see self-righteous and purposeless activism as their sole aim.⁵¹ This sentiment reflects one of the main criticisms of Occupy, that it has failed to incorporate older established organizations, such as labour unions, and to develop a coherent political and economic strategy. This is a cogent argument, but one based on a misapprehension. What it really shows is that political commentators are uncomfortable with the messiness of a milieu.

Of course, there is more to it than that. No movement would be self-sustaining if all it had was a vacuum at its heart. There are two factors animating it. I find the first worrying; it is that the movement is an expression of growing disillusion with liberal democracy. An elite ideological consensus creates the illusion that there is no difference and no choice between parties and politicians. It is an overstatement. There are real differences in many areas and electoral politics holds out the promise of more than illusionary change, however limited. Added to this is the sense that political elites are part of an oligarchy, self-serving representatives of corporate rather than popular interests. It is easy to be cynical, but the difference between dictatorship and democracy is still profound. Just try mounting mass demonstrations in Syria. However, there is a more convincing case to be made about the undermining of democracy by corporate and financial power, especially for indebted nations. Debt is a power relationship; the creditor can dictate terms to the debtor. When national states are reduced to the role of supplicant, representative democracy is compromised. Thus, Occupy is attempting to restore it by other means. Its alternative method is the practice of ‘horizontality’, a participatory system of decision-making through committee structures without fixed hierarchies. Whether the enthusiasm and stamina needed to maintain the consequent myriad of meetings could be sustained outside an activist network must be in doubt. But there is a sense that this offers an antidote to managerialism within smaller organizations, without the risk of co-option and careerism inherent in representation.

The second factor is much more important. Occupy never set out to be the starting point for the creation of a social alternative; it is the product of one that already existed. The Spanish sociologist, Manuel Castells has studied empirical examples of what he calls ‘network societies’. For Castells, culture is at the heart of economics and rather than seeing counter-culture as dilettante self-indulgence, he thought it was a measured response to a sense of dissatisfaction with contemporary political economy. People began to seek greater freedom and fulfilment, rather than financial reward, through a growing informal economy and the communication networks that made it possible. When the financial system imploded, those operating in the informal economy felt vindicated in their beliefs and began to look outwards to respond positively to the crisis. This is how the Indignant

Citizens Movement was born, only joined later by those distressed by the sudden loss of their security and expectations.

In a study of alternative networks in Catalonia in the midst of the Eurozone crisis,⁵² Castells and his team of researchers identified a vast range of alternative economic action. These included ecological food production and distribution; independent markets and networks to barter goods and services; new social currencies and small-scale ethical banking; free universities; free Wi-Fi networks; and a range of cultural and social activities, particularly around music. People were beginning to fill the void left by the withdrawal of the state and the failing economy. They were making a new world within the old. Occupy is its political expression.

Castells makes it clear that the foundation of these networks is very middle-class, producing activities that reflected middle-class pretensions. The test for Occupy and the like is whether these actions can prove to be as appealing to broader sections of society. If some of the cultural aspects remain exclusive and unappealing, there are signs that other economic activities, such as local currencies and alternative distribution networks, are proving to be vital in sustaining areas that have been badly affected by the economic crisis.⁵³

Today's activists look to the present and the future, but if they had a glance over their shoulders they would see some figures of the past advocating precisely what they are doing. The grand revolutionary narratives of the Victorian era may not now be in vogue, but the ideals of liberty and independence, of mutual action and mutual aid were all there, as were those of ecology and sustainability. It is now time to look back at the extraordinarily inventive intellectual climate of radical Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as those other generations of activists and thinkers set out on their own path to try and make another world possible.

Notes

- 1 D. Urquhart, *The Spirit of the East, Illustrated in a Journal of Travels Through Roumeli During an Eventful Period*, Volume 1 (Carey and Hart: Philadelphia, 1839), p.198.
- 2 See Jon Henley's series of reports for the Guardian newspaper, *Greece on the Breadline*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/greece-on-the-breadline> (accessed 15 May 2012).
- 3 Samuel Clark provides a useful taxonomy of five common misrepresentations of anarchism: violence, nihilism, political skepticism, nostalgic primitivism, and finally, impossible utopianism. His book is a defence of utopianism against the charge of impossibility. Samuel Clark, *Living Without*

- Domination: The Possibility of an Anarchist Utopia* (Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington, 2007), see pp.8–11.
- 4 Which is why Purkis and Bowen avoid a single definition in favour of the idea of diverse and developing anarchisms. Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen, *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2004).
 - 5 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1980), p.63.
 - 6 John Moore, 'Lived Poetry: Stirner, Anarchy, Subjectivity and the Art of Living', in Purkis and Bowen, *Changing Anarchism*, pp.55–72.
 - 7 Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (One World: Oxford, 2005), p.3.
 - 8 Randall Amster et al., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (Routledge: London and New York 2009), p.3.
 - 9 Seán M. Sheehan, *Anarchism* (Reaktion Books: London 2003), p.42.
 - 10 Ibid p.159.
 - 11 Colin Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2004), p.69.
 - 12 David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool University Press, 2006), p.3.
 - 13 Though the American individualist anarchist Benjamin Tucker tried to – see the discussion in Chapter Four.
 - 14 David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville House: New York, 2011) Kindle Edition.
 - 15 Ibid Kindle location 1914 (Chapter Five).
 - 16 Ibid Kindle location 5001 (Chapter Nine).
 - 17 Paul Seabright, *The Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life* (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2005).
 - 18 Ibid p.4.
 - 19 For Graeber the real issue is between the personal and impersonal nature of markets. For example, he argues that in the Islamic societies of the Middle Ages with exchange based on the personal principles of extensive trust, rather than self-interest and law, markets did operate as such an instrument of cooperation. Graeber, *Debt*, Kindle locations 5948–55.
 - 20 Two good accounts are to be found in Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land. The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914* (Quartet, London, 1982) and Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics. Back to Nature, Back to the Land & Socialism in Britain 1880–1900* (Harvester Press: Sussex and St Martin's Press: New York, 1988).
 - 21 For a comprehensive history see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2004).

- 22 Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998).
- 23 Frank goes further and argues that capitalism and socialism are ideological constructs based on the idea of the Industrial Revolution as being solely a product of Western societies. Instead he argues for an holistic approach to economic history that would show that the rise of the West was as part of a global economy and not due to specifically Western conditions. In other words, the capitalist society derided by Traditionalists is as much a product of their eulogized East as of the West.
- 24 Michael Bywater, *Lost Worlds: What Have We Lost and Where Did it Go?* (Granta: London, 2004), pp.32–3.
- 25 Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2001), see in particular pp.123–39.
- 26 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, pp.34–6 and 51–3.
- 27 Arthur Versluis, ‘A Conversation with Peter Lamborn Wilson’, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, Vol. 4, no2 (Fall 2010), pp.139–65.
- 28 *Anarchist Traditionalism: Hakim Bey*, <http://traditionalistblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/anarchist-traditionalism-hakim-bey.html> (accessed 17 May 2012).
- 29 Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan* (e-book, The Anarchist Library, 2011), p.13. Retrieved on 23 February 2012 from: http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Fredy_Perlman__Against_His-story__Against_Leviathan.html
- 30 John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: With Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy* (Longmans, Green and Co.: London, 1920), p.751.
- 31 Frank, *ReOrientation*, p.331.
- 32 For an excellent summary see Stephen Davies, *Empiricism and History* (Palgrave: Basingstoke and New York, 2003), pp.110–25.
- 33 Though not always, the split in the Social Democratic Federation and the subsequent ousting of William Morris from the Socialist League, his own creation, by the anarchist faction was a particular example of vicious factionalism in action.
- 34 Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (Continuum: New York and London, 2011).
- 35 Brian Morris, *Ecology and Anarchism: Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought* (Images Publishing (Malvern) Ltd: Worcestershire, 1996), p.5.
- 36 David Graeber, ‘The New Anarchists’, in Tom Mertes (ed.), *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (Verso: London and New York, 2004), p.203.
- 37 A friend and fellow researcher into anarchist history was part of Occupy Tunbridge Wells. Those unfamiliar with the UK need to know that this is one of the most affluent, genteel and conservative towns in Kent, within commuting distance of London.

- 38 For the most comprehensive expression of his views, see Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Black Rose Books: Montréal, 1991).
- 39 In Murray Bookchin, Brian Morris, Rodney Aitchtey, Graham Purchase, Robert Hart, Chris Wilbert, *Deep Ecology & Anarchism: A Polemic* (Freedom Press: London, 1993), p.57. Sadly for the late Bookchin, this book is precisely such an exercise in ossuary guardianship.
- 40 Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.28.
- 41 Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Discipline: Why Dense Cities, Nuclear Power, Transgenic Crops, Restored Wildlands, Radical Science, and Geoengineering are Necessary* (Atlantic Books: London, 2010), p.232.
- 42 John Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Other Essays* (Autonomedia: New York, 1994), p.16.
- 43 Again, this is based on highly selective readings that ignore anything positive about contemporary life and, as Zerzan has done, lumps together disparate aspects of modern life – drugs dependency, suicide rates, obesity and credit card fraud – to create an image of all-pervading unhappiness. See Zerzan’s essay, ‘The Mass Psychology of Misery’, in *Future Primitive and Other Essays*, pp.47–73. As a person of a rather sunny disposition, it is reading Zerzan rather than modernity that I find depressing.
- 44 Fredy Perlman, *Against His-story*, p.13. Personally, I find his reading of history preposterous.
- 45 A classic example of this is the late Tory MP Alan Clark, who was close to the circle around the Goldsmiths and the zoo-keeper John Aspinall. A supporter of animal rights, one of his diary entries discusses his reaction to shooting a heron which had been taking his fish: ‘I cursed and blubbed up in my bedroom, as I changed into jeans and a T-shirt. I was near a nervous breakdown. Yet if it had been a burglar or a vandal I wouldn’t have given a toss. It’s human beings that are the vermin.’ Alan Clark, *Diaries* (Phoenix: London, 1994), p.304.
- 46 Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism* (Black Rose Books: Montréal, 1994), p.179.
- 47 John Clark, *Municipal Dreams: a Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin’s Politics* (Anarchy Archives, CD burned 3 October 2001), p.1.
- 48 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), see especially Chapter One.
- 49 Terry Glavin, *The Lost and Left Behind: Stories from the Age of Extinctions* (Saqi: London, San Francisco and Beirut, 2007).
- 50 Of course Reclus would have demurred in this case, given his vegetarianism, as would others such as the Humane Socialist, Henry Salt.
- 51 Liza Featherstone, Doug Henwood and Christine Parenti, ‘Activism: Left Anti-Intellectualism and its Discontents’, in Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose

- and George Katsiaficas (eds), *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement* (Soft Skull Press: Brooklyn, 2004), p.309.
- 52 Joana Conill, Manuel Castells, Amalia Cardenas and Lisa Servon, 'Beyond the Crisis: The Emergence of Alternative Economic Practices', in Manuel Castells, João Caraça and Gustavo Cardoso (eds), *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 53 A good example is the alternative currency TEM, now in widespread use in the nearest city to my Greek house, Volos in Magnesia. See <http://www.tem-magnisia.gr/> (Greek language only).

1

Property and progress: The emergence of anarchist political economy

In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying ‘This is mine’, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: ‘Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.’¹

With this deceptively simple statement, Rousseau placed property firmly on the agenda of radical political economy. And in doing so he emphasized that property is not primarily a way of defining how humans interact with material world, it is a social concept that defines how they interact with each other. Rousseau was a pessimist, believing that a peaceful state of nature had been irretrievably corrupted by civilization. Despite the vituperative attacks on him, especially by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the decisive rejection of his concept of social contract by libertarians, Rousseau’s influence² on anarchism was palpable and spawned a ‘mythic communism’³ that thought that paradise could be regained by creating a world free of private property.

Yet, in the early years of the development of anarchism this was not the main view. Instead, it was dominated by an intellectual tradition, described by Hillel Steiner and Peter Vallentyne as ‘left libertarianism’,⁴ one of a number of distinctive working-class political economies,⁵ which sought

to articulate a radical alternative to conventional notions of property in emergent industrial capitalism and to address the paradox of the existence of poverty and servitude in an era of prosperity and liberty.

There were three key elements to this critique. First there was the idea of just and unjust property, where a combination of Locke's theory of the origin of property and the labour theory of value, as found in classical economics, was used to draw a distinction between different kinds of property or ownership, with some seen as legitimate and others not.

Much else flowed from this basic idea. Obviously, there was a critique of concentrated ownership and property holding, above all, in land and capital. And this, in turn, meant an attack on rent of all kinds and the institution of wage labour. Not only were employment relations seen as economically exploitative, also they were servile and violated the idea of just property in the person. These theorists also rejected many of the mainstays of classical political economy, which was emerging simultaneously from the same intellectual roots. In particular, they refuted ideas associated with Ricardo and, especially, Malthus, about the implications of population growth.

Most importantly for anarchist thinkers, a connection was made between unjust types of property and political power, resulting in a profound anti-statism. This was a common feature of radical thought at the time. For the propagandist of *The Black Book*,⁶ unjust property was a catalogue of outrage, a record of a kleptocratic church and state living off the productive work of others. For the influential French radical liberal Charles Dunoyer, this was the result of an artificial political hierarchy established as an early stage of social development that was destined to give way to industrialism, 'a state where the right (of enriching oneself by the exercise of political domination) would be the privilege of no one, where neither a few men nor many men would be able to make their fortune by pillaging the rest of the population'.⁷

Dunoyer, together with Charles Comte, also point to the second main feature of left libertarianism, a class analysis based on the distinction between the productive and unproductive classes. It was evident that those that did the work did not receive the rewards for it. The wealth that flowed from labour passed into the hands of owners, not workers, and so a device for redistribution and restitution was central to radical political economy. According to David Hart, they argued 'that it was the state and the privileged classes allied to or making up the state ... which were essentially non productive. They also believed that throughout history there had been conflict between these two antagonistic classes which could only be brought to end with the radical separation of peaceful and productive civil society from the inefficiencies and privileges of the state and its favourites'.⁸

Finally, left libertarianism began to question the nature of progress. It was not hostile towards progress as conventionally understood. The nineteenth

century was a time of supreme confidence in science and technology, which, it was thought, would bring in its wake dynamic and limitless human development. At times this could border on the rhapsodical. As the French anarchist Louise Michel wrote:

Science will bring forth harvests in the desert; the energy of the tempests and whirlpools will carve paths through the mountains. Undersea boats will discover lost continents. Electricity will carry ships of the air above the icy poles. The ideas of Liberty, Equality and Justice will finally burst into flame. Each individual will live his integral part within humankind as a whole. Progress being infinite, transformations will be perpetual.⁹

Thus, anarchists tended to adhere to a modified Whig theory of history. History may not be a record of constant improvement, but it could become so. However, despite this faith, they did not accept the conventional narrative that saw progress as a process of unlimited economic growth and a sustained increase in ‘luxury’, as developed by writers such as Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith. Instead, progress was to come through intellectual development, social evolution and the liberation offered by a new economic order.

Despite the importance for wider economic thought of writers like William Ogilvie,¹⁰ British left libertarianism was predominantly developed by William Godwin and Thomas Hodgskin. It was not solely a native tradition, though; they drew many of their influences from other European thinkers, and it is impossible to complete the picture without proper consideration of a third figure, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon’s significance and influence is manifest as he expanded on the left libertarian concept of property and took it further by developing a theory of exchange – mutualism. And it was he who made the firm connection between radical ideas about property with a critique of the concept of progress. Whilst Godwin may have hinted at it, Proudhon made it explicit.

Property and class in early British left libertarianism

William Godwin’s great work *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, first published in 1793 at the onset of the Napoleonic wars, is now seen as one of the founding documents of classical anarchism. Already the published author of several works of non-fiction and three novels, the book brought Godwin fame and a respected place in radical circles. He followed it shortly with

his best-regarded novel, *Caleb Williams*, and shortly after began his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a formidable radical partnership that ended in Wollstonecraft's untimely death in childbirth. Their daughter, Mary, survived and was to find her own fame by eloping with the poet Shelley and writing her celebrated gothic novel, *Frankenstein*. Godwin continued to publish though with small financial reward and ended his days, ironically, living off a government sinecure.

Political Justice is a wide-ranging book, placing political economy within an ethical framework, and provides a foundation for much of the left libertarian writing that followed. In particular, it laid down the parameters for the discussion of property and its central role in classical anarchist thought. Godwin identified three distinct 'degrees' of property. The first clearly relates to his ambiguous attitude to Utilitarianism.¹¹

The first and simplest degree is that of my permanent right in those things the use of which being attributed to me, a greater sum of benefit or pleasure will result than could have arisen from their being otherwise appropriated.¹²

This is a straightforward defence of the right of personal property in the necessities of life (housing, food, clothes etc.) against seizure by others. Such a view is uncontentious, even if the Utilitarian justification is clumsy. It is with his second and third degrees of property that Godwin becomes more explicitly political.

The second degree 'is the empire to which every man is entitled over the produce of his own industry.' This is very different from the first degree and marks a departure from Utilitarianism, implying the existence of a natural right to property conferred through labour. Godwin is explicit that this includes 'even that part of it the use of which ought not to be appropriated to himself'.¹³

This, of course, raises a problem. If one person produces the necessities of life who, by right of labour, owns them, how is the right of the rest of the community to these necessities – Godwin's first degree of property – enforced? The obvious answer is some form of equitable exchange, but instead Godwin refines what he means by property by removing the absolute right of disposal.

The producer, according to Godwin, 'has no right of option in the disposal of anything which may fall into his hands ... He is only the steward. But still he is the steward. These things must be trusted to his award.' The community exercises its control over the disposal and distribution of this property through 'censorial power', since 'All men cannot individually be entitled to exercise compulsion on each other, for this would produce universal anarchy. All men cannot collectively be entitled

to exercise unbounded compulsion, for this would produce universal slavery'.¹⁴

The idea of property as a conditional right, held in trust for the whole community and, implicitly, for future generations, is found in much modern Green political thought, but it isn't exclusive to it. If the first degree of property gives rights, the second gives duties. The second qualifies but does not negate the first. The second *is*, however, negated by the third degree, the dominant property relationship of the late eighteenth century, which is '... a system ... by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry'. He continues:

There is scarcely any species of wealth, expenditure or splendour, existing in any civilized country, that is not, in some way, produced by the express manual labour, and corporeal industry of the inhabitants of that country... Every man may calculate, in every glass of wine he drinks, and every ornament he annexes to his person, how many individuals have been condemned to slavery and sweat, incessant drudgery, unwholesome food, continual hardships, deplorable ignorance, and brutal insensibility, that he may be supplied with these luxuries...

It is clear therefore that the third species of property is in direct contradiction to the second.¹⁵

In other words, this third degree involves servitude, robbery and the expropriation of the right of the labourer to the fruits of their own labour.

Instead of the market, Godwin gives us the idea of a self-regulating community: 'the distribution of wealth in every community must be left to depend upon the sentiments of the individuals of that community.'¹⁶ This is not quite the same as the 'voluntary communism' that Peter Marshall assumes Godwin is advocating,¹⁷ although it doesn't preclude it. However, Godwin's clear assertion of a social right to property provided the basis for the further development of the left libertarian perspective.

Much of the intellectual content for this development was derived from the new 'classical' political economy, refined from the 1820s onwards, and based on the work of writers such as David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, Nassau William Senior and Robert Torrens. Two essential components were the distinction made between different types of income and a grim view of the position of the labourer. Simultaneously, as Boyd Hilton¹⁸ argues, Evangelical Christianity came to have an influence on political economy through its distinctive interpretation of the long-standing Christian approach to natural law, especially the assertion of economic laws as part of a providential natural order. Benthamite Utilitarians, however, attacked the whole idea of both providentialism and natural law in favour of a social scientific approach based on the psychology of human

happiness, as indicated by Bentham's felicific calculus. All these intellectual movements were critical of traditional economics and instead called for a radical restructuring and reduction of the economic role of government and political power. However, there was also an explicit attack on the idea that there could be a limitation on individual ownership of the kind that Godwin had asserted and an enthusiastic advocacy of unconstrained property rights.

Though radical political economy drew upon these currents of thought, it also rejected many of their conclusions. In some cases, such as with William Cobbett, this could take the form of a radical conservatism, which could appear backward-looking or even reactionary. This was especially so of people like Robert Southey and those associated with *Blackwood's Magazine*. Others, however, viewed themselves as progressive with a vision of a transformed and distinctively 'modern' industrial society. And they, once again, put a radical concept of property at the centre of their ideas.

In Britain, the most prominent of these were the group commonly referred to as the *Ricardian Socialists*. The basis of their ideas lay in truly free exchange and an inalienable right of property in the products of one's own labour. They extended Godwin's ideas by combining them with much of the new economics, to produce a genuinely radical, and anti-statist, political economy. In addition, French class theory, derived from the schools of Jean-Baptiste Say and Henri de Saint-Simon,¹⁹ was influential, with its critique of the parasitic relationship between the unproductive and the productive classes and the resultant social conflict.

It was from this school that Thomas Hodgskin, writing predominantly in the 1820s and 1830s, made the decisive break from Utilitarianism to move towards a consistent libertarian left response to emergent capitalist society. His own intellectual journey had begun in the Royal Navy, where his brushes with authority led to his early departure and his first published work exposing the brutality of naval discipline. He was subsequently part of leading Utilitarian circles before a breach with them, followed by a period of travels, which ended with him beginning a lifelong career as a journalist. Through his political activism for free trade and his connection with *The Economist* magazine, he is also an important link to later radical individualism, especially due to his influence on a young Herbert Spencer.

Though classed as a Ricardian Socialist, Hodgskin, in Halévy's view, 'remained the determined opponent of Ricardo's system'.²⁰ He drew far more radical conclusions from liberal principles. He was also a determined opponent of Malthus, something that was common amongst later anarchists. In a letter to Francis Place on 30 May 1820,²¹ Hodgskin refutes Malthus on the sound empirical basis that the evils of famine and pestilence that are supposed to follow from an increase in population simply do not happen. In Britain, with its rapid population increase, these evils

had, in reality, declined, whilst they persisted in sparsely populated regions. Population growth actually brings important improvements in human conditions and technological progress. Thus:

An increase of population promotes industry, ingenuity, and knowledge, consequently also the means of producing food. The power of the Populating principle may therefore be looked on as the great stimulus to exertion and as the great means of promoting the happiness of the individual and of the Species.²²

Hodgskin was a Deist,²³ believing that God is revealed through nature, and both terms are frequently used interdependently in his writing. It is important to grasp that the Deism of this time was neither obscurantist nor mystical. Much of the Freethought movement at the time were Deist as well as secularist.²⁴ What Hodgskin's religious outlook brought was an optimistic view of human nature, a belief in natural law and a materialist, empirical approach. All three underpin his writing.

Hodgskin's understanding of human nature was straightforward. People were fundamentally good; their virtue derived from a divine natural law, in itself a moral order. Every assertion of the basic virtue of humanity has to rationalize the apparent contradiction of the existence of evil, so, walking hand-in-hand with the perfectibility of humankind, comes the idea of corruptibility. And if humans are intrinsically good, then their corruption must be the result of something external – a product of their environment, and this leads Hodgskin to a materialist view of history:

... all man's knowledge, political and other knowledge, and ultimately all man's opinions are corrected by, and therefore modelled on, the facts of the material world. Mind when most enlightened and informed is a correct reflection of external nature. In the long run, therefore, that according to the laws on which man must act to live, will shape and govern all his opinions.²⁵

And that material reality is natural law, itself moral and a reflection of intrinsic good:

The moral laws of nature are as regular and unalterable as her physical laws. He, who has so beautifully constructed our bodies, has not left our conduct, on which our happiness depends, to be regulated by chance. The power that governs the world is not a sanguinary tyrant, who delights, by momentary and unexpected storms, to blight the best hopes of mankind. Regular laws are established in the moral world, and we have the capacity to discover them, and so to regulate our conduct by them, that we may diminish or destroy every species of evil.²⁶

Natural law does not need intense sociological inquiry to reveal itself; all that is required is liberty. In freedom, humans realize their inherent understanding of the moral order and live in harmony with it.

This belief in the existence of a natural law did not survive long into the nineteenth century; metaphysics were to be replaced by evolutionary and ecological science. However, Hodgskin's analysis of the corruption of human society was more influential and lasting. He saw social and political order, established through law, as nothing more than the establishment of an unnatural order by force for the benefit of one class over another.

... Messrs. Bentham and Mill, both being eager to exercise the power of legislation, represent it (law and government) as a beneficent deity which curbs our naturally evil passions and desires ... which checks ambition, sees justice done, and encourages virtue. Delightful characteristics! which have the single fault of being contradicted by every page of history.²⁷

State law is in total contradiction to natural law: 'Perish the people, but let the law live, has ever been the maxim of the masters of mankind.'²⁸

Hodgskin, drawing on Comte and Dunoyer, further insisted that the apparatus of the state is nothing more than an instrument of class rule: 'In fact, the landed aristocracy and the government are one – the latter being nothing more than the organized means of preserving the power and privileges of the former.'²⁹

Both of these views permeate later radical thought and, once again, property takes centre stage in his alternative political economy, supporting individual ownership conferred by labour, but denying any right of appropriation of the product of that labour by others. And it is labour alone that creates wealth: 'There is no other wealth in the world but what is created by labour, and by it continually renewed.'³⁰

Hodgskin uses a radical reading of Locke, ignoring the inconsistencies that have him made the subject of academic debate,³¹ that labour conveys an inalienable right of property. And so property is integral to natural law and is an individual right.

By the operations of nature ... there arises in every individual, unwilling by any lawgiver, a distinct notion of his own individuality and of the individuality of others. By the same operations, we extend this idea, first for ourselves and afterwards for others, to the things we make or create, or have given to us, including the pleasure or pain resulting from our own conduct. Thus the natural idea of property is a mere extension of that individuality; and it embraces all the mental as well as all the physical consequences of muscular exertion. As nature gives to labour whatever it produces – as we extend the idea of personal individuality to what is produced by every individual – not merely is a right of property

established by nature, we see also that she takes means to make known the existence of that right. It is as impossible for men not to have a notion of a right of property, as it is for them to want the idea of personal identity. When either is totally absent man is insane.³²

This natural right of individual ownership is contrasted with an artificial property right, established by law, enforced by the state and based on expropriation of the labour of others. He wrote: ‘Nature or God ... commands, and has always commanded, that industry should be followed by wealth, and idleness by destitution.’³³ Unfortunately, even a cursory glance at early Victorian society revealed that wealth lay with the idle, whilst the industrious were rewarded with destitution. The property rights, which should have been conferred by labour, were being appropriated by the immoral, but legal, means of ‘revenue, rents, tithes and profit’.³⁴ For Hodgskin this was done by force. Coercion is required to extract both rent and profit, whilst the employment relationship is servile and exploitative, resulting in the transfer of the fruits of labour from worker to employer and owner.

It was not just law that protected this theft; an ideological framework was erected to justify the sanctity of artificial property. Hodgskin saw the dominant cultural, political and ideological life in society to be merely a reflection of naked class interests, whether secular or religious. He is savage with his former Utilitarian associates:

The butcher-wolf has seized a lamb, and is tearing it to pieces; and Mr. Bentham and his followers, the pretended watch-dogs of the flock, bark aloud – to make him desist? NO! but to sanction his proceedings, and encourage him to do his work orderly, decently, and with decorum.³⁵

But it is when he writes on religion that we encounter a trope that runs through some radical thought, often treated with a discrete silence or, at best, a mumbled apologetic – anti-Semitism. It is not consistent, but it is a constant,³⁶ often reappearing, even today, in different guises.³⁷ In the nineteenth century, it mainly took the form of an association between Jews, finance and usury, often borrowing the language of race and ethnicity. Here the undertones in Hodgskin’s writing are palpable:

The God of our priests is not the God of nature – not that great Being who fills and sustains all, who spreads life and happiness throughout creation – but a malicious and revengeful being, born of the barbarous fancies of a cruel and barbarous people.³⁸

So, how then is this artificial society going to unravel? Ultimately, Hodgskin’s materialism leads him to a form of technological determinism and a faith in progress. That progress is moral as well as material:

Though we may not be able to foresee the moral effects of the splendid mechanical inventions of modern times, yet we may be sure that they are harbingers of a more extensive change in the moral condition of society, than was ever effected by political institutions.³⁹

A new society will be ushered in by social and technological rather than political action. It will be inevitable, as the law of nature cannot be negated; it is immanent in all humanity.

The natural right, existing at all times, gradually supersedes the law of the land, and effectually secures those new rights belonging to individuals, which, as men multiply, are continually created.⁴⁰

The agent for these changes is an economic class but, as the natural right of property is pre-eminent, Hodgskin asserts that the owner/producer will usher in the new society, not the propertyless and oppressed working classes. An ardent anti-capitalist, as well as individualist, Hodgskin saw industrial owners as the allies of the landed aristocracy in the expropriation of the fruits of the labour of others. Rather, it was the growing number of economically independent producers, whose interests are bound together through the division of labour in mutual dependence, that Hodgskin saw as the basis for a harmonious society based on natural law. Produced by the changes in technology, these people 'are at once labourers and capitalists'⁴¹ and the growth of this class 'must gradually extinguish both the mere slave-labourer and the mere idle slothful dolts, who live on the rent of land or the interest of money'.⁴² It is to Hodgskin, rather than to Proudhon, that Marx should have directed his cruel jibe that his theory was 'an out-and-out petty-bourgeois fantasy',⁴³ for it was he who saw this class as being the embodiment of the future.

For Hodgskin, Marxism would have been yet another violation of natural right, as ownership must be individual and based on labour, and not collective and vested in the state. Expropriation by the state, or even by the most numerous class, would be identical to expropriation by the current ruling class. Hodgskin's alternative to oppression was consistently individualist and anti-statist. Indeed, state organisations can only impede the development of society. He wrote:

When conceited politicians ask me what I would substitute for their systems, my answer is, that I propose no substitute. My argument is, that individual man does not make society, and that man cannot organize it. Society is the offspring of the instincts of the human animal, not of his will, and it cannot be modelled by an individual as he makes a watch or a steam engine ... I trust to that great power, call it Nature, or call it

God, which has brought society forth out of the wilderness, to provide for its future welfare.⁴⁴

Government is no more than the institution of injustice; economic disorder is the result. Surpluses bring impoverishment not wealth, property becomes an instrument of robbery; hatred, fear and oppression are the result. Mutual trust, the glue that holds societies together, breaks down completely. Hodgskin wrote:

As long as we cherish the mistrust of each other avowed by legislation, though contrary to the mutual reliance continually taught and continually extended by nature, as division of labour is extended, and all the families of mankind are knit by the common bond of commerce into one, so long shall we be the victims of those vices and crimes which pollute all our domestic relations, arming man against man, and nation against nation, till the face of the whole earth is stained with the blood of private assassinations and public murders. As long as we, thus mistrusting each other, are guilty of these atrocities, so long will the greed and the ambition of the priesthood be fattened by our apprehensions and remorse, and so long will they, for the sake of base lucre, invest our benevolent God with their own vile characteristics, filling the mind with horrid phantoms by their furious denunciations, turning religion, from being a consolation, into a plague and a curse, and by corrupting thought at its source, make all mankind feel as if the barb of death were ever rankling in their hearts. We like to go far about to seek the causes of our misery, but they may all be found in those unholy political institutions, which, originally founded by the sword have since been maintained by the sword, breathing nothing but hatred, discord, and bloodshed.⁴⁵

It is a complete statement of anarchism. Government should be removed, not seized or reformed.

There is a glaring weakness in Hodgskin's thought: agency. How is this new world to be brought about? Who will make this change? His *laissez-faire* approach of simply waiting for technological progress to produce moral reform, based on an inherent understanding of natural law, offers up a vision of permanent complaint accompanied by inaction. The poor and the exploited needed change now. Hodgskin offered them nothing. Hardly surprising then that others were to take the ideas of both British and European thinkers in a radical new direction – most notably, Marx and Proudhon. Whereas Marx accepted much of the libertarian analysis of class and exploitation, he departed from nearly all its conclusions. It was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who remained closest to this individualist strand of thought and developed it to give a more sophisticated theory of history and change, and, most importantly, developed a theory of exchange to augment

that of ownership. In doing so he laid down the foundations of anarchist ideas for a future generation.

Proudhon and mutualism

Although this book is about anarchism in Britain, it is impossible to write about it without discussing Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Born in Besançon in Eastern France in 1809, the son of a small brewer and becoming a printer by trade, his self-education and rise to fame through an essay competition marks him out as an intellectual who had his roots in the artisan class. Although his life as a writer and activist was confined to France, his influence was ubiquitous, not least in coining the name ‘anarchism’ – using it in its classical sense of ‘without rule’ rather than the pejorative one of chaos. Importantly too, he was writing firmly in the same tradition of radical thought as Hodgskin, but his works are considerably more sophisticated.

Proudhon’s thought is not unproblematic. His anti-Semitism is overt and unpleasant, whilst in contrast to British libertarians who were influenced by the work of, and friendship with, women intellectuals, Proudhon is consistently, and unattractively, anti-feminist. This has led some of the subsequent historiography to see him as a contradictory figure combining ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ qualities, the clichéd ‘man of paradox’, whilst some have gone as far as to label him as a nostalgic, an outright reactionary or, in one thoroughly misjudged article, a ‘harbinger of fascism’.⁴⁶

Whilst his prejudices are indefensible, they can sometimes be at odds with his writings, are often contradictory, and they are certainly not essential to his ideology. They have also been a factor in the persistent misreading of his thought, with Marxists being the most hostile of all.⁴⁷ This isn’t the right place to deal with these misrepresentations. If you want to read more, Iain McKay disposes of many of them neatly in the introductory essay to his anthology of Proudhon’s writings, *Property is Theft!*.⁴⁸ Instead, I want to try and look at how Proudhon developed the left libertarian tradition and laid the foundations for some of the later ideas that were to permeate late Victorian Britain.

The starting point once again, just as it was for Proudhon’s career, is property. His memoir *What is Property?*, first published in 1840, established him as a significant radical writer. The tract begins with the following resounding and much-misquoted statement:

If I were asked to answer the following question: What is slavery? and I should answer in one word, It is murder, my meaning would be understood at once. No extended argument would be required to show that

the power to take from a man his thought, his will, his personality, is a power of life and death; and that to enslave a man is to kill him. Why, then, to this other question: What is property? may I not likewise answer, It is robbery, without the certainty of being misunderstood; the second proposition being no other than a transformation of the first?⁴⁹

'Property is theft', the ultimate communist slogan, is the phrase most frequently associated with Proudhon. But Proudhon did not mean it as such. Proudhon's essay is, in fact, a sustained attack on Rousseau's advocacy of a propertyless state of nature. Referring directly to Rousseau's declaration from the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, with which this chapter begins, he wrote:

... the man who takes possession of a field, and says, 'this field is mine', will not be unjust so long as everyone else has an equal right of possession; nor will he be unjust, if wishing to change his location, he exchanges this field for an equivalent. But if, putting another in his place, he says to him, 'work for me while I rest', he then becomes unjust, unassociated, unequal. He is a proprietor.⁵⁰

Proudhon was making a vital distinction between what he called property and possession. It is very close to Hodgskin's distinction between the natural and artificial right to property. Property is the device by which the rights of ownership are appropriated by others and used to extort the value of labour from the workers. It is an unconditional, perpetual and legal right. Possession is the conditional right of ownership for use without giving the ultimate right of disposal. It ensures that the products of labour directly belong to the labourer. Possession transforms society from one based on hierarchy to another founded in equality; it is in essence revolutionary. Proudhon elaborates:

There are different kinds of property: 1. Property pure and simple, the dominant and seigniorial power over a thing; or, as they term it, naked property. 2. Possession. 'Possession', says Duranton, 'is a matter of fact, not of right.' Touiller: 'Property is a right, a legal power; possession is a fact.' The tenant, the farmer, the commandit, the usufructuary, are possessors; the owner who lets and lends for use, the heir who is to come into possession on the death of a usufructuary, are proprietors. If I may venture the comparison: a lover is a possessor, a husband is a proprietor.⁵¹

In a later work, in his efforts to stress the value of individual possession, Proudhon used this metaphor in reverse: 'The peasant loves the land without limit; as Michelet poetically says: he does not want a tenancy,

a concubinage; he wants a marriage.⁵² Despite this literary confusion, Proudhon's meaning is clear. Property denies the right of possession. Possession for use is both the aspiration and right of all. Justice demands that this right to possession is inalienable: 'A railroad, a mine, a factory, a ship, are to the workers who use them what a hive is to the bees, at once their tool and their home, their country, their territory, their property.'⁵³

Proudhon attacked both communists and socialists for believing that possession could be exercised indirectly, whether through the state, communes or 'phalansteries', and still result in justice. Not only that, any such collectivization ran contrary to the wishes of the people themselves.

The people, even those who are Socialists, whatever they may say, want to be owners; and ... I find the feelings of the masses on this point stronger and more resistant than on any other question ... And one thing is to be noted which shows how far, in the minds of the people, individual sovereignty is identified with collective sovereignty, that the more ground the principles of democracy have gained, the more I have seen the working classes, both in the city and country, interpret these principles favourably to individual ownership.⁵⁴

If this was the case – and one of Proudhon's strengths was his perceptiveness – the only way in which property could be collectivized was by coercion.

There are three main elements to Proudhon's attack on conventional private property. The first is familiar from Hodgskin: property is exploitative. Property ownership is absolute; it gives the owner the ultimate right of disposal regardless of the common interest. This enables the proprietor to deny use to those who may need it. This power also means that they can dictate the terms by which others both produce and consume the products of their own labour. In this way, property owners extract the majority of the value of the labour of the propertyless, by rent, interest, and through wages that may ensure the workers' subsistence, but are paid below the full value of their labour.

Secondly, as a consequence of this exploitation, economic prosperity is blighted by inequality. Proudhon draws on the radical liberal, Charles Sismondi,⁵⁵ to argue that the impoverishment of the workers leads to under-consumption. In berating an English manufacturer who saw modern technology as freeing him from the costs and demands of his workers, Proudhon wrote:

What a system is that which leads a business man to think with delight that society will soon be able to dispense with men! Machinery has delivered capital from the oppression of labor! That is exactly as if the cabinet should undertake to deliver the treasury from the oppression of the taxpayers. Fool! Though the workmen cost you something, they are your customers:

what will you do with your products, when, driven away by you, they shall consume them no longer? Thus machinery, after crushing the workmen, is not slow in dealing employers a counter blow; for, if production excludes consumption, it is soon obliged to stop itself...⁵⁶

Thirdly, Proudhon asserted that private property corrupts the moral order of society. He did not separate ethics from political economy and ethics are at the heart of his critique of the mainstream notion of progress. Once again, it has to be made clear that his objection was not to technological progress. Instead, he was an enthusiast:

With the introduction of machinery into economy, wings are given to liberty. The machine is the symbol of human liberty, the sign of our domination over nature, the attribute of our power, the expression of our right, the emblem of our personality.⁵⁷

Technology and modern industry are not in themselves the problem. The issue is the social organization of economic life.⁵⁸ Instead, the philosophical objection he has is to what the late American historian Christopher Lasch has called ‘The moral rehabilitation of desire’:

Its (the modern idea of progress) original appeal and its continuing plausibility derived from the more specific assumption that insatiable appetites, formerly condemned as a source of social instability and personal unhappiness, could drive the economic machine – just as man’s insatiable curiosity drove the scientific project – and thus ensure a never-ending expansion of productive forces.⁵⁹

This, the central assumption behind Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’, is what Proudhon is challenging in conjunction with his attack on the nature of property.

So how is a moral order based on possession to be established? Certainly not from above:

Any revolution from above is inevitably ... revolution which takes place through a prince’s good pleasure, a minister’s whim, the gropings of an assembly or the violence of a club. It is revolution by dictatorship and despotism...⁶⁰

Nor would the replacement of property by communism do anything other than intensify oppression:

Communism is oppression and slavery ... Communism is essentially opposed to the free exercise of our faculties, to our noblest desires our

deepest feelings ... communism violates the sovereignty of the conscience and equality: the first, by restricting spontaneity of mind and heart, and freedom of thought and action; the second, by placing labour and laziness, skill and stupidity, and even vice and virtue on an equality in point of comfort.⁶¹

Instead, Proudhon offered us his main organizing principle, liberty.⁶² And the embodiment of liberty is mutualism.

Mutualism is a method of direct action, the construction of systems of production and exchange by possessors, which sees both as instruments of collaboration. Production is inevitably social:

The isolated man can supply but a very small portion of his wants; all his power lies in association, and in the intelligent combination of universal effort. The division and co-operation of labour multiply the quantity and the variety of products; the individuality of functions improve their quality.

There is not a man, then, but lives on the products of several thousand different industries; not a labourer but receives from society at large the things which he consumes, and, with these, the power to reproduce. Who indeed would venture the assertion, 'I produce, by my own effort all that I consume; I need the aid of no one else ...'⁶³

Several things follow from this. First, in complex societies that become ever more productive through the division of labour, the individual ownership of the worker can only be assured by association, creating what we would now call co-operatives. Secondly, if workers are to realize the full value of their labour, then it is not enough alone for them to be free from the theft of that value by a class of property owners, it must also mean that the exchange of goods has to be equitable. Proudhon's vehement advocacy of the virtues of competition and his abhorrence of monopoly could sound like an embrace of market liberalism. Instead, he offers us something else.

Proudhon argued that free trade and the free market could not exist in capitalist society. Exploitation means that the market operates only in favour of the proprietors, whilst law and the state, even in the minimal form advocated by classic liberals, only exist to enforce their interests. A process of exchange between free, equal and independent people is not the same as a capitalist market economy; it is what Proudhon referred to as 'commerce':

Every transaction ending in an exchange of products or services may be designated as a commercial operation.

Whoever says commerce, says exchange of equal values; for if values

are not equal, and the injured party perceives it, he will not consent to the exchange and there will be no commerce.

Commerce only exists between free men. Transactions may be effected between other people by violence or fraud, but there is no commerce ... So, in every exchange, there is a moral obligation that neither of the contracting parties shall gain at the expense of the other; that is, that, to be legitimate and true, commerce must be exempt from all inequality. This is the first condition of commerce. Its second condition is, that it be voluntary; that is, that the parties act freely and openly.

I define, then, commerce or exchange as an act of society ...⁶⁴

Equality has to be at the heart of mutualism. Yet, as always with Proudhon, the detail is more important than the rhetoric. Proudhon's equality is highly specific. It is based on commutative rather than distributive justice and a labour theory of value. It refers to equality of access to resources, even if differential use of those resources produces inequality of income. Proudhon accepted some level of economic inequality. However, that inequality is in itself both moral, based on justice, and is limited by the capacity of an individual's own productive effort and the necessity to collaborate with others, rather than being unlimited through the monopolization of resources. Work and work alone is the only justification for differences in wealth. Whilst Proudhon recognizes that there are differences in talent and abilities, he does not see these as a moral basis for inequality; instead he seeks the maximum diversity of production to ensure that all talents are used and all are rewarded according to their productive labour. Diversity renders such inequality impossible.

Two associated questions then arise. First, how is that access to be secured; how do people become possessors? And, second, in what medium is exchange conducted in a complex society? His answer is two-fold: universally available credit through a Bank of the People and free currencies.

To own and to invest one needs credit. But debt and usury have not only been used as one of the main methods of expropriating the labour of others, they have also been, as David Graeber points out,⁶⁵ one of the ways in which a free agreement between apparent equals recreates the relationship between them as hierarchical. The debtor falls under the control of the creditor and the equality between the parties disappears. What seems like a reciprocal arrangement is nothing of the sort. It is a power relationship masked by the language of mutual obligation.⁶⁶

Proudhon was aware of this and so tried to find a solution in the reform of currency. Rather than being tied to 'bullion' or 'immovable property' that causes 'a miserable oscillation between usury and bankruptcy', Proudhon argued that currency should be based on 'products'.⁶⁷ In this way, 'instead of borrowing capital bearing interest, the workers mutually pledge each other their respective products, on the sole condition of equality in exchange'.⁶⁸

These issues of credit, currency and exchange were to reverberate through the discussions of the subsequent years.

Mutualism is central to Proudhon's thought and he envisaged it developing through local action into a global phenomenon through voluntary federation.⁶⁹ However, it was not the sole challenge he mounted to the idea of progress. He was nothing if not a moral philosopher and to understand the intertwining of his economics and ethics we have to consider his sociology and theory of history.

Proudhon employed a dialectical method, but one that was very different to Marx's, to the latter's considerable annoyance. Proudhon's dialectic is based on what he saw as the essential dualism of human social life, two conflicting realities that exist side-by-side. Proudhon called these contradictions, using Kant's term, antinomies. 'An antinomy is made up of two terms, necessary to each other, but always opposed, and tending to mutual destruction.'⁷⁰

An existential dilemma cannot be resolved in favour of one side or another, nor can it be transcended by a new stage in human history or removed altogether by a radical social transformation. Instead, Proudhon argued that antinomies are a constant in human society and that the dilemmas they produce can only be resolved by reaching a state of equilibrium.⁷¹ This does not mean compromise; it means recognition of the existence of these conflicts and the need to manage them.

In discussing the legacy of Proudhon's ideas there is some debate as to whether Proudhon, the opponent of monopoly, the defender of possession and the supporter of exchange, is best seen as an individualist, or whether his promotion of worker associations and federalism makes him essentially a collectivist. The answer is that he was both. Individualism and collectivism are antinomies that cannot be resolved. Proudhon was exploring a point of equilibrium between the two.

None of this was based on some utopian plan; Proudhon carefully avoided such potentially totalitarian temptations. Instead of being static, equilibrium is, in fact, a dynamic state with no fixed, preconceived end. This state of equilibrium is obtained through justice, realized through equality and liberty, and can only be reached through a particular version of human progress. This progress is not material; it is intellectual. Intellectual progress is intertwined with the social, economic and moral development of society: 'Social destiny, the solution of the human enigma, is found, then, in these words: EDUCATION, PROGRESS.'⁷² This intellectual advance is not the result of abstract theorizing. It is the product of action and the real experiences of people in their everyday lives. Yet, there were constraints. Whilst Proudhon was typical of many in the nineteenth century in exalting humanity's triumph over nature, he did not feel that victory ended natural limits. Societies were still bound by 'laws as abstract and immutable as those of numbers',⁷³ and thus it was not possible to escape those restrictions, merely

to live in harmony with them. In other words, he advocated sustainability. And this is precisely where political economy and ethics intertwine. The new society he ushered in is very far from utopian dreams of abundance or the progressives' never-ending and accelerating consumption. He rejected this vision for two reasons.

First, Proudhon felt that a state of material abundance would destroy the very progress that it is supposed to bring about by being morally corrupting. Proudhon did not share the optimism of Hodgskin about humanity. He saw human nature as unchanging and *malfait* rather than *malfaisant*.⁷⁴ As a result, in order to avoid anarchy in its pejorative sense, he saw the need to place restraints on human behaviour. To be consistent with his libertarianism, such restraint must always be voluntary. Thus, he advocated the replacement of law, an imposition based on the will of others, with contract, reliant on self-interest.

Proudhon's idea of self-interest is not a crude notion of petty desires; it is a spur to self-regulation in accordance with social reality. External regulation through the exercise of state power as a form of social contract, regardless of whether it is the absolutism of a Hobbes or the minimalism of a Mill, will always produce oppression and distort progress. Government inevitably reflects the interests of the governors and is an instrument for the imposition of the worst aspects of their human nature. Ultimately, self-regulation works because a breach of a voluntary contract is economic and social suicide. There are no gains, only losses. Compliance is rational as well as ethical.

Yet, contract is as nothing compared to constructive labour. It is work that realizes the full potential of human personality. Proudhon felt that work is a necessity, not merely as an act of production but also of moral education. Thus, the actions of individuals are not only restrained through contractual arrangements but are also shaped by the establishment of a natural moral order. The removal of work lets loose the inherent evil of humanity and destroys the self-restraint and communal interconnectedness that labour inculcates in those who are neither exploited nor exploiters. For Proudhon, those who view human nature as being shaped by the environment and as mutable into something better through a change in that environment are indulging in utopian speculation. Practical experience would suggest otherwise. Human nature does not change, but human behaviour can if both constrained and encouraged by a just, free and moral society.

Proudhon's second objection to radical conventional wisdom is more material. He thought that a state of abundance is a physical impossibility. His general view of 'the parsimony of nature' and the need to work to overcome it leads him to reject the notion of the, even technologically induced, possibility of abundance. Proudhon did not feel that the problem of production could be solved. Instead, he was an early advocate of the

limits to growth. This was not on ecological grounds, but on the view that the power of production could never match the power of consumption. This is because the possibility of consumption is almost infinite, whilst that of production is not and can never be so. Therefore, it is necessary to live with voluntary constraints on consumption if people are to exist in relative equality. Abundance is a chimera; he concluded: 'Man's condition on earth is work and poverty; his vocation learning and justice; the first of his virtues temperance.'⁷⁵

This is often quoted as a way of claiming that Proudhon was an austere ascetic, an advocate of the simple life.⁷⁶ In fact, this is based on a misunderstanding of the term 'poverty'. Like 'property', Proudhon used the term in a distinct, idiosyncratic way. Poverty in everyday usage means relative or absolute deprivation. This Proudhon called 'pauperism', a state of near-destitution caused by the expropriation of the value of the labour of the many by the few. In contrast, Proudhon's concept of poverty means relative equality and a voluntary restraint on consumption. It mirrors Gandhi's often-quoted statement that there is enough in this world for every man's need but not for every man's greed. Proudhon did not merely advocate poverty in this sense; he celebrated it.

Poverty is an inevitable law of nature. It is wealth that is a distortion of nature. Wealth is based on undeserved expropriation. Poverty is the product of honest labour and equitable exchange...

Poverty is seemly ... Its dwelling is clean, healthy and in good repair ... and it is neither pale nor starving ...

Poverty is not ease. For the worker this would be a form of corruption. It is no good for a man to live in ease. He must, on the contrary feel the pricks of need ... poverty has its own joys, its innocent festivities and homely luxuries ...

It is clear that it would be misplaced to dream of escaping from the inevitable poverty that is the law of our nature and of society. Poverty is good, and we must think of it as being the source of all our joys. Reason demands that we should live with it – frugally, modifying our pleasures, labouring assiduously and subordinating all our appetites to justice.⁷⁷

Proudhon felt that nature could not provide abundance after humanity had passed through the 'primitive' stage. The deliverance from eternal scarcity that industrialization promised was a fantasy. Technology could help people work but could not replace work itself. Abundance and leisure was possible but only for some and always because of the exploitation of others. As the global justice movement points out, the affluence of the developed world is founded on the sweatshops of the poorest corners of the globe. Remove that exploitation, produce equality, return technology to its rightful place as servant and not master, and the reality of the continuing need for work

is revealed. Work is its own justice and equitable exchange is the path to establishing that justice and realizing an immanent natural order.

Proudhon's writings built on the traditions that had been established through the work of left libertarians in both Britain and France, but he took them much further into a more sophisticated vision of revolutionary change from below through mutual self-organization and direct action and, by questioning the orthodoxies of his day, laid the foundations for an alternative vision of progress. His views on exchange, currency and credit inspired a later generation of individualist writers to develop Proudhonian ideas in the context of a fast-growing industrial society. Much of his political economy intrigues in the light of the financial crises of present-day capitalism. He remains a challenging writer though, not least in his moral philosophy, and later theorists jettisoned his social conservatism in favour of libertarian alternatives. But the cornerstones remained firmly in place: a rejection of what we now call consumerism, the importance of popular education and, particularly in the light of ecological concerns, the importance of limits on consumption. These could hardly be timelier. Yet, having established a coherent anarchist position, divisions were about to open again by the re-emergence of his reviled communism as an anti-statist doctrine. Anarcho-communism opened up new vistas for anarchism, ones that took root in late Victorian Britain thanks to the work of the Russian exile, Peter Kropotkin.

Notes

- 1 Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and introduced by G. D. H. Cole, rev. and augmented by J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd: London, 1973), p.76.
- 2 See for example George Crowder, *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1991), pp.16–29.
- 3 David Graeber, *Debt*, Kindle location 1930 (Chapter Five). Graeber argues that 'mythic' or 'epic' communism has 'inspired millions; but it has also done enormous damage to humanity'. Instead, he argues for an everyday communism that is 'a principle of morality rather than just a question of property ownership'. Kindle location 2077 (Chapter Five).
- 4 Peter Vallentyne and Hillel Steiner, *The Origins of Left Libertarianism* (Palgrave: Basingstoke and New York, 2000). Also Peter Vallentyne and Hillel Steiner, *Left Libertarianism and its Critics: The Contemporary Debate* (Palgrave: Basingstoke and New York, 2000).
- 5 See Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man: Political Economies for the Working Class, 1775–1850* (Pluto Press: London and Sterling, VI, 1998).

- 6 John Wade, *The Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State, Courts of Law, Municipal Corporations and Public Companies; with a Précis of the House of Commons, Past, Present, and to Come* (Effingham Wilson: London, 1835).
- 7 In David Hart, *The Radical Liberalism of Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer*, PhD Thesis (King's College, Cambridge, 1984) <http://www.davidmhart.com/Papers/CCCD-PhD/index.html> (accessed 4 July 2012), HTML version. Chapter 4 part VI.
- 8 Ibid Chapter 2 C.
- 9 In Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel*, trans. Penelope Williams (Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1980), p.267.
- 10 William Ogilvie, 'Of the Right of Property in Land as Derived from the Law of Nature', in Vallentyne and Steiner (eds), *The Origins of Left Libertarianism*, pp.49–64.
- 11 For a discussion of Godwin's relationship to Utilitarianism, see Noel Thompson, *The Market and its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Routledge: London and New York, 1988), pp.40–4.
- 12 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, introduced by Isaac Kramnick (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1985), p.710.
- 13 Ibid p.710.
- 14 Ibid p.711.
- 15 Ibid pp.711–12.
- 16 Ibid p.715.
- 17 Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (Freedom Press: London, 1986), p.38.
- 18 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988).
- 19 See Élie Halévy, *The Era of Tyrannies: Essays on Socialism and War*, trans. by R. K. Webb with a note by Fritz Stern (Allen Lane, Penguin Press: London, 1967), pp.17–81.
- 20 Élie Halévy, *Thomas Hodgskin* (ed.), in trans. with an introduction by A. J. Taylor (Ernest Benn Ltd: London, 1956), p.135.
- 21 Ibid pp.61–2.
- 22 Ibid p.62.
- 23 Noel Thompson sees this as a result of the influence of William Paley and a particular reading of Adam Smith. See Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man: Political Economies for the Working Class 1775–1850* (Pluto Press: London and Sterling, VI, 1998), p.54.
- 24 See J. M. Robertson, *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (Thoemmes Press: Bristol and Sterling, VI, 2001).

- 25 Élie Halévy, *Thomas Hodgskin*, pp.134–5.
- 26 Ibid p.51.
- 27 Thomas Hodgskin, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted* (B. Steil, London, 1832, reprinted by Augustus M. Kelley: New Jersey, 1973), p.19.
- 28 Ibid pp.44–5.
- 29 Thomas Hodgskin, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted*, p.51.
- 30 Ibid p.36.
- 31 Amongst the sections that suggest that Locke did think that the right to property is restricted are the following: ‘Thus the grass my horse has bit, the turfs *my servant has cut* (my emphasis) and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property without the assignation or consent of anybody. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.’ And ‘God gave the world ... to the use of the industrious and rational ... not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.’ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (Everyman Edition, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd: London, 1970), pp.130–3.
- 32 Thomas Hodgskin, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted*, pp.29–30.
- 33 Ibid p.57.
- 34 Ibid p.149.
- 35 Ibid p.131.
- 36 One example is Edward Carpenter. Sheila Rowbotham, in her magisterial biography, points out his frequent anti-Semitic outbursts. Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A life of Liberty and Love* (Verso: London and Brooklyn, 2009), see for example p.138 and pp.304–5. For a Trotskyite critique of left anti-Semitism, though with some historical weaknesses when discussing this period, see Steve Cohen, *That’s Funny You Don’t Look Anti-Semitic: An anti-racist analysis of left anti-semitism* (1984), available online at: <http://www.engageonline.org.uk/ressources/funny/contents.html> (last accessed 10 November 2010).
- 37 See for example, Paul Berman, *Power and the Idealists: The Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (W. W. Norton: New York and London, 2007), for a discussion of the role of anti-Semitic discourses in the modern left.
- 38 He continues: ‘...while the priest holds up the idol-god of a foreign and *despised race* (my emphasis), to terrify the vulgar, he makes searching demands on our pockets.’ Thomas Hodgskin, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted*, p.15. The association of Judaism and finance capital made racism acceptable amongst some on the left as well as the right.
- 39 Ibid p.91.

- 40 Ibid p.102.
- 41 Ibid p.180.
- 42 Ibid p.181.
- 43 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the 'Philosophy of Poverty' by M. Proudhon* (Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1978), p.221.
- 44 Thomas Hodgskin, *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted*, pp.178–9.
- 45 Ibid pp.161–2.
- 46 J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism', *The American History Review* (Vol. 50, No. 4, July 1945), pp.714–37.
- 47 Starting with Karl Marx himself in his sustained attack, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.
- 48 *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, (ed.) Iain MacKay (AK Press: Edinburgh and Oakland, 2011).
- 49 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, trans. from the French by Benj. R. Tucker (William Reeves: London, 1898, repr. 1969), p.37.
- 50 Ibid p.227.
- 51 Ibid p.65.
- 52 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. from the French by John Beverley Robinson, new Introduction by Robert Graham (Pluto Press: London, 1989), p.209.
- 53 Ibid p.216. The word 'property' in this context in the later works is used to denote 'possession'.
- 54 Ibid p.210.
- 55 See Elié Halévy, *The Era of Tyrannies*, pp.1–16.
- 56 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?*, pp.189–90.
- 57 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *System of Economical Contradictions or The Philosophy of Misery*, Volume One, trans. by Benjamin R. Tucker (Benj. R. Tucker: Boston, MA. 1888, repr. Arno Press: New York, 1972), p.178.
- 58 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution*, p.50.
- 59 Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (W. W. Norton: New York and London, 1991), p.52.
- 60 In Stewart Edwards (ed.), *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, with introduction by Stewart Edwards, trans. by Elizabeth Fraser (Macmillan: London, 1970), p.156.
- 61 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?*, p.251.
- 62 Ibid p.270.
- 63 Ibid pp.154–5.
- 64 Ibid pp.141–2.

- 65 See for example, David Graeber, *Debt* (Chapter Four), Kindle location 1773–81.
- 66 Ibid (Chapter Five), Kindle location 2241.
- 67 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Organisation of Credit and Circulation and the Solution of the Social Problem*, in Iain MacKay, *Property is Theft!*, p.284.
- 68 Ibid p.290.
- 69 See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Principle of Federation*, trans. and introduced by Richard Vernon (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1979).
- 70 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Theory of Economical Contradictions*, p.85.
- 71 Ibid p.51.
- 72 Ibid p.434.
- 73 Ibid p.146.
- 74 Ibid p.434. Tucker awkwardly translates this as ‘ill done’ not ‘ill-doing’, and thus fails to convey the full strength of the original.
- 75 Edward Hyams, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works* (John Murray: London, 1979), pp.243–4.
- 76 For an example of a complete misreading of Proudhon you can’t do better, or worse, than the chapter on him in James Joll, *The Anarchists*, (Methuen: London, 1979). See particularly p.60 where he referred to Proudhon as envisaging ‘... men living an extremely austere life with few needs ... However much he may have realized that “the workshop is the basis of the new society”, it was a workshop in rural surroundings, and the artisans were small holders at heart.’
- 77 In Stewart Edwards (ed.), *Selected Writings*, pp.259–60.

2

Kropotkin and the rise of anarchist communism

The development of anarchism in Britain was hugely influenced by the presence of large numbers of European exiles, as the country became an oasis of uneasy tolerance in a continent dominated by repression. For a time London was the centre of the international anarchist movement; freedom of expression had trumped the weather. The central figure in all this was Peter Kropotkin. Not only was he an international revolutionary celebrity, but he also integrated himself within the British movement and became a focal point for native anarchist ideas and organization. As Carissa Honeywell points out, ‘unlike other anarchist writers within this community (of political exiles) he wrote in English and directed his arguments to British readers’. If not a British writer, he was integral to the British milieu and found support amongst a growing communist sentiment, which had, in part, been nurtured by the most radical elements of Chartism. Honeywell is right to say that he ‘was part of British politics’.¹

Kropotkin first arrived in the UK in 1876 following his dramatic escape from the Peter and Paul fortress in St Petersburg. His arrest as a leading member of the dissident Chaikovskii Circle had followed on from an early military career in Siberia and a subsequent period of geographical research that marked him out as a distinguished scholar. Neither these, nor his impeccably aristocratic background, could save him from the Tsarist police. His first stay was short, leaving in January 1877 to live in Switzerland and work with the Jura Federation. However, he was to make the mistake of moving to France, where he was arrested again in the continuing repression that set in after the Paris Commune. Convicted along with more than sixty others in Lyon on scanty evidence, he served a further three years in prison before returning in poor health to Britain in 1886 to begin some thirty years of exile, until the Russian Revolution drew him back to his home country. And it was here in Britain that he conceived and wrote the major books

that were to form the theoretical basis for much of the anarcho-communist movement that was to follow: *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, *Mutual Aid* and *Ethics*.

Those works established Kropotkin's reputation and ensured his continuing influence. Yet, in the popular view, they obscured something else – his revolutionary zeal and his rejection of pacifism. He was not the gentle anarchist of *Mutual Aid*.² In part, this was down to the continuing influence of the man who was described by George Woodcock as Proudhon's 'most spectacular and most heretical disciple, Michael Bakunin'.³

In one aspect, Bakunin's heresy was of great value. He comprehensively broke with Proudhon's anti-feminism, arguing for complete gender equality.⁴ Kropotkin was prepared to take this further into the domestic sphere through a critique of housework as an instrument of women's oppression.⁵ He was a man of his times though; the solution to the crippling burden of domestic chores was not men sharing it, but technology to do it *for* women.

Kropotkin was also critical of those who divorced gender from class. He felt that middle-class reformers, campaigning for equal rights, only addressed the liberation of one class of woman, and then solely in their public lives, leaving the domestic sphere untouched. Not only that, but the nature of class inequality meant that middle-class women's liberation did not abolish housework, it merely displaced it, intensifying the exploitation of working-class women through domestic service.⁶ What is more, Kropotkin always refrained from using the gender-exclusive term 'fraternity', replacing it with 'solidarity', and from now on anarchism was firmly committed to a feminist agenda.

Kropotkin inherited three main ideological themes from Bakunin: his belief in revolutionary spontaneity as the main organizing principle of social change; the rejection of all forms of private property; and his anti-German sentiments, though, thankfully, without Bakunin's anti-Semitism. The latter has been widely blamed for Kropotkin's support for the Allied cause in the First World War, something that perplexed many of his anarchist comrades. To argue that it was would be to do him a disservice.

By 1914, anarchists broadly conformed to an anti-war orthodoxy. They saw war as purely a product of the nation state, capitalism and imperialism. They wanted nothing to do with something that was leading to the systematic slaughter of the working classes on the battlefields of Europe. Though not embracing the revolutionary defeatism of Lenin, they were active in opposing the war and wanted to see it end immediately. Hostility to the war was an ideological companion to their rejection of the state, but the real driver was moral revulsion at the phenomenon of war itself. From his earlier writings, such as the pamphlet *War!*,⁷ one would have supposed Kropotkin to have been with them. His was an orthodox view that the causes of war lay with imperial competition for markets. Yet in

1914 he published his *Letter to Steffen* in the November issue of *Freedom*,⁸ calling for support for the defence of France against the German invasion. The subsequent furore led to his departure from *Freedom*, the paper he helped to found. In 1916, at the peak of socialist anti-war agitation, he continued his stance by being a cosignatory with Jean Grave and others of the *Manifesto of the Sixteen*,⁹ opposing moves to end the war that would, presumably, cement German gains.

The question remains as to whether this stance can be ascribed mainly to his broad anti-German views. These were real enough, consistently held and in evidence throughout the letter. Even his use of clear and accessible language, which has led some to unfairly describe him as a propagandist rather than a theorist, was his deliberate counterblast against what he called 'the barbaric terminology of the German philosophers'.¹⁰ In today's parlance, he would be called a Germanophobe. Yet, this is a lazy explanation. Kropotkin was perfectly clear about his position. He had not renounced any of his earlier beliefs about war and its causes, but he felt that neither 'pacifist dreams' nor anti-war agitation stood any chance of ending the existence of war. It would require a total social transformation to remove its roots. However, he also saw the advance of a centralized, militaristic German state as a major danger. This was not a sudden conversion; Rudolf Rocker records Kropotkin expressing his growing alarm as early as 1896.¹¹ He also romanticized France as being the source of the liberties that the French Revolution had spread (he had written an appreciative history of the Revolution¹²), despite his experience of arrest and imprisonment in the country.

What Kropotkin was doing was looking beyond the general experience of war itself and considering the consequences of this specific war's potential outcomes. An anti-war stance on one side would aid Prussian militarism on the other. This debate mirrors the modern split in the left over the wars in Iraq and, particularly, Afghanistan, between anti-imperialists opposing Western interventions regardless and anti-totalitarians who generally support liberal intervention and the war against theocratic terrorism.¹³ Kropotkin's position was based on a rational calculation of what the effects of a German victory would be, especially when it would, as he saw it, have resulted from an act of aggression. His support for the Allied side was not an expression of prejudice.

Not only was Kropotkin no pacifist, he was also wedded to an eschatological concept of revolution, violent if necessary, writing that:

We are right to declare that a terrible revolution is inevitable if we are finally to cleanse our societies down to the roots ... The plague is already on our doorsteps; we must destroy its causes, and even if we have to proceed by fire and iron, we must not hesitate. It is a question of the salvation of humanity.¹⁴

Unlike Proudhon, he felt that antinomies could be resolved, once and for all, by a communist revolution. This linking of communism with social revolution marked a sharp departure from the left libertarian ideas of earlier in the century.

The one thing that Kropotkin did share with Proudhon was his attitude to Marxist state communism. Although he was not a close student of Marx, he agreed that Marx's advocacy of political, as well as social, revolution through the conquest of the state by the working class would lead to tyranny. As a natural scientist, he also denied the right of Marx to refer to his socialism as scientific. Martin Miller puts it nicely; Kropotkin 'argued that this (Marxism's) claim to science was a false one. What Marx had done, he believed, was merely to use Hegelian metaphysics to explain material reality.'¹⁵ Instead, he turned to Bakunin, adopted the idea of revolutionary spontaneity and decisively broke with Proudhon by denying the rights of all forms of individual property, including possession. He wrote:

In common with all socialists, the anarchists hold that the private ownership of land, capital, and machinery has had its time; that it is condemned to disappear; and that all requisites for production must, and will, become the common property of society.¹⁶

Fundamental to his analysis of property was the idea that capitalism had been a process of dispossession. The task of revolutionaries was to restore to the people that which had been stolen from them. State ownership would not be restitution; it would be compounding the original theft by placing all economic power in the hands of a centralized, despotic state. However, Kropotkin thought that by retaining direct ownership mutualism would in effect be the preservation of capital by other means, simply making it 'less offensive'.¹⁷ His reason for rejecting any form of individual possession is that private property dispossessed the people of their *collective*, not individual, property. What guaranteed their independence and liberty was not personal possession but rights of access to communal land and productive forces via the village commons and the city guilds.¹⁸ Thus, collectivization is only the restoration of rights that had existed previously, but partially, in full.

In repudiating the right of ownership through labour and denying any historical origin for it, Kropotkin underestimated, arguably, the strength of individual independence in pre-industrial society and thus dismissed an aspect of social organization that others had identified as liberating. Being critical of utopian and authoritarian socialists, he saw that there is more than one variety of collectivism. However, this insight was not applied to personal possession. He tended to see individual ownership as a monolith consisting only of 'bourgeois' private property.

There is a classic example of that reasoning in his early work, *Words of a Rebel*. He castigates liberals for first praising private property by pointing out the increased productivity of peasants once they own their own land and then justifying enclosure on the grounds of the superior virtue of private property, a process that actually dispossessed the individual peasant.¹⁹ He was right; it is an absurd argument. But then to deduce from this that the only possible property relationship is some form of collectivism is another logical non sequitur. Godwin, Hodgskin and Proudhon had, from the same position, all emphasized the natural right and social need of producers to directly own their own means of production and the product of their labour. Kropotkin's negation of all forms of individual possession does not automatically follow. If his justification of collectivism was to be convincing, Kropotkin needed to produce other utilitarian justifications. He did this mainly by focusing on agriculture.

The attention paid to agriculture is one of the positive features of Kropotkin's thought. In an explicit rejection of the Marxist notion of the historic role of the urban proletariat, he wrote: 'The emancipation of the proletariat will not even be possible while the revolutionary movement fails to embrace the countryside.'²⁰ Industrial workers still need to be fed and so agriculture not only is essential, but also has to be integral to a new revolutionary society. Yet, Kropotkin also felt that the liberation of the peasant and the farm labourer was not to come from land redistribution but collectivization. The major reason he gave is economic; collectivism is more productive. Whilst a peasant owner may produce more than a serf, a comparison of small-scale peasant farming with modern larger-scale intensive agriculture would, Kropotkin asserted, show the latter to be far more productive, leading to a reduction in work and ending the exploitation of the peasant. Only collective ownership would allow large-scale communal investment in expenditure and labour, thereby liberating the small farmer from time-consuming and back-breaking work, whilst producing an abundant supply of food for the whole community. Individual ownership hinders collective progress and impoverishes subsistence farmers.²¹

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, large-scale agriculture and collectivization do not appear quite so attractive. The experience of commercial agribusiness and the manifest disaster of collectivization in the Soviet Union suggests this type of farming is hardly liberating. Of course, Kropotkin would not have viewed these as anything other than another form of expropriation and centralization as they rested on the concentration of ownership rather than the abandonment of private property. Even so, he still doesn't wholly convince. And in making his argument, he too failed to compare like with like. He compared large-scale agriculture with a serf or a heavily taxed, socially marginalized peasant who has no access to capital, not with a small farmer with access to cheap credit and local markets. In addition, the subdivision of land into unviable plots is

a product of inequitable land ownership, rather than ownership itself. Intriguingly, recent work by two Nobel Prize-winning economists gives additional perspectives. Amartya Sen²² contradicts him by emphasizing the greater productivity of small-scale agriculture, whereas Elinor Ostrom²³ is more supportive by pointing to the effectiveness of the self-regulating commons. This indicates a sub-theme running through the argument of this book that the monist positions of both individualists and communists do not fully satisfy and that in the end there is a need for some type of synthesis.

Kropotkin's utilitarian proofs may not be completely persuasive, but the major justification for his communism was integral to his whole ideology that equal access and equitable distribution is only possible without property.²⁴ Kropotkin argued that collective ownership arises out of the collaborative nature of work. In common with Proudhon, he saw production as a social act, but the contribution of any individual is indivisible from the contribution of all. Once again, he ignored Proudhon's advocacy of association to pose a stark choice between individual ownership and communism:

... individual appropriation is neither just nor serviceable. All belongs to all. All things are for all men, since all men have need of them, since all men have worked in the measure of their strength to produce them, and since it is not possible to evaluate every one's part in the production of the world's wealth.²⁵

Thus, social justice needs communism:

The common possession of the instruments of labour must necessarily bring with it the enjoyment in common of the fruits of common labour.²⁶

Communism would mean that there is no need for any mechanism for the exchange of goods and labour. Instead, Kropotkin argued, the spontaneous actions of the people in a propertyless society would distribute goods according to need, and thereby fulfil all the distributive functions of the future society. Instead of 'worthless paper-money', the peasant would be rewarded with manufactured articles, given freely, and would then, out of solidarity, reciprocate by sending their produce into the cities.²⁷ Not only did Kropotkin explicitly reject the wage system and the market, but he also, in what seems a huge leap in faith, denied the need for any system of exchange whatsoever, even dismissing mutualism. Noel Thompson is right when he writes that Kropotkin 'added little of worth to the discussion of the basis upon which a decentralised communism would function in the absence of a market mechanism'.²⁸

For Kropotkin, private property is dysfunctional, preventing co-operation.²⁹ He gave the example of the patent, which turns ideas into

property, hindering the dissemination of knowledge – something many individualists also argued – though Kropotkin saw capitalism and individualism as one and the same, both enemies of human progress. He argued that capitalism, by its very nature, provides disproportionate rewards and these result in exploitation, not just of workers, but also of the country by the town,³⁰ whereas the two should live in harmony.

Kropotkin asserted that the aim of society should be the production of ‘the greatest amount of goods necessary to the well-being of all, with the least possible waste of human energy’.³¹ Explicitly rejecting Adam Smith’s contention that private wants can lead to public goods, he continued: ‘This generalised aim cannot be the aim of a private owner; and this is why society as a whole ... will be compelled to expropriate all that enhances well-being while producing wealth.’³² Revolutionary expropriation became his chosen method of collectivization.

The starting point for the coming revolution would be the complete destruction of the state; social change is impossible if attempted through government. And this includes liberal democracy. Kropotkin’s anti-democratic sentiment reflects much of the fashionable cynicism of our times.³³ Elections are ‘fairs at which vanities are traded for consciences’.³⁴ Candidates behave disgustingly, falsely ‘flattering the mother, the child, and if necessary caressing the asthmatic dog or cat of the “voter”!’.³⁵ Then again, there is the professional politician, ‘the worst type of all’, whose practice is based on ‘display, pizzazz and corruption!’.³⁶ The answer to this charade is revolution. That revolution has to destroy government, which can never be the instrument for making a social revolution.³⁷

Kropotkin was convinced that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable and imminent. A spontaneous uprising of the masses would destroy it. The persistence of the injustices of capitalist society was inconceivable. And this belief in spontaneity meant that he put forward no particular revolutionary strategy to bring it about. Even though he admitted that anarchism was a minority view, he thought that it would soon spread and inspire the world to take action and that the people’s instincts would lead them to the expropriation of property.

Kropotkin was certainly not a crude economic determinist, however he did insist that political power is underpinned by economic control.³⁸ It would not be enough to remove government without eradicating private property. This led Kropotkin into two theoretical difficulties. First, collectivization of all property means the dispossession of the small peasant farmer and artisan as much as the landed gentry and industrialist. Kropotkin did not wish these people away as Marxists tended to do by arguing that they form an anomalous class doomed to disappear. On the contrary, he is closer to people like Hodgskin in his views. Rather than focusing on the concentration of capital, Kropotkin argued that small factories and workshops proliferated in advanced capitalism³⁹ and, in contrast with his views on

agriculture, he saw these small productive organizations as the basis for the new urban economy. Nevertheless, if property were to cease to exist, then craftsmen in small workshops as well as the peasant farmer would have to be dispossessed.

Initially, Kropotkin appeared to limit expropriation to 'everything that enables any man ... to appropriate the product of others' toil'.⁴⁰ However, he later argued that as 'all is interdependent in a civilized society; it is impossible to reform any one thing without altering the whole'.⁴¹ And so, all property will have to be expropriated. This is hardly a course of action that would endear owner/producers to the revolutionary cause. Rather than face this problem and question his collectivism, Kropotkin ducked the issue by insisting that small proprietors would willingly abandon their property rights. In the countryside, he wrote, inspired by the bands of 'joyous and gay' (and, no doubt, inexperienced) workers flooding out of the cities to give voluntary help to the small farmer, 'do you think he will not ask to play his part in the great human family?'.⁴² The answer is probably no. The peasants would undoubtedly wish to maintain possession of the land, just as Proudhon suggested. This would be a fulfilment of centuries of ambition and rural culture. The revolution would only be supported if it gave land to the peasant rather than removed it. Accordingly, the question arises that if the small proprietor does not wish to be dispossessed, how will a propertyless society emerge without coercion? This highlights Kropotkin's second theoretical problem. Can a process of dispossession be one of liberation?

Firstly, the question arises as to who precisely dispossesses whom. Kropotkin was not naive enough to rely on simple generalizations and realized that there had to be an agent of expropriation. This again he thought would arise spontaneously. He envisaged voluntary groups of people springing up who would survey and allocate housing to the most needy,⁴³ take command of the food supply and set up large communal kitchens,⁴⁴ all acting with heroic altruism and, in a telling phrase, guaranteeing that there would be no counter-revolution because the 'people are up in arms'.⁴⁵

This instantly raises a problem. Armed groups of expropriators are exercisers of power and they may form the basis of a future power structure that could undermine the very liberty that is central to his anarchist vision. This could happen in two ways. First, if there were resistance, the expropriation of property would have to be accompanied by violence. Violence is hardly the best way of ensuring social harmony, and historical examples of human behaviour during the violent breakdown of civil order are not encouraging. Communal divisions, ethnic and confessional hatreds, local rivalries and even the petty jealousies of neighbours would have to dissolve instantly in the fervour of revolutionary enlightenment. The process of revolutionary expropriation could be a vehicle for the expression of conflict rather than its resolution.

Secondly, those who coerce the property owners also have to be of common mind and intention, the benefit of all. Individual desire and partiality are assumed to vanish. Again, this is highly unlikely and there is every chance of the misuse and entrenchment of coercive power, even of the emergence of an embryonic state system.⁴⁶ Evolutionary approaches, such as Proudhon's, avoid this potential. However, Kropotkin is unshakable in his Bakuninist conception of the revolution. Indeed, John Quail quotes Stepniak in asserting that Kropotkin was 'too exclusive and rigid in his theoretical convictions'.⁴⁷ This may be unfair in some respects, but Kropotkin would not abandon his belief in spontaneous revolution, whatever the objections.

The picture of Kropotkin's ideology that emerges is one that denies the necessity of politics, property and exchange; asserts that there is no need for a revolutionary organization; and argues that the cathartic process of rebellion instantly transforms human personalities. It is hardly surprising that one of the main criticisms levelled against him is over-optimism. If that were his sole output, it would be hard to see his reputation as a major influence on libertarian thought surviving. Instead, faced with his own internal contradictions and assailed by the external challenges of liberal individualism together with the rise of what is now known as social democracy,⁴⁸ he sought to explain the plausibility of his position. In doing so, he produced work that, stripped of its historical context, was to prove to be of enduring significance and of great influence and interest for subsequent generations of anarchists.

Mutual aid

Kropotkin was fully aware of the objection that egoism and greed could lead to abuse by those who organized expropriation. In earlier works, he dealt with this in a rather simplistic way by arguing that antisocial behaviour is a function of life in capitalist society and will disappear in a transformed world. By the end of his life, he took a more sophisticated stance, relating human behaviour to social development.⁴⁹ For Kropotkin, human institutions are not the product of any social contract but an emanation of human nature itself, and this is what he began to explore. For this enquiry, he abandoned revolutionary rhetoric and began to examine human history through his particular expertise, the natural sciences. In doing so he established a small tradition of the geographer/scientist anarchist, in which he was followed by Elisée Reclus and Patrick Geddes.

Kropotkin resisted any temptation to romanticize human nature. He rejected both the Hobbesian conceptions of the brutish state of unrestrained humanity together with the idyllic idea of the noble savage as ideological

abstracts. Instead, he based his views on his understanding of the processes of natural evolution. The most important evolutionary advantage that humans had was, according to Kropotkin, our capacity to co-operate and support each other – mutual aid. His book that elaborated on this theme, *Mutual Aid*, began life as a series of articles in the prominent periodical, *The Nineteenth Century*, as an answer to what Kropotkin saw as a misreading of Darwin in a previous piece by T. H. Huxley.⁵⁰ Huxley emphasized the struggle of individual organisms against each other for resources. This reading had been widely translated into Social Darwinism and a crude Malthusian individualism. Kropotkin saw this as a distortion of the totality of Darwin's thinking and instead wrote from the Russian tradition in evolutionary thought, which emphasized the collective struggle of a whole species for survival in a potentially hostile environment,⁵¹ neatly dovetailing with his collectivist politics. The themes Kropotkin developed in *Mutual Aid* were extended in his later work, *Ethics*, and together they form a coherent account of his thinking on human nature and his theory of history. Probably, the best place to start is his discussion of the nature of conscience.

Kropotkin agreed with Kant that there is a categorical moral imperative, a sense of right and wrong, but he rejected Kant's metaphysics. Kant may have identified its existence but could not explain its origins. Darwin provided this explanation. Human conscience is the result of a struggle between, using Proudhon's term, two antinomies: the instinct for individual gratification and the instinct for sociability⁵² – the very conflict that he saw at the heart of human evolution. It is the social instinct that is the basis for human evolutionary success and it is there we find our conscience. The feeling of guilt we experience after a selfish act is a reflection of our innate sociability. In this way, Kropotkin found morality in nature, rather than seeing it as a human construct that was necessary so that people can transcend nature. It is universal and, as he succinctly put it, 'A man who possessed no trace of such instincts would be a monster'.⁵³

These pangs of conscience are not momentary sensations. Because the social instinct is far more powerful and permanent than the instinct for individual survival, feelings of remorse will persist long after the sensation of personal gratification has gone and will affect later behaviour. Kropotkin saw the ultimate triumph of sociability occurring as humans become accustomed to the idea of duty and the individual instinct coincides more and more with the social instinct.⁵⁴ People learn from experience. This emphasis on social learning came to the fore when he introduced a second aspect of human behaviour – an instinct for justice. He argued that Darwin's explanation was incomplete because it excluded a concept of justice derived from our capacity for reason;⁵⁵ thereby he united Enlightenment thinking with evolutionary biology.

The demands of evolution ensure that personal desires are made subordinate to the needs of the group, both through instinct and intellectual understanding. At first sight, this could appear to be profoundly illiberal. Certainly, Kropotkin was no friend of liberal individualism, which he felt to be divisive and likely to produce the triumph of the strong over the weak. However, he was not proposing the submission of the individual to a general will, expressed through a social contract. Instead, Kropotkin argued that there is an inherent moral connection between all people, an instinctive identification with others, which allows for communal self-regulation. Therefore 'the conceptions of good and evil were thus evolving not on the basis of what represented good or evil for a separate individual but on what represented good and evil for the whole tribe.'⁵⁶ Collective good should always have precedence over individual desire if that desire was harmful to others. The well-being of all is instinctively wished for through the development of a sense of justice to augment natural human conscience. Because of this, acts of self-sacrifice are entirely voluntary, free decisions made by free individuals, rooted in their deep integration in an organic community. In this way, the sense of justice is not the unconditional suppression of individual liberty; it is the suppression of the freedom of the individual to oppress others – permanently.⁵⁷ But still, it makes me uneasy. Kropotkin didn't accept the argument that individual liberty, with all the messy conflicts that can imply, can be the basis of a collective good and that without it communal organizations can be stultifying, conformist and oppressive. Individual liberties can act as a permanent restraint on the possibilities of collectives developing authoritarian tendencies. For Kropotkin, communal self-regulation without external authority was liberty. His collectivism is certainly consistent, but I find his conception of freedom worryingly limited.

This, in turn, raises the question, from where does this concept of justice arise? The answer comes back once again – nature. Human morality and justice are both to be found in nature and are not external to it. After all, societies based on mutual aid and solidarity preceded the existence of human beings. People had a powerful role model, they learnt through the observation of animals. They lived with animals, tracked their patterns of migration, saw them as wise, in constant communication and observed the way they lived in mutually supportive organic societies.⁵⁸

Nature itself is neither moral nor immoral. What Kropotkin argued is that it contains the examples of behaviour, which, when learnt and internalized, become an instinctive morality and the basis for the conscious reasoning that leads to human progress. Virtue is of and in nature and it is discovered by our immersion in it, not our conquest of it. If we lose our contact with the natural world, we also lose the sources of the instinct that creates institutions of mutual aid and solidarity and a selfish, destructive individualism comes to the fore. The industrial state is a perfect example of

the development of institutions that are expressions of individual greed and exploitation. It gives the selfish instinct the opportunity to acquire wealth by fostering 'the struggle for domination and the enrichment of some through the toil of others'.⁵⁹

This set Kropotkin against the dominant nineteenth-century concept of progress. Far from industrial society ushering in a new, more peaceful form of social solidarity, the exploitative nature of industrialism produces war and violence. Those who argue that nature is violent and competitive, who speak of the inherently evil nature of humanity and the need for restraint through religion or authority, are merely sophists. Not only are they ignorant of intra-specific co-operation in the natural world, they are, according to Kropotkin, spouting an unscientific ideology in order to justify their privilege. 'Every state constitutes an alliance of the rich against the poor, and of the ruling classes, i.e., the military, the lawyers, the rulers, and the clergy, against the governed',⁶⁰ not the establishment of a social contract protecting social order.

In fact, Kropotkin maintained, peoples living closer to the state of nature in simple societies can have a 'far clearer perception of justice than the more developed peoples'.⁶¹ He recounted that during his travels in Siberia it was difficult for him 'to explain how it was that in our Christian societies people frequently die from hunger, while side by side with them other people are living in affluence. To a Tungus, an Aleut, and to many others, such a situation is utterly incomprehensible'.⁶² Yet, even in complex industrial societies with their myriad of injustices, such an ethic is developed, but usually amongst the oppressed and by the need to survive. Informal and active mutual aid is a necessity in the lives of the poor and it is they who Kropotkin saw as the most morally advanced. This is what the revolution will call into being – the morality of simple societies recreated in advanced ones. He would not wish to rescue people from the 'idiocies of rural life'.

Kropotkin's idea of a future anarchist society is rooted in his theory of history, understood as a process of social evolution analogous to the evolution of species. He did not see history as linear, nor was it cyclical. Instead, he insisted that, as in nature, periods of growth are often followed by regression and there is no pattern to this, only an explanation. Societies lose their vitality when they have abandoned mutual aid in favour of individualism and competition, resulting in war, conflict and barbarism. Even the inventiveness of modern industrial society, he argued, owes more to co-operation rather than competition, contrary to the conventions of nineteenth-century political economy.⁶³ Kropotkin saw modern industrial society as being based on the advances in technology generated by the medieval city between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Industrial progress was halted by the collapse of these highly co-operative communities, and it was only the nineteenth century's rediscovery of their technology that launched the Industrial Revolution.

That collapse, for Kropotkin, was due to the fundamental cause of all historical change, the conflict between authority and liberty. Liberty was embodied in voluntary collective institutions, authority was the product of religious and military elites conspiring to 'reign over the peoples, hold them in subjection and compel them to work for the masters'.⁶⁴ Though Kropotkin felt that history had lurched between structures dominated by these two tendencies, he did not ascribe these shifts to a single motivating force, such as class conflict. The causes of social change are multifaceted. However, at no point in time has one tendency succeed in abolishing the other. Indeed, so deeply rooted is mutual aid in the human psyche, that it is incapable of abolition. Mutual aid is the dominant feature of human history, persisting amongst the people even at the time of the blackest repression. Authority, on the other hand, is capable of being eradicated, and the task of the revolution is to obliterate it forever. Because of the centrality of mutual aid in human life, Kropotkin challenged traditional historiography. He argued that human history has been overwhelmingly peaceful.

The twenty-first century has begun with war, civil conflict, totalitarian resurgence and arbitrary terrorism. It follows on from the century of total wars and systematic genocide. The word 'peaceful' to describe history does not immediately spring to mind. Yet, in the midst of it all, people survive. They help each other and do their best to maintain their lives and hope for a better future. In the middle of war, peace still exists. What is more, Kropotkin believed, history is skewed. History as conventionally understood is an intellectual construct that records the occasions when peaceful life breaks down, not the far longer periods of tranquillity and more numerous examples of individual lives lived in co-operative activity in both simple and complex societies. He pleaded for a social history that would 'restore the real proportion between conflict and union' and that 'after having heard so much about what used to divide men' will 'reconstruct stone by stone the institutions which used to unite them'.⁶⁵ Those institutions are the historic embodiment of mutual aid.

The earliest form of human social organization was not, as was the dominant nineteenth-century view, the family. Kropotkin claimed it was the clan or tribe. Whereas the family embodies individual values, the clan is imbued with the collective ethic. Using many examples of simple societies, Kropotkin demonstrated how communal sharing of survival needs and the identification of individual interests with the requirements of the tribe as a whole lead to customs, practices and values in which the individual sacrifices personal interests willingly for the benefit of the whole. This can lead to practices, such as infanticide, which, in another example of his anti-liberalism, he argued is totally misconstrued by 'civilized' societies. Infanticide is practiced only if the population outstrips the means of feeding it. Increase food supplies and infanticide stops. In extreme conditions, self-sacrifice for

the good of all is considered to be natural and is undertaken willingly. That sacrifice can be life itself: 'The savage [sic] ... considers death as part of his duties towards the community.'⁶⁶

The collapse of the clan system did not come about through new methods of production, but internally through the rise of the family, and, most importantly, through the disruption caused by the wave of migration from the East due to environmental factors. According to Kropotkin, it was the desiccation of Central Asia that led to the wholesale migration of people towards the West.⁶⁷ The resulting conflict with the indigenous people fundamentally altered social structures. However, new forms of organization soon adapted themselves to the requirements of mutual aid.

The rise of the family was countered with its integration within the village community. This new society had a strong identity with territory, yet did not develop a conception of private property. The territorial rights of a village were held in common. As village communities developed, they began to form networks for trade and rules, customs, and institutions for self-regulation. Uncultivated land was brought into productive use, new communities grew and flourished, domestic industry evolved, as did market centres, all without any superimposed authority.

Although immensely successful, village communities were to fall under the destructive power of authority. Undoubtedly force and wealth played a role in the establishment of power. However, Kropotkin, paradoxically, asserted that 'the deeper we penetrate into the history of early institutions, the less we find grounds for the military theory of the origin of authority. Even that power which later on became such a source of oppression, seems, on the contrary, to have found its origin in the peaceful inclinations of the masses.'⁶⁸ Out of the passion for justice arose a judiciary, arbitrators in disputes who began to be venerated and to collect imposed penalties. Though initially still accountable to collective institutions, such as the folkmote, the judge or king began to emerge as an independent person of power and to destroy the liberty of the village. The reason for the toleration of this was the spread of the concept of authority embodied in Roman law and the teachings of the Church. Kropotkin was not satisfied with a purely materialistic explanation of the development of power and the subjection of the village community by the imposition of feudalism. For him, ideology plays a crucial role in historical development. Those ideas enabled a collective institution to be crushed. The powerful legitimated their greed through the ideology of power in order to consolidate their domination. Kropotkin was scathing about those who argued that the village community died due to relative economic failure rather than deliberate action.⁶⁹ It died at the hands of the state.

The struggle between authority and communal independence was to take a further turn when the larger, fortified villages rose against the new feudal monarchs and established their independence through the medieval

city. Kropotkin indulged in the fashionable nineteenth-century cult of the medieval by claiming that 'not only many aspirations of our modern radicals were already realized in the Middle Ages, but much of what is described now as Utopian was accepted then as a matter of fact'.⁷⁰ The medieval city was, for Kropotkin, one of the pinnacles of human achievement. Not only did the arts and sciences flourish, but also work was fulfilling and satisfying, whilst the city was broadly equitable. This social justice was achieved by the embodiment of mutual aid, the guild system.

The guild system protected both the quality of production and the earnings of the producers and, although admitting to wide differentials between master, journeyman, and apprentice, 'this was a difference of age and skill, not wealth and power'.⁷¹ The guilds were not merely trade and employment organizations, they were instruments of social integration. Given the wealth and the flourishing of inventiveness in the Middle Ages, how then did the city fall under royal power and lose its independence to the nation state, ushering in a new dark age? Kropotkin's answer embodied hints as to his vision of a future society.

There were many factors involved in the rise of the state and the fall of the free cities. However, three elements stand out in Kropotkin's writing. First, he again stressed the importance of ideology. A deliberately constructed intellectual hegemony, preaching that 'salvation must be sought for in a strongly-centralized State, placed under a semi-divine authority; that one man can and must be the saviour of society',⁷² took root. Yet, this ideology can be defeated and another can supplant it, bringing change in its wake. People can be inspired by other ideas, to give them a sense of the possible, in order to create revolution. This is the duty of the conscious anarchist. 'All that is needed is that the public mind should be thoroughly convinced of the necessity of this transformation, and should come to look upon it as an act of justice and progress.'⁷³

Action, rather than ideas alone, was needed to bring down the independent city-state, but Kropotkin felt that these cities had made two fatal errors that sealed their fate. The first was that they allowed a class system to develop, which in its turn bred class conflict.⁷⁴ As those families who gained at the expense of the outsiders faced resentment and demands, they resorted to the tactics of authority to suppress dissent and maintain privilege. The city became feudalized.

The second error was, for Kropotkin, the most serious: 'The greatest and the most fatal error of most cities was to base their wealth upon commerce and industry, to the neglect of agriculture.'⁷⁵ The consequence of this was not merely the inability to feed the population but also the creation of a policy hostile to the land. Lack of self-sufficiency led to trade, in search of which colonies had been established. The need to maintain mercenary armies drained finances, exacerbating the gap between rich and poor. With the growth of exploitation, of both the peasants outside and the workers

within the city, the oppressed were only too willing to fall into the arms of a royal 'saviour'. The people 'by too much trusting to government ... had ceased to trust themselves ... The State had only to step in and crush down their last liberties.'⁷⁶ The independent city had doomed itself.

As a result, authority and centralization had been re-established. The attractiveness of the governmental idea even appealed to socialists. However, Kropotkin's optimism knew no bounds. Mutual aid continued and was still to be found in trade unions, friendly societies, co-operatives, and the simple neighbourliness of the poor in urban slums. It was embodied in the risings and revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even if they had been seduced by statist ideas and betrayed by authority.⁷⁷ What is more, it had not gone away and was now about to triumph. And this time it would rectify the mistakes of the past.

Fields, Factories and Workshops – a study in sustainability

The coming revolution would usher in a new society, which will be permanent, based on the certainties of scientific knowledge, and will expel authority forever. It is a dream that Kropotkin was sure would one day come to pass and, to counter a charge of utopianism, he explored the viability of this new world in his prolonged essay on the political economy of sustainable cities and integrated labour, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.⁷⁸ Kropotkin sought to use science to show that it was possible to recreate the independent industrial city in a modern setting, closely integrating it with agriculture and maintaining unity with the natural world. It would mark the final victory of mutual aid. This meant that he wrote outside the mainstream of political economy, rejecting many of the conventional doctrines of both liberals and socialists, including the left libertarians that preceded him. Though he did have one thing in common with them – contempt for Malthus' ideas on population.

Kropotkin denied that hunger was the result of population pressure:

... the over-population fallacy does not stand the very first attempt at submitting it to a closer examination. Those only can be horror struck at seeing the population of this country increase by one individual every 1,000 seconds who think of a human being as a mere claimant upon the material wealth of mankind, without being at the same time a contributor to that stock.⁷⁹

A growing population meant a greater potential for inventiveness and production:

... the productive powers of the human race increase at a much more rapid ratio than its power of reproduction. The more thickly men are crowded on the soil, the more rapid is the growth of their wealth creating power.⁸⁰

Kropotkin saw technological, industrial, agricultural and scientific development as essential to human prosperity. For all his emphasis on nature, he was not a rural romantic, as so many Victorian figures were. And, as a result of the progress he envisaged, Kropotkin insisted that well-being for all is a physical possibility.

To bring this about there has to be a solution to the failings of the systems of production in capitalist societies, to turn social exclusion into inclusion. Sharing the critique of under-consumption, he wished to include the unemployed as producers and the poor as consumers, thereby enabling all to make their full contribution to the collective wealth of society. Yet though he is often seen as an ecologist, he was not a conservationist: 'However splendid, a meadow remains a meadow, much inferior in productivity to a cornfield.'⁸¹ On the other hand, he was an early bio-regionalist, arguing that the natural organizational basis for human life is not the arbitrary and artificial boundaries of the nation state, but the natural geographical limits of sustainable regions. Kropotkin denied the need for exports to finance production at home. Instead, he argued for a predominantly self-sufficient local economy.

With a familiar-sounding picture of Britain's comparative decline and the impact of globalization, Kropotkin argued that it was impossible for Britain to remain the supplier of cotton goods to the world. Not only did excessive reliance on export trade lead to exploitation overseas and to war over the control of markets, it made a country instantly vulnerable to competitors. Production for export also leads to over-specialization, resulting in an inability to supply all local needs whilst rendering communities frighteningly dependent on only one source of employment. As one nation develops it will supplant the production of another, leaving unemployment and destitution in its wake.

Kropotkin did not argue for a cessation of trade, though he wished to limit it 'to the exchange of what really must be exchanged'.⁸² In contrast to material goods, the exchange of ideas and inventiveness needed to be extensive, free and unrestricted. However, he argued, both had to be free from the distorting effects of markets and money. Goods and ideas need to be freely given and freely received. There can be no artificial restrictions on human development, no secrets, no patents, and no monopolies. A free society is one based on free exchange:

Services rendered to society, be they work in factory or field, or mental services, cannot be valued in money. There can be no exact measure of

value (of what has been wrongly termed exchange value), nor of use value, in terms of production.⁸³

Free exchange in necessities is best achieved by production close to the point of consumption. Free exchange in ideas is the result of an egalitarian and interdependent global society. He felt that by localizing and collectivizing production, goods could be manufactured for need rather than for profit. After jettisoning the ideas of exchange and value, he then called into question the twin economic pillars of the centralizer's faith: the concentration of capital and the division of labour.

As mentioned earlier, Kropotkin did not feel that small industries died out as a result of the growth of industrial capitalism. New technology, especially electricity, provided greater opportunity for small-scale productive workshops to grow in number. Where small-scale manufacture did decline, this was not the result of the greater efficiency achieved by economies of scale, but the ability of larger firms to dominate the market place, thereby stifling diversity and innovation. Centralization did not occur because of mass production, but because mass producers have the power to control how and where goods are sold: 'This is why the "concentration" so much spoken of is often nothing but an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of dominating the market, not for cheapening the technical process.'⁸⁴

Kropotkin argued that the removal of a conventional market economy would release the energies and creativity of industry, thereby increasing production of a more diverse range of goods. In stark contrast to his ideas on agriculture, he was convinced that a manufacturing economy based on small-scale local production was not only possible, but would also be more productive. Whilst Kropotkin castigated the socialists for ignoring this fact, he also lambasted the right for trying to use small trades as the basis of nostalgic conservatism. Instead, small industries are capable of being the foundation of a new, decentralized economic order, responding to the needs of a community of free individuals, rather than the dictates of a cash economy.

Fed by the productiveness of intensive, collectivized agriculture, the bond between the city and the country would be cemented in two other ways. The first was by Kropotkin's insistence on organic agriculture:

Science ... sometimes misguided – as was the case with Liebig's theories, developed to the extreme by his followers, who induced us to treat plants as the glass recipients of chemical drugs, and who forgot that the only science capable of dealing with life and growth is physiology, not chemistry.⁸⁵

Thus *Fields, Factories and Workshops* is much concerned with manure, as

well as examining ingenious systems for using the by-products of urban industrial life: heat, light, glass and, of course, sewage.

The second was the idea of integrated labour. Fed by his rejection of the division of labour, Kropotkin asserted the need for each individual worker to be both an industrial and agricultural producer. Kropotkin argued that just as the centralization of production does not carry economic benefits for the many, so too the division of labour is counterproductive. Division may have brought some economic and technological advances, but at a cost to the individual and the community. To dispose of the division of labour is essentially liberating and solidaristic: 'Political economy has hitherto insisted chiefly on division. We proclaim integration; and we maintain that the ideal of society ... is a society of integrated, combined labour.'⁸⁶

The combination of industry and agriculture is hardly original in radical thought. Thomas More's *Utopia*, for instance, describes a vision of integrated labour similar to that of Kropotkin.⁸⁷ Kropotkin's unique contribution to this tradition was that he did not solely advocate integrated labour on moral grounds, but tried to argue that it is the cornerstone of economic efficiency, modernity and social change, whilst using modern science to show that it was technically possible.

In all his discussions of the nature of work, Kropotkin emphasized its importance in the fulfilment of human personality. For industrial workers, agricultural work provides a change to a healthier environment, is good exercise, and helps develop an understanding of nature, which is so important to the development of mutual aid. Yet, what Kropotkin was also aware of is the need to reduce the amount of work each individual has to perform. Participation in agriculture is not an exhortation to Stakhanovite sacrifice for the good of the community. It is about producing the basic material needs and the rounded personalities of a predominantly self-sufficient community. As technology develops, so work is reduced, and Kropotkin devoted many pages to exercises in calculating the reductions in working time possible. However, release from punishing labour does pose problems for a new society in its formative stages. Because of this, the integration of labour is a pragmatic requirement as much as an ideological goal.⁸⁸ Necessity is the mother of integration.

Kropotkin's enthusiasm did tend to lead him into hyperbole. He glossed over the need for agricultural expertise and writes of how industrial workers 'will gladly turn to the labour of the fields, when it is no longer a slavish drudgery, but has become a pleasure, a festival, a renewal of health and joy'.⁸⁹ Yet in his later work, whilst his reasoning remained essentially the same, he used additional, more sophisticated arguments. In particular, he asserted that the relationship between agriculture and industry is not antagonistic but symbiotic. This was partly down to the need to mechanize agriculture but also to provide a variety of seasonal employment for workers.⁹⁰ He also advocated an education system that would produce

all-round practical skills married to academic and scientific study. Even at the higher levels of intellectual research, knowledge without a practical understanding is limited.⁹¹ The rounded personality is integral to the self-supporting community. It is individually fulfilling and socially functional.

Kropotkin painted a picture of work fulfilling all needs, material, physical and emotional, in an organic, technologically advanced community. But this is not a community that has transcended agriculture; instead, it has embedded agriculture and nature into the very essence of its existence. Its integrated labour force is creative and diverse, its productive systems are dynamic and progressive, and its technology is advanced. It is a society that has established justice and abolished centralized authority. This vision can hardly fail to appeal.

Yet reading Kropotkin is impossible without feeling some misgivings. His work is almost a complete reversal of Proudhon's. Rather than peasant agriculture and large-scale industry, based on the division of labour and direct ownership, he gives us large-scale collectivized agriculture and small-scale industry without any ownership at all. Instead of mutualism, we have a world without any formalized systems of exchange. And in place of Proudhon's caution about human nature and the need for restraints, he gave us the triumph of mutual aid established through spontaneous revolution. His casual dismissal of democracy and rejection of individual liberty in favour of a restrictive collectivism gives cause for concern, as does his optimism that violent revolution would trigger universal benevolence. Often when looking at the impact of ideology on history we should not only be aware of what it is, but also of what it might become. I am reminded of the observation in Milan Kundera's brilliant novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, of the discomfort of young, intelligent communist activists who after 1948 'had the strange feeling of having sent something into the world, a deed of their own making, which had taken on a life of its own, lost all resemblance to the original idea, and totally ignored the originators of the idea'.⁹²

Despite these reservations, Kropotkin's writing can still be compelling, particularly his bio-regionalism, analysis of sustainability and the examination of mutual aid in human history. They are important themes and have influenced others who would not be attracted to his revolutionary communism. Of course, in the nineteenth-century radical milieu, his revolutionary ideas would not have seemed outlandish and so they provided a platform for promoting an increasingly popular alternative to the libertarian left ideas that had featured so prominently in the first half of the century. Kropotkin had helped take anarchism on a divergent path.

However, the early variant of left libertarianism had not gone away and it was to resurface again as a contemporary rival to anarcho-communism. It took the form of two vibrant movements, a specifically individualist anarchism and a group of libertarians usually known as the English Individualists who were influenced by Herbert Spencer; Spencer had, as a

young man, worked with Thomas Hodgskin⁹³ at *The Economist* magazine. Both movements were part of a continuing tradition in British radical thought. How they developed and interacted with anarcho-communism is the subject of the next two chapters.

Notes

- 1 Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition*, p.10
- 2 This is not the case with academic studies; Martin Miller's excellent biography stresses the continuity of Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas, whilst Caroline Cahm sees him as a key influence on the revolutionary movement and a vehicle for the expression of Bakuninist ideas. Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1976); Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism: 1872–1886* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 3 George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p.133.
- 4 In G. P. Maximoff (ed.), *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, preface by Bert F. Hoselitz, University of Chicago, introduction by Rudolph Rocker, biographical sketch of Bakunin by Max Nettlau (The Free Press: New York and Collier-Macmillan Limited: London, 1953), p.326.
- 5 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, introduction by Alfredo M. Bonanno (Elephant Editions: London. 1990), p.125.
- 6 Ibid pp.127–8.
- 7 First published as a pamphlet in English in 1886 by the individualist anarchist Henry Seymour, and later reprinted by the radical publisher William Reeves in an undated edition. Peter Kropotkin, *War!*, trans. from *Paroles d'un Revolte* (International Publishing Company: London, 1886).
- 8 Full text available here: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/steffenletter.html (accessed 12 July 2012).
- 9 A full text translated by Shawn P. Wilbur is available here <http://libertarian-labyrinth.blogspot.gr/2011/05/manifesto-of-sixteen-1916.html> (accessed 12 July 2012).
- 10 Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics. Origin and Development*, trans. by Louis Friedland and Joseph R. Piroshnikoff (Black Rose Books: Montréal, 1992), p.167.
- 11 Rudolf Rocker, *The London Years*, trans. by Joseph Leftwich with an introduction by Colin Ward (Five Leaves: Nottingham and AK Press: Oakland, 2005), p.75.
- 12 Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution: 1789–1793*, introduction by Alfredo M Bonanno (Elephant Editions: London, 1986).
- 13 This author falls into the latter camp and thus has some sympathy for the stand that Kropotkin took. The criticisms directed at him remind me very much of those aimed at the late Christopher Hitchens.

- 14 Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, trans. by George Woodcock (Black Rose Books: Montréal and New York. 1992), pp.32–3.
- 15 Martin Miller, *Kropotkin*, p.182.
- 16 Peter Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles’, in Peter Kropotkin, *Fugitive Writings* (ed.), with an introduction by George Woodcock (Black Rose Books: Montréal, 1993), p.72.
- 17 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.160.
- 18 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, with an introductory essay ‘Mutual Aid and the Social Significance of Darwinism’ by John Hewetson (Freedom Press: London. 1987), see especially Chapters IV, V and VI.
- 19 Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, p.210.
- 20 Ibid p.103.
- 21 Ibid pp.214–15.
- 22 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001).
- 23 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*. See p.xxi.
- 24 Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, p.52.
- 25 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.33.
- 26 Ibid p.46.
- 27 Ibid p.84.
- 28 Noel Thompson, *The Market and its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Routledge: London and New York, 1988), p.279.
- 29 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.116.
- 30 Ibid p.102.
- 31 Ibid p.103.
- 32 Ibid p.103.
- 33 I find the rejection of democracy on the basis of a few ad hominem somewhat disturbing, as with the cliché ‘they are all the same’ when at times they are manifestly not.
- 34 Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, p.133.
- 35 Ibid p.131.
- 36 Ibid pp.134–5.
- 37 Ibid p.176.
- 38 Ibid p.118.
- 39 Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (ed.), introduced and with additional material by Colin Ward (Freedom Press: London, 1985), p.129.
- 40 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.61.

- 41 Ibid p.64.
- 42 Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, p.214.
- 43 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, pp.92–3.
- 44 Ibid p.78.
- 45 Ibid p.93.
- 46 This is depicted in the fictional ‘ambiguous utopia’ of Ursula Le Guin’s reflective science fiction novel on the dilemmas of propertyless anarchist societies. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (Harper Prism: New York. 1994).
- 47 John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (Granada Publishing: London, Toronto, Sydney and New York, 1978), p.52.
- 48 See Ruth Kinna, ‘Kropotkin’s Theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context’, *International Review of Social History* (Vol. 40, No. 02, August 1995), pp.259–83.
- 49 Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics*, pp.74–5.
- 50 Coincidentally, under whom Patrick Geddes was to commence his career in scientific research.
- 51 Stephen Jay Gould, ‘Kropotkin was no Crackpot’, *Natural History* 106 (June 1997), pp.12–21.
- 52 Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics*, p.40.
- 53 Ibid p.40.
- 54 Ibid p.41.
- 55 Ibid p.146.
- 56 Ibid p.77.
- 57 Ibid p.80.
- 58 Ibid pp.50–54.
- 59 Ibid p.316.
- 60 Ibid pp.259–60.
- 61 Ibid p.314.
- 62 Ibid p.175.
- 63 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, pp.232–3.
- 64 Peter Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism’, in Capouya, Emille and Keitha Tompkins (eds), *The Essential Kropotkin* (Macmillan: London and Basingstoke, 1976), p.57.
- 65 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, p.103.
- 66 Ibid p.94.
- 67 Ibid p.104.
- 68 Ibid p.133.
- 69 Ibid p.189.

- 70 Ibid p.159.
- 71 Ibid p.158.
- 72 Ibid pp.177–8.
- 73 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.85.
- 74 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, p.176.
- 75 Ibid p.177.
- 76 Ibid p.179.
- 77 Ibid p.179.
- 78 Much of the detail was edited out of the Freedom Press edition. For data please turn to an earlier copy such as P. Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops: or Industry Combined with Agriculture and Brain Work with Manual Work* (Thomas Nelson and Sons: London, Edinburgh, Dublin and New York, 1912).
- 79 Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, p.70.
- 80 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p.35.
- 81 Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, p.57.
- 82 Ibid p.103.
- 83 Ibid p.168.
- 84 Ibid p.154.
- 85 Ibid p.62.
- 86 Ibid pp.25–6.
- 87 Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. with an introduction by Paul Turner (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1965).
- 88 Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, pp.86–7.
- 89 Ibid p.88.
- 90 Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, pp.156–8.
- 91 Ibid pp.185–6.
- 92 Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim (Faber and Faber: London and Boston, 1992), p.6.
- 93 Hodgskin's review of Spencer's *Social Statics* was published in *The Economist*, Vol. IX, No. 389 (8 February 1851), pp.149–51 and is available online here <http://praxeology.net/TH-HS-SS.htm> (accessed 23 July 2012). It provides an interesting commentary on the relationship between their views.

3

The English individualists

There is a conventional historical narrative that portrays the incremental growth of collectivist political economy as something promoted and fought for by popular movements, an almost inevitable part of the process of industrial modernization. Whether described in class terms as the ‘forward march of labour’ or ideologically as the rise of socialism, the narrative is broadly the same. The old certainties had to give way in the face of modern mass societies. This poses no problem for anarcho-communism. It can be accommodated comfortably on the libertarian wing of collectivism. But what of individualism? It seems out of place, a curiosity; the last gasp of a liberal England that was about to die. Perhaps that explains its comparative neglect. Yet seen as part of the radical milieu of the time, it seems neither anomalous nor a fringe movement. It stood firmly in the tradition of a left libertarian radicalism that was a serious competitor of the collectivist left.

There were two main groupings of individualists in late Victorian Britain. Those who identified themselves explicitly as anarchists are the subjects of the next chapter. This one concerns itself with a group of thinkers strongly influenced by the ideas of Herbert Spencer¹ and clustered around a number of individuals and organizations, of which three stand out: Wordsworth Donisthorpe’s Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL); the Personal Rights Association, closely associated with Joseph Hiam Levy; and Auberon Herbert’s Voluntarist movement. Their place as part of the anarchist movement is contested. For many, they have appeared to be conservatives rather than radicals, Max Nettlau was particularly scathing:

... the anti-socialist bourgeoisie ... and the greed of unlimited exploitation, had stirred up in England a certain agitation in favour of pseudo-individualism, an unrestrained exploitation. To this end, they enlisted the services of a mercenary pseudo-literature. I refer to the ‘*Liberty and Property Defence League*’ of the years 1880–1890, and

other similar publications, which played with doctrinaire and fanatical ideas in order to project a species of ‘non-interventionism’ that would let a man die of hunger rather than offend his dignity.²

Later, Nettlau is kinder to Auberon Herbert than he is to the League but he remains distinctly unimpressed by his effectiveness.³

One of the reasons for this hostility is that they identified themselves as strongly anti-socialist, but this is easy to misunderstand, both today and when they were active. Despite their eager adoption of this label, their definition of the word ‘socialism’ was restrictive. They were solely *anti-state socialism* and it is also possible to establish an association between individualism and a libertarian approach to early socialist thought.⁴ One historian who has paid attention to individualism is Edward Bristow, who has written the only history of the LPDL, though he doesn’t think much of them either:

For this was a doctrine so absolutely unrealizable in form, and so based on the virtues of free competition and private property in content, that it became in practice a defense of the status quo.⁵

Bristow mainly looked at individualism in the context of Spencer’s ideas, but he also saw it as part of anarchism, though again he isn’t particularly sympathetic.

Individualism also called upon and contributed to the anarchist tradition. It was a millenarian doctrine which anticipated a future anarchist utopia made possible by the withering away of the state ...⁶

Meanwhile, the prominent American individualist anarchist, Benjamin Tucker, was eager, in his usual condescending way, to claim the individualists for anarchism in his journal, *Liberty*:

One of the most interesting papers that come into this office is the *Personal Rights Journal* of London. Largely written by men like J. H. Levy and Wordsworth Donisthorpe, it could not be otherwise. Virtually it champions the same political faith that finds an advocate in *Liberty*. It means by individualism what *Liberty* means by Anarchism. That it does not realize this fact, and that it assumes Anarchism to be something other than complete individualism, is the principal difference between us.⁷

As with earlier studies of anarchism itself, we have to pick our way through misunderstandings caused by a lack of familiarity and see why something that appears superficially to be a species of Tory radicalism should feature in a book with anti-capitalism in its title.

The growth of this variant of individualism can be seen as a reaction to the expansion of the state through both an extension of government intervention and regulation and the 'New Imperialism' of the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was a major impetus to their activism and a target of their critique, but they were not solely reactive. As we have seen, individualism also had a direct link to Hodgskin and the intellectual ferment of the 1820s and 1830s. As well as being part of an older tradition of political thought, they were also coterminous with a range of individualist radicals who linked them with other movements such as the co-operator George Jacob Holyoake,⁸ and the former 'moral force' Chartist W. E. Adams.⁹ In addition, some feminists of the Langham Place Group, who initially came together in the 1850s, were very active in later individualist organizations such as the Personal Rights Association.

Even more interestingly, the sentiments that informed individualism were not the sole preserve of intellectuals. There was a strong working-class attachment to the idea of the 'free-born Englishman' that saw compulsion and regulation as an imposition. At this time, the doctrine of self-help was not a Victorian fantasy but a daily reality of working-class life. The existence of self-help organizations, owned and controlled by their members, was one of the reasons why it has been suggested that the call for social reform and state welfare originally emanated from the middle, rather than the working, classes.¹⁰ Self-help was also accompanied by 'self-improvement' and a strong working-class autodidact tradition.¹¹ The result was the expression of widespread distrust and resentment of regulation, which was seen as being the imposition of the values of one class on another. It seemed to many that social reform was both a form of social control and an attempt to eradicate pleasure. This was particularly so with the opposition to temperance, which forged a strictly tactical alliance between brewers and drinkers.¹²

Stephen Reynolds captured this sentiment beautifully in his book *'Seems So!'* (co-authored with two Devon fishermen, Bob and Tom Wooley),¹³ about the lives and opinions of working people in Devon. Reynolds recognized that working-class political consciousness existed, but insisted it was not socialist.¹⁴ Instead, he reckoned that it was based on a cluster of attitudes, which 'tend ... towards a New Toryism or Nationalism, a Nationalism founded on respect for the poor; less bent on "raising them out of their station" than on providing them with justice in that station, and the chance of bettering themselves whenever by their own efforts they can do it.'¹⁵ Crucial to that consciousness is a rejection of the imposition of middle-class values on the working classes. According to Reynolds, Victorian values, even where they informed reform, were instruments of class oppression. He wrote:

They know very well that in almost everything there is one law for the rich and another for themselves; and they are beginning to realize that

much of the so-called democratic legislation of recent years (above all, that of the grandmotherly sort) has increased the injustice, has more heavily penalized poverty, has intruded further into their homes, has interfered less and less tolerantly with their own habits and customs.¹⁶

Reynolds' book is innovative social reportage in which he recorded the views of his two co-authors in their own Devonshire dialect. Their opinions consistently supported non-interference. None more so than in their attitudes to temperance:

There's lots o' things concerning drink that they an't worked out eet, for all they tries to force 'ee from it. An' if they close public-houses, they'll only lead people to take it in house 'long wi' 'em, which is ten thousand times worse, 'cause they nips at it all day till 'tis gone ... They says that drink is the ruin of thousands, don' 'em; but if you looks into it you'll generally find there's summut besides the drink ... I don't think people mostly drinks for drinking's sake. You goes in for the company – for to see a bit o' life. There's a lot to be learnt in pubs, an' 'tis a fine affair, I reckon, for to hae a good chatter over a glass or two o' beer. If you didn't do that you'd go to bed an' sleep. An' that's all some o'em wants 'ee to do, seems so – work an' sleep – an' never enjoy no life.¹⁷

This outlook was allied to a suspicion of the police, a well-founded cynicism of the vested interests embodied in electoral politics, and an awareness of the power of wealth and its propensity to deprive the poor of their independence. Reynolds was quite clear that self-regulation and economic justice for manual workers was the underpinning of working-class political awareness. These are precisely the issues addressed by the individualists.

These attitudes also produced popular political organizations and pressure group activity. The most prominent one was the campaign that was set up to resist the Compulsory Vaccination Act of 1853.¹⁸ Its supporters were often active in other radical movements; former Chartists were early supporters and, inevitably, it drew in individualists later. In some ways, this resistance seems strange to modern eyes, but given the state of medical knowledge at the time and the method of vaccination used, often arm-in-arm with danger of cross-infection, it is understandable. What is more significant is that it had considerable working-class support. Partly, this was down to ignorance and misinformation, but much else related to working-class political attitudes. Two were important. The first was the attachment to what we would now call 'alternative medicine'.¹⁹ There was certainly suspicion of the professionalization of medical practice, but there was also an attraction to the idea of 'medical liberty',²⁰ a free market in medical care between professional medicine, seen as 'a tyrannical system of state-sanctioned interference with the lives and health of an oppressed people',²¹

and self-medication, the free choice of a free people. The second was more important, the assertion of the right of the working classes to govern their own families and to control their own bodies. This was expressed in terms of individual ownership of both their own children and of the self,²² a key individualist concept. Overall, the opponents of compulsory vaccination did not see the law as a public health measure, but as class legislation. This was fertile ground for individualists, although the main movement germinated in another campaign, the one against the Contagious Diseases Acts, whose leading figure was Josephine Butler.

Josephine Butler – libertarian feminist

The Contagious Diseases Acts applied to garrison towns and were aimed at the prevention of the spread of venereal disease among the armed forces. They enabled the forcible medical inspection of women suspected of prostitution and their detention if found to be infected. Moral campaigners were highly critical as they argued that the laws, in effect, amounted to an acceptance, licensing and regulation of prostitution. A National Association had been formed to campaign against the laws, but it excluded women from membership. As a result, Butler set up the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1869 and came to dominate the movement, bringing a different perspective with her.

Butler is now a widely admired figure and rightly so. Conventionally, her activism is seen as being the product of both her evangelical Christianity and grief at the accidental death of her daughter in 1863, though I find it hard to see how someone with her upbringing in a politically active liberal family and personal convictions would not have become involved in some form of activity anyway. Despite frequent ill-health and continual crises of faith, Butler threw herself into public life, first through the campaign for women's education and then into one of the great causes of Victorian philanthropy, the rescue of 'fallen women' – prostitutes. Yet, shaped by observation, experience and her already well-formed feminism, Butler's concerns were not conventional. It was the physical, not the spiritual welfare of prostitutes that concerned her. Her work began with her caring for individuals, exhausted and ill prostitutes in her own home, before moving on to her political campaigns. It became clear to her that prostitution was not a moral issue, at least not on the part of the prostitutes themselves, but one of exploitation – specifically, the exploitation of women.

Butler's contribution to Victorian feminism is now widely acknowledged, but even the best of her biographers²³ underplay something that is just as important – her libertarianism. This fusion of feminism and libertarianism is particularly evident in her surprising hostility to purity campaigners, despite her agreement with their goals. When W. T. Stead set up the National

Vigilance Association, Jane Jordan comments that Butler wrote ‘protesting against the purity campaigners and their “coercive and degrading treatment” of prostitutes, “in the fatuous belief that you can oblige human beings to be moral by *force*”’.²⁴ What is more, she was aware that the issue of exploitation was not just a matter of gender but also of class. This critique of class and gender exploitation is crucial to individualism.

Feminism was an explicit part of the Campaign’s first Declaration of Policy, which stated that: ‘The Law, in safeguarding individual liberty outside the home, had not, hitherto, discriminated between men and women. The Acts, however, constituted just such a gender discrimination.’²⁵ Not only that, but the difference in the accepted norms of male and female sexual conduct, one of the central hypocrisies of Victorian Britain, were now established by Acts of Parliament. Males were unaffected by the laws and free to infect whom they chose. The Acts were to protect men alone against venereal disease. Furthermore, women were to be effectively punished for being infected by men.

The application of the law led to celebrated cases of ‘innocent’ women caught and effectively sexually abused by medical examination. However, it was not individual injustices that drove the campaign but the legal, institutionalized injustice against women as a social group. The laws were an effective constraint on women’s freedom of movement unescorted by men, restricting their rights to independence outside the home. But there were much more profound implications; the campaign had to confront the fundamental Victorian notions of sexuality and gender. As Petrie writes, the double standard in morality was

shrouded in a vast conspiracy of silence. The onerous duty of any reformer who wished to strike at the roots of prostitution as practised in mid-Victorian England was to shatter that silence. In doing so her actions must, inevitably, be harshly opposed and bitterly resented, for it must seem that she was striking at the very fabric of society.²⁶

Thus, despite Butler holding a somewhat orthodox view of female sexuality, the campaign was deeply subversive.

Butler’s targets were the institutions of patriarchy and so it was inevitable that she should campaign against other discriminatory legislation. One example, in a jointly authored pamphlet,²⁷ is Butler’s attack on the Factory Acts Amendment Bill and the Shop Hours Regulation Bill. Both forms of ‘protective’ legislation sought to limit women’s working hours. Whilst acknowledging the desirability of a general reduction in hours of employment, these Bills were seen as another legislative attack on women’s social rights to employment and an independent income. But the pamphlet didn’t stop there; it set out to attack the hidden assumptions and misogynist intentions that underlay the Bill.

We have said that the ostensible purpose of the Bill is to reduce the hours of women's labour from ten to nine a day; but it, in fact, merely provides for reducing the *paid* labour of women by that one hour daily, and as one of the chief reasons given for this reduction is, that 'the comfort of the home is greatly affected by the prolonged absence of the mother from the family', it is fair to infer that the one hour spared from paid labour at the factory, is spared in order that the mother may employ it in unpaid labour at home.²⁸

This legislation was seen as one of the first steps in the intended removal of women from work, ending any prospect of female independence. The result, the authors insisted, 'would be not to protect, but to oppress women'.²⁹ However, the pamphlet's greatest fury was reserved for the attitudes that both belittled and dehumanized women. It is worth quoting at length.

A Mr G. W. Hastings had given a speech in support of the legislation at the annual meeting of the British Medical Association and Butler was scathing. Hastings' endorsement of the Bill was based on 'a fact which any old nurse in the land could have told them, viz., that mothers' milk is the best food for babes'.

Mr. Hastings proceeded to argue therefrom that it was the duty of our legislators, not – as might have been supposed – to compel married men to provide the nursing mothers of their children with such sufficiency of food as might enable them to supply 'natural nourishment' to their offspring, but to forbid mothers from earning food for themselves. He did not say by what means deserted wives and mothers were to procure food without work.³⁰

Butler was clear that, given liberty, 'nursing mothers would gladly stay at home and perform ... the noble maternal duties with which God has crowned and sanctified womanhood'.³¹ She was no advocate of androgyny, but this did not amount to an acceptance of female inferiority. The pamphlet quotes Hastings again:

Mr. Hastings further said:- 'The argument which is drawn from men to married women ... is largely fallacious, and for this reason, that their destiny in life is dissimilar. Man ... is eminently a working animal, one intended to earn wages to maintain himself and those dependent on him; whereas a MARRIED woman is eminently, ESSENTIALLY, and primarily a child-bearing animal, and it is from that point of view that public policy must look upon her and insist that that view should occupy the foremost place in any legislation affecting her destinies ...

Butler was furious, claiming that Hastings had put women on the same plane as cattle:

Could it be possible that a woman should come forward to declare that ‘man is eminently, *essentially*, and primarily a child-begetting animal’, the degrading immorality of the assertion would be recognized at once. But it is, perhaps, well that Mr. Hastings has stripped off the veil of false sentiment, and exposed in its ugly nakedness, the base doctrine which does, in fact, secretly underlie the existing and prospective legislation for the assumed protection of our sex.

We protest against this doctrine. Reproduction is not the essential aim of existence for either half of the human race. To declare it such for a woman is to deny the unity of the moral law ... The faculties of reason and conscience are the signs of the *human* nature, and of the right of the human being to voluntary and responsible self-government.³²

The right to ‘voluntary and responsible self-government’ is a theme that runs through much of her work, alongside her dissection of the prejudiced assumptions of the Victorian male establishment.

A typical example of what she was up against was the ludicrous view of William Acton that women did not have sexual desires. This was based on his observation of prostitutes’ failure to experience satisfaction after intercourse with their clients.³³ The obvious conclusion, that prostitutes did not desire sex but needed the money, did not occur to Acton. It certainly did to Butler. In reclaiming the definition of female sexuality for themselves, women could show that prostitution was an expression of destitution, not of a perverted nature. Women were drawn into prostitution by economic injustice, inadequate education, the lack of opportunities for employment and, critically, the psychological damage of long-term sexual abuse inherent in overcrowded housing. Thus a campaign against prostitution, rather than one against prostitutes, would inevitably lead to demands for social change.

The recognition of the systemic nature of poverty undermined the comfortable and conventional charitable impulses of the middle-class philanthropist and meant that the campaign recognized that if legislation was aimed at prostitutes, it was, by definition directed against the poor. Therefore, it was also *class legislation*, whereby one class attempted to subjugate another. The issue of class and gender were thus united. Butler consciously organized her campaigns amongst the working classes and her libertarianism came into play when she insisted that the instrument for class and gender oppression was legislation, even legislation that was supposed to improve working-class conditions. It was undermined fatally by the assumptions of a complacent ruling elite and would always be in their interests alone.

It was a short step from opposition to specific legislation to questioning government itself, especially after Butler had witnessed the brutality of the French ‘Police des Mœurs’. Her view of government as a body that enforces the values of a dominant class and gender on the people against both

their wishes and interests led to a profound libertarian critique of state oppression. The crucial point for Butler is that regulation always has to be policed and, as she wrote:

The more absolute a government is, the more will the police be developed; whilst the freer the country is, the more it will follow the principle that everything which can be possibly be left to care of itself should so be left.³⁴

Increasing legislation, however well-intentioned, would have the consequence of corrupting and tyrannizing the state, especially if the police are constituted as 'an organized body of women-hunters'.³⁵

And so, for Butler, with increasing levels of regulation came the vested interests relying on enforcement for their living, matched by a growth in what we would now call dependency culture.³⁶ She felt that 'a certain mutual incompetence, languor, almost atrophy grows upon a people which has continued to be over-ridden by a bureaucracy'.³⁷ For Butler, legislation was corrupting and inefficient. Social policy should aim to '*prevent* these great evils which our law-makers show themselves so ready to *regulate*'.³⁸ To paraphrase the celebrated political sound bite, Butler was far tougher on the causes of crime than on crime itself. She may have believed in Christian redemption, but her libertarian social policy was firmly utilitarian.

Butler's own advocacy of radical decentralization was not fully anarchist, yet her class and gender critique would clearly make such an association intellectually comfortable, whilst her combination of feminism and libertarianism with a class analysis was the basis of individualism. It was the source of the concern with 'over-regulation'. It prompted the foundation of organizations such as the splendidly named 'Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights and for the Amendment of the Law wherein it is Injurious to Women'. Better known unsurprisingly by its short title, the Personal Rights Association, it widened the scope of its action to embrace many liberal causes, including anti-vivisection – an early manifestation of animal rights.³⁹ Individualism clearly identified itself as part of a radical and progressive movement and was, at least, in a critical dialogue with early Fabianism, especially when the influence of Charlotte Wilson gave the society a distinctive libertarian tinge.⁴⁰ As a result, the individualists must be seen as part of the late Victorian radical milieu, but one that swam against the tide of the growing influence of Marxism, democratic socialism and the New Liberalism of T. H. Green, L. T. Hobhouse, J. A. Hobson and others.

Individualism was not a coherent movement with a central doctrine; instead, somewhat appropriately, it was represented by the work of a cluster of individuals and associated organizations who shared a number of core assumptions, though they differed as to their application. To

understand individualism and its influence, we need to look at each of the main protagonists in turn.

Wordsworth Donisthorpe and labour capitalization

Of the three main individualist writers, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, Auberon Herbert and Joseph Hiam Levy, Donisthorpe was probably the most interesting, if the easiest to misrepresent. This is partly because his writing can be inconsistent and uncomfortable, being infused with the prejudices of his time and class, and partly due to his role in founding the Liberty and Property Defence League.

Donisthorpe himself was a Victorian polymath and a descendant of William Wordsworth (his mother was the poet's great-niece). Cushioned by family wealth, initially earned through the Yorkshire woollen industry, Donisthorpe qualified as a barrister, though doesn't seem to have practised. His independent income meant that he could devote his time to a wide range of personal obsessions. He was a founder member of the British Chess Association in 1885 and was a pioneer of cinema, inventing a moving picture camera, which he called a Kinesigraph, with his cousin and lifelong collaborator W. C. Crofts.⁴¹ Donisthorpe had already published a book on political economy⁴² before he came to individualism and helped to form the Liberty and Property Defence League. Whilst the League's general aim was the limited one of resisting 'over-legislation', Donisthorpe invested its foundation with great idealism and optimism. It was intended to be the 'embodiment of the absolute principle of civil liberty, or the greatest possible liberty of each compatible with the liberty of all'.⁴³ From the League's earliest days, he was determined to see the organization become one based on political principles and cautioned against 'men who are open to the charge of protesting against State interference with the industry in which they are themselves interested, lest such interference should favour their weaker fellow workers'.⁴⁴

Unfortunately for Donisthorpe, the attendance at the League's founding conference seemed to consist of just such people. It included no less than ten directors of railway companies, who were all facing the possibility of the regulation of fares. They were joined by the representatives of employers' associations and businessmen from Pawnbrokers to the National Federation of Employers of Labour.⁴⁵ So, Nettlau's criticism is not without justification, especially in the light of some of the League's stranger campaigns. It certainly tilted at some odd windmills, as evidenced by its short-lived journal, *Jus*. One example is its campaign against free public libraries:

Everybody knows in his heart that the Free Libraries Act is the legalization of robbery with violence; for it empowers the majority to compel the minority to pay for what they don't want.⁴⁶

There were also some extraordinary misjudgements, such as the description of Kropotkin as a state centralist.⁴⁷ Many assertions were overstated and verged on the bizarre, such as the contention that the reason for the disproportionately higher number of boiler explosions at sea than on land was 'that marine engines are examined by the State and "minded" by State-certificated engineers, while on land they are not – not yet!'.⁴⁸ Sadly, these eccentricities eclipsed criticism of low wages⁴⁹ and its radical political philosophy.

Amongst some of the turgid prose of the League's pamphlets Donisthorpe's originality stands out. He clung hard to his principles and it became clear that a breach was likely. There were a few disagreements that brought this about, but the most significant was the drift of the League to the right and its neglect of the interests of the working classes.⁵⁰ It is hard to disagree with Donisthorpe's pessimistic final editorial in the last issue of *Jus* that 'the League seems to be fast degenerating into a sort of Harassed Interests Defence League'.⁵¹ Shortly after, Donisthorpe resigned from the League, signifying what Wendy McElroy believed was his 'explicit embrace of anarchism'.⁵²

How far Donisthorpe can be described as an anarchist is open to conjecture. There is no doubt, however, that he aspired to anarchism and believed it to be the final destination of human evolution. There are two main elements to his thought, a broad anti-statism and a political economy, which accepts a fairly conventional view of property and the market, but then develops a bitter criticism of the exploitative nature of wage labour that gives it a much more radical twist. He saw his libertarian political economy as an alternative to legislation as a way of dealing with the inequities of Victorian Britain. This alternative provided a link with early British radicalism, together with the continental anarchist tradition derived from Proudhon. By rejecting natural rights and accepting the market, Donisthorpe produced a modernization of these traditions, adapting them to late capitalist society.

Donisthorpe's anti-statism was consistently anti-authoritarian. Consequently, he rejected any possibility of a legislative solution to social problems. He wrote:

... of those who have faith in State-action, it is probable that none follow up the principle to its extreme logical conclusion, and look forward to the time when every man in the land shall have his own inspector to follow him about, to carry his goloshes, and to see that he puts them on before crossing the road; to take notes on what he says; to correct his grammar

and his religious opinions when out of harmony with authorised usage; to see that he drinks what is good for him and no more; to put out his candle at nine at night, and to accompany him twice to church every Sunday. Consistency wavers before such a prospect.⁵³

Of course, this is a very common rhetorical trick. His conclusion may well be ‘extreme’ but it is by no means ‘logical’. He is extending the argument, taking it away from the specific topic of real regulation into a dystopia of Donisthorpe’s own making.⁵⁴ No one considered the extreme conclusion because they had not the slightest intention of going there. The legislator’s inconsistency was both pragmatic and a virtue. Such rhetoric exemplifies the failure to distinguish between what is now known as social democracy (Donisthorpe called it ‘neo-radicalism’) and the totalitarian variant of socialism, something that had yet to emerge. This way of arguing was one source of the more curious judgements expressed by the League as well as being a convenient justification for the protection of the self-interest of some of its supporters. That said, Donisthorpe’s critique of incremental moral authoritarianism has a modern resonance and is a reflection on his views on the development of the state.

The problem he poses about the state is how we get from what he saw as initially a necessary concentration of power⁵⁵ to liberty. Liberty is the culmination of a process of historical evolution drawing on a Hobbesian understanding of human nature and the possibility of improvement through a process of natural selection. Donisthorpe did not share Proudhon’s view of the state as an alien imposition; he saw it as the result of organic growth. As society changes so does the state. His starting point was Hobbes. A state of nature is a state of absolute liberty. This is not to be recommended:

A state of full liberty then, is one in which the strong are free to rob the weak, and the weak are free to rob the strong. Clearly this is an unenviable state of things for the weak. The strong may call it liberty, but the weak call it anarchy. The two are identical.⁵⁶

This is why the social compact arises, together with a form of primitive collectivism, to enable the protection of the weak and the integration of society. This integration ensured the successful evolution of cohesive groups.

The first requisite for social integration was a strong central power which should effectually suppress all forms of individual activity calculated to injure the group as a whole. Tribes which developed this form of organisation waxed strong, while tribes which consisted of undisciplined and *disorderly* numbers were crushed out in the struggle for existence.⁵⁷

But then he parted company with Hobbes. He did not assume that the need for strong, centralized power and the restriction of absolute liberty is permanent. Once established, the state has a tendency to repress the weak in favour of the strong and thus becomes dysfunctional, completely reversing its original purpose. It has to evolve again.

A true Victorian, Donisthorpe saw social evolution as a process leading to ever-higher forms of society. He did not share Kropotkin's views about social regression, each stage of development is better than the previous one, thus he was disparaging of other cultures in a way Kropotkin was not. Like Spencer, he saw progress as passing through identifiable stages. As to government, its earliest form was the family, authoritarian but independent. With social development comes the tendency for power to devolve into increasing number of hands, firstly through the grouping of heads of families and then through other forms of combination such as tribes and nations. Although this tendency leads to the dispersal of power to ever-larger oligarchies, Donisthorpe argued, 'all history shows an increasing tendency towards a democratic form of government, and, moreover ... democracy is not only inevitable, but desirable in all respects'.⁵⁸ But then Donisthorpe departed from his Liberal contemporaries. Nineteenth-century political democracy was nothing of the sort. It was the rule of an oligarchy – in this case, a ruling class.

The end, aim, and test of all government – such is human nature – is the welfare of the ruling class. All history proves it. Human nature is such that it is absolutely impossible to provide against it.⁵⁹

Logically, government can never be democratic and progress will lead us to live without it. Whilst acutely aware of class oppression, Donisthorpe rejected the idea that justice and liberty could be obtained through working-class rule. 'The process of breaking his own fetters is a very different process from that of forging shackles for his neighbours.'⁶⁰

Evolution towards a stateless democracy is partly achieved through a process of natural selection, but his was not a crude social Darwinism. The type of Victorian non-interference that Nettlau castigated would abandon the poor, seeing them as the weakest of the species that nature is weeding out. Not so Donisthorpe, who saw the fitness of the individual to be related to the type of society in which they were living. As he wittily wrote:

... only the careless and unobservant can express doubt as to the existence of real and terrible distress among the working classes all over the world at the present time. There are economists who are ready to say, 'True, at such times the fit must survive and the weak go to the wall; it can't be helped, and therefore it is no use talking.' But this hardly an argument likely to commend itself to the classes who are chiefly interested in the

problem. Besides is there not a weak link in it? Doubtless the unfit will be eliminated, and the fit will survive. But is it quite certain that under existing arrangements it is the absolutely unfit who go to the wall? ... That they are unfit under the present system of industrial organisation is proved by the fact that they are short of means of subsistence. The unfit are those who fail. Shipwrecked on a desert island well tenanted by wild beasts, who would be the fittest in the following crew – Socrates, Seneca, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sykes (the world-renowned Bill)? I would venture to take Bill for choice. But transplant them to another country, under another and a higher social system, and Sykes takes rank with the unfit, and is forcibly or indirectly eliminated. Is it not possible that under a better system of industrial organisation many of those whom the callous political economist stigmatises as the unfit might turn out to be the cream of the race?⁶¹

Social progress changes the nature of competition and survival. The current state of evolution was far from complete; it was one that witnessed the oppression and debasement of the working classes.

When it comes to the method of transition, Donisthorpe is far less convincing. He offered a series of reformist ‘canons’⁶² for Parliament that seem to be more the product of an inveterate desire to pontificate on policy rather than develop a consistent theoretical model. Yet, he saw even his reformed system of liberal democracy as merely a transitional stage in the evolution of a free society. Evolution was leading history in the direction of ‘ever-increasing political integration’.⁶³ His unbounded confidence in progress and European civilization led him to discount nationalism and the staying power of the nation state. For instance, Donisthorpe insisted that ‘Denmark is disappearing; Holland and Belgium have not many years of independent existence left to them’.⁶⁴ Even more absurdly, he talked of ‘agitation ... in the Colonies in favour of some kind of closer union between the mother country and her offspring’.⁶⁵ His writing is riddled with Victorian Eurocentric and racial assumptions about, for example, ‘the predominant need of the superior race’⁶⁶ in Ireland and his view that ‘the Hindus are somewhat backward in civilisation’.⁶⁷

It is easy to criticize Donisthorpe in the light of twentieth and twenty-first century historical experience, yet few in the late nineteenth century were prepared to admit the possibility of anti-colonial national liberation movements and even fewer would have predicted that faltering steps towards European union would have only been taken after two cataclysmic wars. Calls for federalism and international law were commonplace in Victorian liberalism, especially in the peace movement.⁶⁸ What distinguishes Donisthorpe from mainstream liberalism is his insistence on decentralization as part of the process of integration. This decentralization was not a federation of nation states resting on a process of national

self-determination. It was more radical than that. 'Decentralise down to the unit itself, the individual.'⁶⁹ Social integration and decentralization, seemingly contradictory, are intrinsically linked and together they will have another effect. They will break down the class oppression inherent in the state.

Whilst Donisthorpe's writing displays a robust Victorian confidence in Anglo-Saxon civilization and the concept of historical progress, he was neither historicist nor determinist. A libertarian society is not an automatic end to historical processes; it is a choice. And for Donisthorpe the choice was now one of urgency. Only two options were viable, socialism or individualism. One secures increasing authority, the other greater liberty. It was not just a personal ideological preference that drove Donisthorpe to declare for liberty, but his view that it is functional for social development. Liberty, in higher forms of civilization, tends to permit the voluntary development of features of that civilization. For instance, Donisthorpe's pamphlet arguing for 'free marriage'⁷⁰ is not based on wilder anarchic concepts of free love but on the fact that free, equal and readily dissolvable marriage would, in an advanced society, tend towards monogamy. The evils of Victorian marriage, with its repression of women and encouragement of prostitution, were based on inequity enforced by law.

In fact Donisthorpe was – if this is not a contradiction in terms – a systematic pragmatist. His pragmatism was not the calculating 'triangulation' of twenty-first century political discourse. It was rooted in his concept of a free and tolerant society. Social evolution advances, he thought, 'through a long process of generalisation and friction',⁷¹ vaguely similar to Proudhon's antinomies. Fixed political prescriptions are of little use given the ever-changing nature of society and Donisthorpe avoided them. For example, he refused to be tied to any one definition of justice, despite its importance to his vision of a self-regulating society. Donisthorpe wrote: 'Justice has no meaning at all: that is to say it conveys no definite meaning to the general understanding.'⁷² He continued in a thoroughly Burkeian vein:

I have tried to show that the right course for the State to adopt towards its own citizens – Group Morals – cannot be discovered by deduction from any abstract principles, such as Justice or Liberty; any more than individual morals can be deduced from some underlying law of Virtue. The rules of conduct by which States should be guided are intelligible cannons based on centuries of experience, very much like the rules by which our own private lives are guided; not absolutely trustworthy but better than no general rules at all.⁷³

Donisthorpe was being somewhat disingenuous here. He had a firm principle of emerging justice, the roots of which lie in Spencer's Law of

Equal Freedom.⁷⁴ Hence, he saw a concept of justice as praxis emerging from two sources. One was a compromise between two opposing interests, resulting in a Proudhonian contract based on self-interest. The second was the offspring of ‘parental love’ in the ‘patriarchal stage of social development’. The parent intervenes to prevent an elder child using its superior strength against a younger one; this is in reality ‘an arbitrary State interference’.⁷⁵ For Donisthorpe, justice has a double origin and two incompatible meanings, both reflecting the stark choice facing society that infuses all his writing:

One is socialism: the other is individualism. The one is based originally on parental sympathy which slowly expands from the family to humanity; the other based on selfish compromise, and tends finally to absorb the whole field of law. Altruism tends to become wholly voluntary and law to become wholly based on average individual advantage and implied voluntary contract. Thus scientific anarchy is shown to be the end towards which society is moving. That is to say, we are approaching a state in which law, based on the rights of the selfish, will be tempered not by paternal despotism and compulsory *charity* (a contradiction in terms), but by true voluntary altruism.⁷⁶

Unusually for a barrister, Donisthorpe was explicit about the right to ignore law where it conflicts with liberty, though he does at times deem it imprudent,⁷⁷ but increasingly law ceases to be class imposition as society evolves and conflict progressively diminishes. ‘The State or Voluntary Association, by whatever name known, will cease to compel unwilling individuals to join its ranks, because coercion will be no longer required’;⁷⁸ whilst state power will be restricted through imbuing ‘the hearts of our fellow countrymen with the doctrine of individualism’.⁷⁹

Despite his confidence in the future, Donisthorpe did not feel that we had reached this stage yet and he had a growing sense of urgency about the choices facing society. State intervention was increasingly seen as the solution to the most obvious fact facing all Victorian reformers, the plight of the working classes. For Donisthorpe, intervention and regulation would only perpetuate oppression; what was required was to move to a higher stage of industrial evolution. We have passed through Serfdom, but now Wagedom must go as well, to be replaced by Freedom.⁸⁰ Donisthorpe had no doubt about the cause of workers suffering; it was the wage system. Abolishing wage labour was central to his political economy.

Donisthorpe worked within a liberal economic paradigm, discussing, in turn, the three pillars of political economy: property, capital and labour. Donisthorpe saw property as a legal rather than a natural right, but it was still essential to a free society. In addressing the ownership of land, there are strong echoes of Proudhon.⁸¹ Donisthorpe, in contrast to Kropotkin’s

preoccupations with the creation of large-scale agriculture, echoed Proudhon by praising the success of continental peasant proprietorship and argued that the concentration of land ownership in Britain is purely the result of 'socialistic legislation'. He was clearly no historian of enclosure. There were further limits on his radicalism when it came to property, such as defending unearned rents as 'the reward of successful risk'.⁸² He rejected the anarchist argument for a property based on trusteeship by dismissing the ultimate right of proprietors to dispose of property as they please as 'accidental'.⁸³ Thus, his concept of property would be a conservative one if it were not for his insistence that it should be universal, thereby guaranteeing individual liberty. However, Donisthorpe was writing in a developed industrial society and accordingly he had to try and define property within that context. To do so, he needed to address the relationship of property to capital.

Donisthorpe tries to define capital by constructing a debate between – to twenty-first century eyes – unequals. He contrasts the work of John Stuart Mill with that of a Mr G. Poulett Scrope.⁸⁴ After sixteen pages of excruciating prose, he finally comes to a conclusion as to the nature of capital: 'Capital is that value of which is *due* to the value of its products.' He continues:

Anything which owes its value to the demand, not for itself, as calculated to afford immediate gratification to the consumer, but for some other commodity into the creation of which it enters as an element, whether as raw material, as tool or machine, as worker, brute or human – such a thing is capital.⁸⁵

And here his solution to the problems facing the working class becomes evident. If labour is a form of capital then there has to be a way for it to become the property of the labourer. Donisthorpe's solution was something he called Labour Capitalization.

Labour Capitalization was one of Donisthorpe's obsessions. The idea was recycled and republished with little textual alteration in numerous pamphlets and books. The root of it is his horror at the condition of the working classes. He was certain as to the cause – exploitation. 'The Truth is that economically the free labourer is no better than a slave. The *whole* of the profits of his contribution to production are appropriated by the capitalist.'⁸⁶ The links with earlier radical thought are striking. He wrote:

The rise of the great middle class under the industrial *régime* about the end of the fifteenth century; its conflicts with the ancient landed aristocracy and eventual triumph...; its subdivision into two distinct parties, employers and employed, masters and men, or superintending labourers and manual labourers, are grand historical facts, and they bring us down to the present day. The battle is now between the

employer and the employed; year by year the strife waxes hotter. We are in the midst of it.⁸⁷

Donisthorpe fully accepted the analysis of the socialist movement: the degrading nature of repetitive drudgery, the alienation of workers from the products of their labour, the resultant cyclical nature of the economy with its periodic recessions and unemployment, the all-pervading misery and poverty, and the retardation of social progress. However, both the revolutionary socialist cure, the dispossession of the bourgeoisie, and the social democratic remedy, increasing regulation, were anathema to him. Both diminish rather than enhance liberty. The system failed not because the workers did not have full ownership of the means of production and owned only their own labour. It failed because they did *not* own their labour. They had sold it. They had sold it in return for wages. It was a terrible bargain.

Wages may provide a guarantee of income regardless of the consequences of work, but as the risk of failure is thereby transferred to the employer, they seek compensation by extracting as much of the value of that work as possible for themselves. The workers' guarantee of future earnings is bought at their own expense and can be arbitrarily ended in times of crisis. The result is exploitation.

Donisthorpe was writing at a time of capitalist development where the rising collective power of the corporation was becoming apparent. Though Donisthorpe still saw the state as paramount, he was aware that individualism had to grasp with the need for labour to act collaboratively whilst maintaining their liberty. Therefore, to break the slavery of wagedom, without swapping it for the slavery of state socialism, Donisthorpe saw only one possibility, Labour Capitalization.

Labour Capitalization is premised on the worker's 'right to the whole profits of his labour', not that the employer gives him a share of profits as a bonus. 'The profits on labour belong to the labourer by *right* and not by favour.'⁸⁸ Workers, by treating their labour power as capital, enter into a form of collaborative self-employment, working for the full value of their labour, great or small. They themselves become capitalists and share an identity of interest with the employer in the success or failure of the enterprise, of which they are part-owners. Class conflict ends not with proletarianization or embourgeoisement but with Capitalization.

Donisthorpe painted a Ruskin-esque picture of the future worker, highly skilled in their craft, independent, working for their own direct benefit in a democratic workplace. He had no schema for the introduction of such a process other than seeing it as both necessary and an inevitable choice of the most socially advanced of the skilled working classes. Unfortunately for him, most workers did not see it the same way. Collective bargaining, social insurance and protective legislation, achieved through a democratic state,

seemed the most relevant tools to secure their immediate needs. It was not only Marxists who were to be disappointed by the working class.

In his enthusiasm for his scheme, Donisthorpe may have overestimated the immediate attraction of risk over security at a time when the collective power of the state was seen as able to offer the latter. But one industry did operate in such a way throughout most of the twentieth century: the Hull North Sea trawler fleet. Fishermen's pay was based on a share payment agreed before embarkation on a sliding scale according to the degree of responsibility of the worker. It varied in accordance with the success and profitability of the catch. It was no equal bargain. It was a byword for exploitation, unsafe working conditions and was a contributory cause of the over-fishing of the North Sea.⁸⁹ Donisthorpe underestimated both the market as a system of power and the effectiveness of employers' collective economic power. The bargain was worse than wages.

Donisthorpe's writings have to be seen as a failed attempt to integrate individualism into an advanced industrial society. But many of his critiques of regulation ring true and the concept of collaborative self-employment has most definitely not gone away. It is the cornerstone of much radical thought and alternative economics. It is just that corporations have the power to resist any worker wishing to gain the full value of their labour. If wages are such a good deal for employers then it is one that they would not willingly relinquish. To be independent, workers have to rely entirely on themselves.

Auberon Herbert and the voluntary state

The individualist with the strongest claim on anarchism was the one most determined to avoid the label, Auberon Herbert. Whereas Donisthorpe was a beneficiary of the wealth of the industrial bourgeoisie, Herbert was a product of the aristocracy. He was the third son of the third Earl of Carnarvon, married the daughter of the sixth Earl Cowper and travelled a considerable political distance from his family's conservatism, through liberalism, until he reached his final destination of individualism. He can certainly be described, using the old cliché, as a man of action. After Eton and Oxford, he held a commission in the Seventh Hussars. He was an observer of wars – something that no doubt influenced his later near-pacifism – including the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian war, witnessed the Paris Commune, and was decorated by the Danish government for the rescue of wounded during the Prussian-Danish War of 1864. He was a keen sailor and mountaineer, and was decorated by Austria for the rescue of the crew of an Austrian ship off the coast of Devon.⁹⁰ Despite his elite background, he was anything other than a cloistered intellectual. Herbert also served as a liberal MP for Nottingham between 1870 and 1874, where

he supported Dilke's republicanism and Arch's trade unionism. He would have been likely to continue on this path towards social liberalism if it had not been for a meeting with Herbert Spencer in 1873, which led him to declare for liberty and against the state.

Max Nettlau's coruscating judgement of Donisthorpe and the League was balanced by a far more generous assessment of Herbert. He described his 'Voluntaryism' as 'a humane and vigorously anti-statist idea'.⁹¹ It certainly is libertarian. For Herbert liberty was the source of all virtues both intrinsically and as an educative process. Property was at the centre of individual liberty, though his rudimentary political economy contained a concept of property that is scarcely more radical than Donisthorpe and clearly less well conceived. Nettlau's judgement is rendered more curious by Herbert's explicit rejection of anarchism as 'one more creed of force' which, he surprisingly comments, 'we can never rightly class among the creeds of liberty'.⁹²

There is a graphic instance of this hostility to be seen in his response to a request from Charlotte Wilson for support for the defence fund set up to support Cantwell and Quinn in fighting their prosecution for offences arising from speeches at a public meeting, which supposedly included incitement to murder members of the Royal Family and assorted politicians. Herbert's ardent opposition to violence of all kinds and his acceptance of the popular association of anarchism with 'outrage' meant that he was unable to simply accept Wilson's assurances that the defendants were not associated with any form of violence. He wrote, somewhat pompously, that he would only give money if the defendants signed and returned an enclosed slip of paper saying 'I the undersigned disassociate myself from all so called outrages or acts of violence ...'. He then went on to complain about the Royal Family being called 'swine'.⁹³ The declaration remains in the archives unsigned and his name is missing from the list of contributors.

Despite this conditional element to his commitment to free speech, Herbert's fluid writing made him first and foremost an articulate and passionate advocate for individual liberty. For him, liberty is simple and indivisible. Government, rooted in compulsion, is its enemy. Herbert held no candle for representative democracy, which was purely 'the rule of the majority and the suppression of the minority'.⁹⁴ And, for him, state power was infinitely corruptible.

You cannot devote yourself to the winning of power, and remain faithful to the great principles. The great principles, and the tactics of the political campaign, can never be made one, never reconciled ...

When you strive for power, you may form a temporary, fleeting alliance with the great principles, if they happen to serve your purpose of the moment, but the hour soon comes ... when they will not only cease to be serviceable to you, but are likely to prove highly inconvenient and embarrassing.⁹⁵

Herbert had moved beyond the studied pragmatism of Donisthorpe to assign a higher, romantic role for liberty. For liberty is the only condition where those 'great principles' can flourish. But what are they? Herbert summarized them thus:

And now, if these principles, as I have tried to set them before you, are true; if men have no rightful claim to possess any sovereignty over the bodies and minds of each other; if that sovereignty only belongs to the man's own self; if the attempt to have and to exercise power over each other has been the most fruitful cause both of the past and the present misery of the world; if force has never permanently bettered and never can permanently better any of us, but only unfits us for our struggle in a world, where we must depend for our success, sooner or later, at some point or other, notwithstanding all ingenious systems of external protection, upon the selves that are within us, upon our own choice of what is right, and our own power to abide by that choice ...⁹⁶

These are the two pillars of his thought, the right of self-ownership and, to ensure that right is respected, the absence of direct coercion. Herbert was not interested in utilitarian justifications; instead he returned to the idea of natural rights, 'rooted in the very nature of our being'.⁹⁷ These rights were then married to the idea of evolutionary advantage to produce an ideology of liberty that sees it as central to human evolutionary progress. His romantic idealization of liberty led him to reject the Hobbesian assumptions about human nature that Donisthorpe held.

It is liberty alone, broad as the sky above our heads, and planted deep and strong as the great mountains, that allows the better and higher part of our nature to rule in us, and subdues those passions that we share with animals.⁹⁸

In contrast, authority is dysfunctional:

Set men up to rule their fellow men, to treat them as mere soulless material with which they may deal as they please, and the consequence is that you sweep away every moral landmark and turn this world into a place of selfish striving, hopeless confusion, trickery and violence, a mere scrambling-ground for the strongest or the most cunning or the most numerous.⁹⁹

This complete belief in liberty as the deepest human value precluded all forms of coercion and that, in turn, led to his advocacy of the voluntary principle in all social policy, together with the primacy of private property and free trade.

Herbert's rejection of coercion is absolute, even down to the extent of denying the necessary existence of conflict. He argued that 'all forms of war – whether between nations, or political parties, or classes, or employers and employed' were 'mere survivals of barbarism' and 'outbursts of senselessness'.¹⁰⁰ At the high point of the British Empire, this drew Herbert into the anti-imperialist stances of a nascent liberal peace movement.¹⁰¹ His opposition was not just to war or revolutionary violence, he also expressed moral disgust at state socialist regulation and taxation. The carnage of the twentieth century unleashed by the cult of the state suggests these targets were relatively harmless in comparison; indeed this is one of the prime criticisms of the individualists. It is also possible to see his libertarianism as merely sophistry for the preservation of privilege. This would be to do him a disservice. He saw liberty as the only way to emancipate the working class, though his concept of power is not as rooted in an analysis of class and gender oppression as the other individualists.

Herbert did not admit to the possibility that the complexity of human relations required compromising liberty. All aspects of liberty are indivisible. For Herbert, 'private property and free trade' are both 'essential and indivisible parts of liberty, both depending on rights, which no body of men, whether called governments or anything else, can justly take from the individual'.¹⁰² This is not just a case of economic justice. 'As the foundation of all morality is respect for the free choice and the free choice of others, the essence of the true offence against person or property seems to be the violent interference with a man's faculties, the constraining of his will and actions.'¹⁰³

It seems a curious morality that equates property with human life but he made a clear connection between individual self-ownership and property more generally, which associates the two. He argued that 'property is directly or indirectly the product of faculties', a notable distinction with the early natural rights theorists who saw property as the product of labour alone, and so he concluded that 'Personal ownership of our own selves, of our own faculties, necessarily includes personal ownership of property'.¹⁰⁴ The implication is clear; an act of coercive violence against property, such as taxation, is as morally obnoxious as violence against the person. And Herbert romanticized property, endowing it with almost supernatural powers.

The control of his own property by the individual, and the liberty of the individual can never be separated from each other. They must stand, or fall together ... Destroy the rights of property, and you will also destroy both the material and the moral foundations of liberty.

Preserve, then, at its best and strongest the magic of property; leave to it all its stimulating and transforming virtues. It is one of the great master keys that open the door to all that in a material sense you rightly and proudly wish to do and to be.¹⁰⁵

Property endows the owner with virtue and thus Herbert argued that the salvation of the working class is through the acquisition of property. However unlikely Donisthorpe's scheme for the capitalization of labour, it was certainly more realistic than Herbert's methods of turning workers into owners – saving. Despite the proliferation of working-class self-help institutions, Herbert was surely too optimistic in asserting,

The working body of the people must no longer be content – not for a single day – to be the property-less class. In every city and town and village they must form their associations for the gaining of property; they must put their irresistible pence and shillings together, so that step by step, effort upon effort, they may become the owners of land, of farms, of houses, of shops, of mills, and trading ships; they must take shares in the great well-managed trading companies and railways, until the time comes, as their capital increases, when they will be able to become the owners at first of small trading concerns, established by themselves, and then later of larger and more important concerns.¹⁰⁶

It is the acquisition of property that ends the class war. A classless society arrives through the peaceful collaboration engendered by trade and property, not through the victory of one class over another. Worker's associations will be reorganized on a 'peace basis' and 'enter into friendly alliances with capital'. These would engage in forms of voluntary intervention at times of unemployment, providing employment and supporting the unemployed 'to enable them to spend their unoccupied time usefully in study and education'.¹⁰⁷ Herbert's picture of free trade, competition and anti-imperialism is placed in the context of independent self-regulating associations and communities in a curious variety of syndicalist capitalism. As coercion is to be admitted only in so far as it is necessary for self-defence, no interests can be advanced by force. This caused Herbert to reject redistributive socialism. State socialists only sought to use systematic robbery to achieve their ends. Herbert commented, 'all these generous impulses and large ideas turn, like fairy gold, to dust and ashes, because they are wedded to compulsion, which degrades all that it touches.'¹⁰⁸ State socialism is not only coercive; it is morally corrupting. This is because people will give up their natural rights to self-ownership and receive, instead, what the state deigns to give them in exchange. It is a system based on compulsion and forced obedience.

Herbert's political economy is, in fact, moral theory. His primary concern was with a virtuous society, arguing that virtue springs from liberty. Liberty engenders the best in human nature and Herbert placed all his trust in the generous instincts of free people. It follows that taxation is permissible, but only if it is voluntary. Herbert did recognize the existence of collective interests and the possibility of collective action

for compassionate ends, but again would only sanction it if done freely without coercion. As a result, taxation needed to be transformed into giving on a purely voluntary basis. 'Under that voluntary system alone can a nation live in peace and friendship and work together happily and profitably for common ends.'¹⁰⁹

Herbert, therefore, advocated a form of mutualism within a fully developed capitalist society in which private property held a central and sacred place. The contrast with liberals and collectivists could hardly be clearer. Christian moralists saw in property the corruption of wealth; collectivists saw it as systematic theft. For Herbert it is the source of all virtue. Whereas Adam Smith felt that selfishness was the secret to the effective working of a market economy, Herbert believed that, to the contrary, such a free economy produced a noble unselfishness. This takes the idea of the market as a system of collaboration to a new hyperbolic level as the source of morality. This is the complete opposite of the way he saw state socialism, which was a doctrine that ensured 'the certain degradation of the human character'.¹¹⁰

Aside from the association of anarchism with violence, there was another reason why Herbert rejected label anarchist. It is because he saw a role for a residual state. Firstly, this is needed to protect the self-ownership and rights of the people against the use of force by others. The important thing for Herbert is that this is exercised collectively and impersonally rather than through individual vigilantism or revenge. Secondly, it would manage external relations with other nations, though without the right to declare war or enter into binding treaties. And finally it would be there as a 'useful friend to the people', capable of providing services as long as 'it renounced all use of compulsion' and never demanded 'compulsory services or compulsory contributions'.¹¹¹ A residual state would act where there were collective needs to be addressed – he gives the examples of education and sanitation for example; however, he insisted that any action should be entirely voluntary. This is what he thought distinguished him from the anarchists, even the individualist anarchists, though surely what he was advocating is not a government as commonly understood, but the very self-regulating community that stands at the heart of all anarchist thought. His disavowal of anarchism is unconvincing to say the least.

The individualists felt that they were writing at a turning point in history and Herbert is no exception. He joined the chorus warning against the growing appeal of state collectivism, writing passionately of its dangers and of the urgency of his appeal to liberty.

The great choice lies before you. No nation stands still. It must move in one direction or the other. Either the State must grow in power, imposing new burdens and compulsions, and the nation sink lower and lower into a helpless quarrelling crowd, or the individual must gain his own

rightful freedom, become master of himself, creature of none, confident in himself and in his own qualities, confident in his power to plan and to do, and determined to end this old-world, profitless and worn-out system of restrictions and compulsions, which is not good or healthy even for the children. Once we realize the waste and the folly of striving against each other, once we feel in our hearts that the worst use to which we can turn human energies is gaining victories over each other, then we shall at last begin in true earnest to turn the wilderness into a garden, and to plant all the best and fairest of the flowers where now only the nettles and the briars grow.¹¹²

Of course, the growth of collectivism proved irresistible regardless of Herbert's passionate advocacy.

Joseph Hiam Levy and the defence of personal rights

J. H. Levy was a sharp critic of Herbert's Voluntaryism, despite their professed friendship, and is arguably one of the least anarchistic of the prominent advocates of individualism. He did not share Donisthorpe's criticism of the wage system or Herbert's negation of the state. A prolific lecturer and pamphleteer, he frequently recycled his writings, often word for word, in a multitude of publications, just as Donisthorpe did. His criticism of the concept of voluntary taxation was based less on the practical consideration that given the choice most would not contribute, but that it would transform the state into a voluntary association rather than a government.¹¹³ Arguably, this was Herbert's intention, and it was this that drew the approval of the anarchist Nettlau. However, Levy's Hobbesian conception of human nature led him into a position that denied any possible anarchy. Self-regulation is unfeasible, as it requires that all contributors would be agreed on the principles of regulation. This is impossible for Levy as there 'can be no singleness of aim, either political or personal, among the citizens of any country in the world'.¹¹⁴ In no way can he share Herbert's romantic utopianism or even Donisthorpe's pragmatic anti-statism. None the less, a picture of late Victorian libertarianism would not be complete without him.

Levy's life had none of the intellectual spread of Donisthorpe's, nor the adventurousness of Herbert's. In part, this was because he was not cushioned by private wealth and actually had to earn his living. His employment as a civil servant was such that it gave him time for all his external activities: journalism, teaching in adult education and political organization and campaigning. Arguably, it made him less prone to utopian speculation and more grounded in reality. He was a committed feminist,

active in the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts and against compulsory vaccination, and joined the committee of what became the Personal Rights Association, defending the liberty of the individual against state compulsion.¹¹⁵ He was also proudly Jewish and spoke both to and on behalf of British Jewry.¹¹⁶ It is likely that his prominence helped prevent individualism from acquiring the taint of anti-Semitism that permeated other parts of the radical milieu.

Levy's approach can best be described as rigidly positivist. This positivism made him an economic reductionist. For instance, he based his critique of socialism on a rigid and narrow definition that it was simply 'the active or direct distribution of products by the State'.¹¹⁷ The omission of any ethical component to socialism is not an accident; it is something that he claims to ruthlessly exclude from all aspects from his thought. In his essay on the *Economics of Labour Remuneration* he wrote:

Be as warm, ladies and gentlemen – as sympathetic as you like; you cannot be too much so for me, so long as you restrict your warmth to your heart, and do not let it mount to another organ which it is very much better to keep cool, if one wishes to distinguish between fact and fiction ... Love of our fellows is an excellent guide to conduct; but it is a snare when substituted for accurate knowledge of the facts and laws of our economic environment.¹¹⁸

This approach to economics is a curious one for a social scientist. He denied that there was any social content in economics:

... economic laws are not products of human will or design, but permanent relations in the order of the phenomena of wealth, which we may learn or not learn, but which we can no more alter than King Cnut could annihilate the force of the tide.¹¹⁹

Thus, for instance, he defended Malthus on the basis that Malthus' linkage of population growth to poverty was scientifically correct.

It is, no doubt very annoying to be reminded that the great cause of the misery existing in our midst is our own ignorance or want of self-control ... Mr Malthus' researches are not the cause of poverty: but an explanation of the reasons of its existence.¹²⁰

In doing so, Levy lazily brushed aside opponents of Malthus by diminishing their real quarrels with the validity of Malthus' analysis as a prejudiced objection to a finding that they may find disagreeable. The unqualified assertion of conjecture as scientific fact is a common rhetorical trick and one on which Levy based much of his rejection of socialism. Yet, this

positivism did not mean that he lapsed into crude economic determinism. Instead, he argued that, within those prescribed and immutable economic laws, human beings have a choice about how they react and structure their societies. And so, in apparent contradiction, he concluded, 'the battle between Socialism and Individualism must be mainly fought out on ethical grounds'.¹²¹

Levy was a critic of socialism as a solution, but he shared all the same concerns as socialists. Rather than being a propagandist for plutocracy, he decried those 'who use Individualism as a cloak for the maintenance of privilege'¹²² and understood that 'the moral springs of Socialism are not ... envy and greed' but a 'noble impatience of the misery of their fellow men'.¹²³ The ethical arguments for individualism he deployed are now familiar from the debates over command economies. His economic utilitarianism suggested that wage-earners would be better off under a free market and that socialism, as he strictly defined it, would be debilitating. Individuals would be 'drained of ... individuality and drilled into mere machines'.¹²⁴ As such, Levy was not original, but, from the point of view of this study, it is his approach to property that is distinctive.

Levy's theory of property derived from both J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. Spencer had written in *Social Statics* that the ownership of land offended his law of equal liberty in that it permitted the possibility that 'our planet may ... lapse altogether into private hands' and in doing so would deprive the landless of the liberty to use it.¹²⁵ In other words, he saw land ownership as bestowing power over others. Once again, we see property understood as a social relationship. Mill had developed this further and Levy took up Mill's criticism of Locke. Whilst prepared to robustly defend private property in the products of labour, he argued against the appropriation of the raw materials necessary to manufacture those products. Locke's safeguard, that mixing labour with land to make it private property is only allowable where there is sufficient remaining for others, is a logical nonsense in a finite world. Property in land permanently denies its use by others. Levy wrote:

John Stuart Mill says:- 'It is no hardship to anyone to be excluded from what others have produced: they were not bound to produce it for his use, and he loses nothing by not sharing in what otherwise would not have existed at all. But it is some hardship to be born into the world and to find all Nature's gifts previously engrossed, and no place left for the newcomer.' It is more than a hardship. It is injustice so gross that, were it carried out in its entirety, rebellion against it would be instantaneous and general. Had not the principle of nationalization of land been partly carried out, by public roads, streets, footpaths, waterways, and open spaces, the landless poor would not only be unable to move about without payments, which they might not be able to afford, but would

have no place on which to rest the soles of their feet. To some extent this state of things has been read by the Vagrancy Acts; for the poor, driven off the land, have had their homeless wandering turned into a legal offence and have been forced into the ranks of the criminal classes.¹²⁶

Levy further radicalized his view by defining land as ‘the raw material of the globe, of whatever kind’.¹²⁷ Humanity’s relationship with nature has to be one of collective ownership rather than private property. Levy makes a cogent argument against privatization (later qualified by a rejection of renationalization):

It is not necessary that I should tell my present audience that I hold, and have always held during my long public life, that the State should not sell or otherwise alienate any portion of the storehouse of Nature commonly called ‘land’; and that, if it sells any of the materials extracted from it, such as coal, the purchase money should not be considered as current income, but should be capitalized, so that the benefit derived from it may be used for the advantage, not merely of the present generation, but also of future ones.¹²⁸

Levy comes close to Godwin’s notion of trusteeship, but perhaps it is more interesting to project his thinking forwards. There was just such a debate in the 1970s in the UK over the proceeds of North Sea oil. The left unsuccessfully argued that the receipts should be used as a national fund for investment rather than to support recurrent spending. However prescient he turned out to be, Levy was proud in his time to be recognized as having advocated ‘Land Municipalization here before Henry George was politically born’.¹²⁹

The American individualist anarchist, Victor Yarros, echoed the modern Green and Global Justice movements when he linked the land question to what was then called the conservation movement, identifying it as an ‘anti-monopoly movement’ against the ‘wasting or greedy private exploitation of national assets’. He wrote that ‘the old “liberal” policy of permitting individuals or corporations to grab and appropriate natural resources is dead. The people of the United States have realized that such a policy is as criminal as it is absurd.’¹³⁰ Unfortunately, criminal and absurd policies are both tempting and rewarding, ensuring that Levy’s defence of collective rights in economic resources remains highly pertinent to this day where the doctrine of privatization reigns supreme.

The English individualists' place in history

Intellectual historians have mostly ignored the English Individualists. They have attracted some attention amongst North American libertarians, but otherwise both their contribution to political economy and their connection to anarchism have been broadly overlooked. There are three main reasons why this should be so. One is an anachronistic misinterpretation of them as conservatives rather than the radicals they actually were. Their anti-socialist rhetoric has masked their trenchant critiques of gender inequality and class exploitation. And though they embraced the market and private property, they did so whilst questioning the nature of corporate capitalism, often expressing hostility to the limited liability company and offering a libertarian alternative. And this was also obscured by the subsequent history of individualism. The radical moment was brief. Under the influence of W. H. Mallock later individualists embraced capitalism with an almost evangelical enthusiasm¹³¹ and were to emerge as fully-fledged anarcho-capitalists. Looking back from today, it is too easy to see the English Individualists as proto-neoliberals.

Secondly, their obsession with the state as an agent of coercion blinded them to the appeal of state protection, security and welfare, especially to those in desperate need. A seeming irrelevance was added to misunderstanding. Grippled by a perception of an apocalyptic choice facing people between liberty and state domination, they failed to engage with the possibility of a compromise position between the two, which was already entering nineteenth-century political discourse as social liberalism. Most importantly, they underestimated the importance of economic security to the exercise of liberty and the powerful coercive force of the fear of penury. Pure economic liberty could appear a very limited form of freedom indeed. It was certainly easier to preach the virtues of a free economy from a position of wealth.

Finally, though the individualists' perception was acute, their solutions were unrealistic. The market was coming to be seen as an instrument of power to be used against workers rather than a facilitator of collaboration. Most importantly, the state was no longer the sole source of collective power; it now had a rival, the modern corporation. This new form of private collectivization squeezed out the possibilities of universal self-employment that individualism saw as the future. Radicals began to see the need to confront that power and the democratic socialist state seemed to offer a collective champion against corporate exploitation. Ultimately, their timing was bad.

So, should they be included in our picture of late nineteenth-century anarchism? Though they may seem semi-detached, they were, at the least, anarchist fellow travellers. The residual state they favoured was hardly

government as we know it, whilst they rejected the hypocrisies and injustices of Victorian class and gender hierarchies. And at a time when our faith in ‘scientific’ management is failing, individualists’ identification of the repressive tendencies in some forms of social regulation appears to be strikingly modern. Most important of all, they were there. They were part of that radical milieu; they influenced it and debated with it. They sat outside the mainstream of political thought and swam in the turbulent waters of alternative ideas. And whilst Levy might be the one person least likely to be seen as part of anarchism, he provided a coherent defence of the commons from a libertarian perspective that still impresses. An account of nineteenth-century libertarian intellectual movements would not be complete without their resuscitation from the ‘condescension of history’, though it was left to the individualist anarchists to develop an unambiguously anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology, and they are the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 See M. W. Taylor, *Men Versus the State. Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualism* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992).
- 2 Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, Heiner M. Becker (ed.), trans. by Ida Pilat Isca: (Freedom Press: London, 1996), p.39.
- 3 Ibid p.40.
- 4 See Frank H. Brooks (ed.), *The Individualist Anarchists. An Anthology of Liberty (1881–1908)* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London, 1994), esp. Chapters 3 and 4.
- 5 Edward Bristow, *Individualism versus Socialism in Britain, 1880–1914* (Garland Publishing Inc.: New York and London, 1987), p.217.
- 6 Ibid p.176.
- 7 Benjamin Tucker, *Instead of a Book, By a Man too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (Benj. R. Tucker: New York, 1897, repr. Gordon Press: New York, 1972), p.38.
- 8 George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life* (T. Fisher Unwin: London, 1892). For a good secondary account, see Lee E. Grugel, *George Jacob Holyoake: A Study in the Evolution of a Victorian Radical* (Porcupine Press: Philadelphia, 1976).
- 9 W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom*, first edn 1903 repr. with an introduction by John Saville (Augustus M. Kelley: New York, 1968).
- 10 Discussed intelligently here: Pat Thane, ‘The Working Class and State “Welfare” in Britain, 1880–1914’, *The Historical Journal* (Vol. 27, No. 4, December 1984), pp.877–900.
- 11 For a brilliant account of popular working-class self-education, see Jonathan

- Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale University Press, 2002).
- 12 A good example of this type of aristocratic anti-temperance campaigner is Lord Elcho, discussed here: Alastair Paynter, 'Francis Wemyss-Charteris-Douglas: Champion of Late-Victorian Individualism', *Libertarian Papers* (Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2012), pp.119–46. Online at: libertarianpapers.org (accessed 2 August 2012).
 - 13 Stephen Reynolds with Bob and Tom Wooley, *Seems So! A Working Class View of Politics* (MacMillan and Co.: London, 1911).
 - 14 Of the criticisms aimed at Reynolds' book, the one that Devon fishermen were hardly typical of the industrial working class strikes me as the most pertinent.
 - 15 Stephen Reynolds, *Seems So!*, p.320.
 - 16 Ibid pp.244–5.
 - 17 Ibid pp.73–4.
 - 18 See Nadja Durbach, *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England, 1853–1907* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2005).
 - 19 So called because it is an alternative to medicine that actually works.
 - 20 Nadja Durbach, *Bodily Matters*, p.26.
 - 21 Ibid p.27.
 - 22 Ibid pp.69–72.
 - 23 Such as the excellent biography by Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (John Murray: London, 2001).
 - 24 Ibid pp.276–7.
 - 25 In Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (Macmillan: London, 1971), p.93.
 - 26 Ibid pp.85–6.
 - 27 Josephine E. Butler, Ada Smith, Elizabeth C. Wolstenholme, Dinah Goodall, Emilie A. Venturi, *Legislative Restrictions on the Industry of Women considered from the Women's Point of View* (Matthews & Sons: London, 1874).
 - 28 Ibid p.6.
 - 29 Ibid p.4.
 - 30 Ibid p.16.
 - 31 Ibid p.17.
 - 32 Ibid pp.17–18.
 - 33 Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity*, p.84. There is no suggestion of how he managed to observe this.
 - 34 Josephine Butler, *Government by Police* (2nd edn, Dyer Brothers: London, 1880), p.16.

- 35 Ibid p.48.
- 36 I have strong doubts about the validity of this notion drawn from my work in community and outreach education. It seems to me to rest on speculation and spurious observation rather than hard empirical evidence. That Butler indulged in it is not, to my mind, a strength.
- 37 Josephine Butler, *Government by Police*, pp.19–20.
- 38 Ibid p.60.
- 39 Edward Bristow, *Individualism versus Socialism in Britain*, p.61.
- 40 Hermia Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (Croom Helm: London and Canberra; St Martin's Press: New York, 1983), p.36.
- 41 Stephen Herbert, *Industry, Liberty, and a Vision: Wordsworth Donisthorpe's Kinesigraph* (Projection Box: London, 1998).
- 42 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Principles of Plutology* (Williams and Norgate: London and Edinburgh, 1876).
- 43 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, 'Self Help v. State Help', in *The Liberty and Property Defence League: Its Origins, Objects and Inaugural Meeting* (The Liberty and Property Defence League: London, 1882), p.9. This is, of course, Herbert Spencer's law of equal freedom.
- 44 Ibid p.18.
- 45 Ibid p.7.
- 46 *Jus: A Weekly Organ of Individualism*, 7 January–30 March 1888, Vol. 1, No. 15, 1 April 1887, *Anti-Socialist Organisations in Britain 1870–1914, Anti-Socialist Journals 1874–1914* (Harvester Microform: Brighton, 1986). Donisthorpe was nothing if not persistent. The theme is continued in later works. See, for example, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Law in a Free State* (Macmillan and Co: London and New York, 1895), pp.40–5.
- 47 *Jus*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 25 February 1887.
- 48 *Jus*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 11 February 1887.
- 49 *Jus*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 14 January 1887.
- 50 Stephen Herbert, *Industry, Liberty, and a Vision*, p.41.
- 51 *Jus*, Vol. 2, No. 65, 30 March 1888. A judgement shared by others sympathetic to individualism. See George Howell, 'Liberty for Labour', in Thomas Mackay (ed.), *A Plea for Liberty. An Argument Against Socialism and Socialistic Legislation: Consisting of an introduction by Herbert Spencer and various writers* (John Murray: London, 1891), p.122.
- 52 Wendy McElroy, *Liberty's Connection to Other Publications*, unpublished manuscript, nd, online at <http://www.wendymcelroy.com/libdebates/apx1pubs.html> (accessed 3 August 2012).
- 53 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism: A System of Politics* (Macmillan, London, 1889), p.69.

- 54 You can find the same way of arguing in Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, in that he sees totalitarianism as a potential outcome of economic planning. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge: London, 1976).
- 55 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.299.
- 56 Ibid p.294.
- 57 Ibid p.299.
- 58 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.46.
- 59 Ibid pp.42–4.
- 60 Ibid p.42.
- 61 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Law in a Free State*, p.39. Bill Sykes is the cunning villain in Charles Dickens' novel, *Oliver Twist*.
- 62 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.50.
- 63 Ibid p.7.
- 64 Ibid p.9.
- 65 Ibid p.10.
- 66 Ibid p.19.
- 67 Ibid p.16.
- 68 See for example Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford University Press, 1978) and Martin Ceadel, *Thinking About Peace and War* (Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 69 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.28.
- 70 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Love and Law: An Essay on Marriage* (W. Reeves: London, 1893).
- 71 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.296.
- 72 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Law in a Free State*, p.113.
- 73 Ibid p.120.
- 74 M. W. Taylor, *Men Against the State*, p.3.
- 75 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.280.
- 76 Ibid p.282.
- 77 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Law in a Free State*, p.120.
- 78 Ibid p.121.
- 79 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, 'The Limits of Liberty', in Thomas Mackay (ed.), *A Plea for Liberty*, pp.63–4.
- 80 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *The Claims of Labour; or Serfdom, Wagedom and Freedom* (Samuel Tinsley & Co.: London, 1880).
- 81 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, pp.90–127. He consciously calls this chapter 'What is Property?'
- 82 Ibid p.105.
- 83 Ibid p.93.

- 84 Despite one attempt at rehabilitation, Scrope remains stubbornly obscure. See Redvers Opie, 'A Neglected English Economist: George Poulett Scrope', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 44, Issue 1, (November 1929), pp.101–37.
- 85 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.144.
- 86 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Labour Capitalization* (G. Harmsworth & Co.: London, 1887), p.9.
- 87 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Serfdom, Wagedom and Freedom*, p.2.
- 88 Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Individualism*, p.215.
- 89 See Rupert Creed, *Turning the Tide: The 1968 Trawler Tragedy and the Wives' Campaign for Safety* (Back Door Press: Hull, 1998), Chapter 1.
- 90 M. W. Taylor, 'Herbert, Auberon Edward William Molyneux (1838–1906)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, January 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33828> (accessed 10 August 2012)].
- 91 Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, p.40.
- 92 Auberon Herbert, *The Voluntaryist Creed* (W. J. Simpson at the Oxford University Press: London. 1918), p.54.
- 93 Herbert to Wilson, 10 July 1894, Pressburg Archive IISH.
- 94 Auberon Herbert, *The Voluntaryist Creed*, p.19.
- 95 Ibid pp.8–9.
- 96 Auberon Herbert, *The Rights and Wrongs of Compulsion by the State, and Other Essays*, ed. and with an introduction by Eric Mack, (Liberty Fund: Indianapolis, 1978), pp.150–1.
- 97 Herbert, *A Plea for Voluntaryism*, p.68.
- 98 Ibid p.70.
- 99 Ibid pp.67–8.
- 100 Auberon Herbert, *The Principles of Voluntaryism and Free Life* (Free Press Association: Burlington, VE, 1897), pp.21–2.
- 101 Eric Mack, 'Voluntaryism: The Political Thought of Auberon Herbert', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* (Vol. 2, No. 4, 1978), pp. 299–309, 300.
There is an interesting contrast between Herbert and Butler that mirrors the anarchist split over Kropotkin's support for the First World War. Whereas Herbert opposed the Boer War, Butler supported the British on the grounds that British rule would be far less disadvantageous to the indigenous people. Butler had spotted the racism in the Boers that would eventually give us apartheid.
- 102 Auberon Herbert, *The Rights and Wrongs of Compulsion by the State*, p.152.
- 103 Ibid p.154.
- 104 Auberon Herbert, *The Principles of Voluntaryism*, p.5.
- 105 Auberon Herbert, *The Voluntaryist Creed*, pp.87–91.
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- 117 Bax and Levy, *Socialism and Individualism*, p.73.
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- 123 Ibid p.5.
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- 125 Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: or, The Conditions essential to Happiness specified, and the First of them Developed* (John Chapman: London, 1851), Chapter IX: the right to the use of the earth. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/273/6246> (accessed 14 August 2012). Spencer goes on to argue for collective ownership of land together with private leasing from a national corporation.
- 126 J. H. Levy in Sir Roland K Wilson, J. H. Levy, and Others, *Individualism and the Land Question: A Discussion* (The Personal Rights Association, P. S. King and Son: London, 1912), p.41.
- 127 Ibid p.43.
- 128 Ibid p.47.
- 129 Ibid p.50.
- 130 Victor S. Yarros, 'The Land Question in the United States', in Wilson et al., *Individualism and the Land Question*, p.107.
- 131 Edward Bristow, *Individualism versus Socialism in Britain*, pp.219–23.

4

Individualist anarchism in late Victorian Britain

If the Spencerian individualists had laid down their marker as being strongly anti-socialist, despite wanting to transform the capitalism of their day into something radically different, the co-existent individualist anarchists had no such compunction. It is best to see them as the left wing of the individualist movement that grew from the ideas current in the early part of the century. They were unambiguous about the state and far more vehement in their opposition to finance capitalism, sometimes embracing the label socialist with relish. They were much closer to the Ricardian socialists and to Proudhon in their political economy. They were certainly not worried about calling themselves revolutionaries, even if their revolution was to be achieved through non-violent, economic direct action. Some also brought a different nuance to the movement's ideology, being influenced by Stirner's Egoism.

As well as European influences, individualist anarchism also drew from the United States. American individualism was well-established and prominent, beginning with Josiah Warren and culminating with Benjamin Tucker's newspaper *Liberty*, the high point for the tradition. This has led some historians to marginalize British individualism, concentrating solely on the United States. John Quail, the British movement's first historian,¹ did acknowledge its existence, but focused on the activities of the anarcho-communists. Nevertheless, Quail did see Tucker's *Liberty* as the starting point for the English anarchist movement as it was the first English language anarchist paper available in Britain, being distributed from 1881 onwards.²

It is possible to see British individualist anarchism representing a fusion of European ideas, particularly those of Proudhon, with this emerging Atlanticism, especially as British individualists were regular contributors to Tucker's journal.³ However, to do so would be to relegate the strong native

tradition, discussed in the first chapter. This strand had not disappeared and, though it only appears in glimpses, there is a direct link between the radical thought of the early and later part of the centuries. British individualism was a distinctive fusion of these three traditions, American, European and British. A graphic example of how this was is the life and work of Ambrose Custon Cuddon.

Max Nettlau rescued Cuddon from obscurity, wrote about him in *Freedom*⁴ and preserved his few extant publications. Cuddon had American connections, being influenced by the correspondence between Josiah Warren and the Owenites,⁵ and had also visited America in 1858. Clearly identifying with anarchism, he later headed the deputation that greeted Bakunin when he arrived in London in January 1862, whilst, at the age of 83, he met Benjamin Tucker on his visit to London in 1874.⁶ Cuddon was the secretary of a group known as the London Confederation of Rational Reformers whose programme, which Nettlau assumes was written by Cuddon, prefigured the main themes of individualist anarchist political economy, a free currency and mutualist exchange. Their underpinning philosophy was fundamentally individualist.

Liberty – *the sovereignty of the individual* – is the highest good of life, for which no artificial substitute, however ingeniously disguised, can ever be made an adequate compensation.⁷

The other conduit for these early radical ideas was freethought⁸ and many anarchists started out in the movement. For instance, the leading individualist anarchist, Henry Seymour, began his activism by engaging in agitation for secularism, establishing his Secular Hall and Science Library in his hometown of Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Freethought was not solely concerned with religion, it wished to secularize the way we thought, to spread rationality and clarity in the place of superstition. And once again, Cuddon is an example of the fusion between freethinking and anarchism, when he wrote about the misuse of language. He put it succinctly: ‘the bulk of mankind are, and have ever been, the egregious dupes of language.’⁹ Political language is, he argued, an exercise in deception, through its imprecision. Concepts such as prosperity are entirely relative depending on to whom they apply. One of the best examples he gave was how MPs’ concept of working-class prosperity was somewhat different to how they understood their own. If the political elite had the same level of wealth as they though suitable for the working classes, ‘most of them would think they were utterly ruined and commit suicide’.¹⁰ He wrote eloquently, as George Orwell was later to do in his celebrated essay *Politics and the English Language*, of how euphemism is used to hide real meanings. For example, he quoted President Pierce at his inauguration attempting to sanitize slavery as ‘involuntary servitude’.¹¹ This critique of the use of language is also to

be found in Herbert Spencer's work and the later anarcho-communist, Louisa Bevington, used it as the main framework for the defence of atheism with which she first made her name. Arguably, freethought provided the conceptual toolbox for the anarchists' social critique that augmented their political economy.

The British individualist anarchists

The bulk of the publications to emerge from the individualist anarchist movement in Britain were produced by a small group of diverse writers and activists, notably John Badcock, John Armsden, John Basil Barnhill, Albert Tarn, Henry Seymour and Lothrop Withington.

John Badcock, an accountant who later became a dealer in Chinese art,¹² was a Stirnerite egoist. Egoism and individualist anarchism are not synonymous, although this book is not the right place for an in-depth discussion of the differences. It could seem that, for example, Stirner's use of 'ownness' as a critique of freedom, together with his denial of an external natural right, would question their ability to collaborate. Yet, there were many instances of cross-fertilization between the two, even in the area of political economy. For example, Badcock, together with others influenced by Stirner, shared many individualist concerns and contributed to their discussions on the nature of a free society. Badcock was also active in the group Free Currency Propaganda, together with John Armsden and Henry Seymour, and had been involved in the Legitimation League, formed to campaign against the bastardy laws, which gathered support from a wide range of liberal and libertarian activists. Egoism was further represented by John Basil Barnhill, whose witty journal, *The Eagle and the Serpent*, published between 1898 and 1903, waged a war on what it called 'altruism' in all its guises, the most notable being the willingness of ordinary people to work for the benefit of the rich.

Of greater importance to the development of individualist ideas was Albert Tarn. Yorkshire born from Huddersfield, Tarn was the publisher of *The Herald of Anarchy* and came closest to the libertarian political economy espoused by Tucker. He was one of Tucker's agents for the distribution of *Liberty* in Britain. Tarn had been a member of William Morris's Socialist League, though it is hard to see how he fitted in comfortably given his distinctive views. He had pet obsessions that recur throughout his writings, most notably his opposition to the Post Office monopoly, which he referred to, with a characteristic lack of proportion, as 'a stupid monstrosity instituted and perpetrated for the purpose of maintaining authority'.¹³ He was also an advocate of 'rational spelling', a movement designed to reform written English, rendering, for example, 'neighbours'

as ‘nabers’ and ‘although’ as ‘altho’, despite claiming in *The Herald of Anarchy* ‘that we shall not go out of the way to spell “foneticalli”’.¹⁴

The most prolific writer and energetic activist was Henry Seymour and much of this article necessarily focuses on him. Seymour’s interests were far wider than individualism. He was a publisher, editor and campaigner who had first gained minor notoriety in 1882 when, as secretary of the Tunbridge Wells branch of the National Secular Society, he was prosecuted for blasphemy.¹⁵ Seymour had strong links with the Legitimation League and its journal, *The Adult*, which he later edited. He also formed the Free Press Defence Committee to defend the League’s secretary, George Bedborough, against his prosecution for selling Havelock Ellis’ book *Sexual Inversion*, a major cause célèbre for the radical movement. Seymour also played a role in the early development of the wider British anarchist movement by turning over his journal, *The Anarchist*, to the leading members of what were to become the Freedom Group, notably the anarcho-communists Peter Kropotkin and Charlotte Wilson.

The Anarchist was an eclectic journal from the beginning. Its first issue contained a contribution from Elisee Réclus and George Bernard Shaw’s celebrated ‘What’s in a Name’, later republished in Tucker’s *Liberty*. Charlotte Wilson also contributed under the by-line of ‘An English Anarchist’. However, in a series of editorials, Seymour committed himself to the main principles of individualist anarchism and a complete rejection of collectivism. In a review of the Lyon Manifesto, issued by the defendants in the trial of 1883 that led to the imprisonment of Peter Kropotkin, he wrote: ‘the idea of holding capital in common is absurd’.¹⁶ So it was surprising to see him hand over control of the journal to communists and even, temporarily, abandon individualism itself.

Issue thirteen of *The Anarchist* of 25 March 1886 announced that it was now ‘the recognized organ of the English Anarchist Party’ and its opening page carried a coherent criticism of individualism by Severino Merlino, arguing that as production was inherently co-operative the products of labour were indivisible and therefore necessarily collective. Seymour wrote a short response, but the next issue, bearing the surprising banner ‘Communist and Revolutionary’, saw a bold declaration from Seymour: ‘In accepting the economic principles of Communism as satisfactorily established, I unhesitatingly and fearlessly adopt them.’¹⁷ On top of which, articles in *The Anarchist* were now to be unsigned and the newspaper was to be collectively edited.

Even allowing for Seymour’s attraction to fads, this was a startling conversion. In fact, it appears that it was financial concerns that led Seymour into an uncomfortable collaboration. Certainly, this was not a meeting of minds. It took only two issues for Seymour to sign his editorials again; in issue seventeen he published barbed comments against Charlotte Wilson and the editorial board and in issue eighteen, only five months after

his conversion, he published an article by Wordsworth Donisthorpe. It took until March 1888 for Seymour to confirm in writing what was obvious to any reader, that he had long rejected anarchist communism, if he had ever accepted it at all. He replied to a letter from a reader with typical bravado:

The fact of contradicting oneself is evidence of intellectual growth ... It is true I embraced Communist Anarchism some two years ago for a sufficient length of time to understand and repudiate it.¹⁸

Seymour blamed 'differing temperamental dispositions'¹⁹ for the break-up of this short-lived collaboration. Whilst egos, especially Seymour's, may well have played a part, it is clear that there were profound ideological differences, which Seymour could not repress. His association with the Freedom Group was one that the communists also seemed keen to play down. On 28 September 1896, Charlotte Wilson wrote to Alfred Marsh about an article on the origins of the *Freedom* newspaper suggesting it was better to 'leave out the reference to Seymour and *The Anarchist*. It has really nothing to do with *Freedom* which was started some time after we decided to work with Seymour no more. It would have been started if there had been no *Anarchist*'.²⁰ Individualism had begun to be airbrushed from anarchist history.

Seymour was a conspicuously modern man adopting all kinds of modish beliefs, many of which appear outlandish to twenty-first century minds, though it is easy to forget how widely they were shared. For example, eugenics, physiognomy and phrenology were part of the mainstream of Victorian science and widely advocated within radical circles. Seymour's writings were not as strange as they may seem, but they did embody two of the most striking aspects of his personality: his supreme self-confidence and his eye for the main chance. For example, he not only championed these ideas, he also saw himself as an expert. In his book, *The Physiology of Love: A Study in Stirpiculture*, he describes how human temperament is shaped by bone structure and complexion, with grave physiological consequences. He was confident enough in his expertise to be able to declare firmly: 'When both the parents to a marriage have the sanguine-encephalic temperament ... their children will die young of dropsy of the brain, or of tubercular inflammation of its membranes.'²¹ His entrepreneurship was on display, too, as he used the book to offer his services for a fee 'for the purpose of describing the temperamental condition of ladies or gentlemen ... to ensure the most satisfactory marriages'.²²

Later, his faith in the possibilities of the new science of psychology led him to the conclusion that true anarchy is possible only when we have evolved enough to become telepathic.

Every time a man is *persuaded* by another he is governed. It is impossible to be really free. Thus the anarchist can only aspire to social equality.

The time will come, however, when each man will be able to read the thoughts of every other man, and the realization of this condition in psychic development will cause men to ‘voluntarily’ abandon as impracticable all criminal intents.²³

It is fortunate that he advocated free love; otherwise there would be endless trouble in this new utopia.

In general, Seymour had a singular talent for ruining a good argument with wild rhetoric. Yet, despite this tendency, and sometimes because of it, he is always entertaining to read and was, at times, a hugely effective propagandist for individualist ideas.

The political economy of individualist anarchism

Henry Seymour described the ‘economic substance’ of individualist anarchism to be ‘socialism’. He also saw the purpose of *The Anarchist* to be ‘a journal of anti-political Socialism’.²⁴ This emphasis on socialism is what distinguishes individualist anarchism from liberalism, something that surprises many critics. Whereas L. Susan Brown’s anarchist critique of liberal feminism²⁵ asserted that ‘Individualist Anarchists are ... not in any substantial way different from liberals’,²⁶ Don Werkheiser, writing about Benjamin Tucker, feels able to describe him as having ‘Socialist convictions’, pointing out:

today Socialism has degenerated into a doctrine of totalitarian Statism, but in the 19th Century the term referred to an intent to fundamentally re-organize the societal systems so as to return the full product of labor to the laborers.²⁷

In a thoughtful reflection on her book, ten years after its initial publication, Brown wrote that she would ‘tone down some of the stronger statements ... about the commonality and differences between anarchism and liberalism’ and would have argued for a ‘natural alliance between anarchists and liberals’ based on their ‘common commitment to the individual’.²⁸ The Canadian libertarian feminist, Wendy McElroy, is probably right when she writes that the change of the conventional understanding of the word socialism means that it is hard to place individualism in the socialist tradition, but she also argues, ‘with its stress upon contracts and voluntary society, individualist anarchism constituted an entirely original and distinct tradition’.²⁹

That tradition is certainly a radical one. It rejected representative democracy, called for the complete abolition of the state and the full

liberty of the individual, and argued for a revolution that would eliminate capitalism. Underpinning all is a political economy that asserts that the cause of poverty and inequality is not property, as the communists insisted, but monopoly. Individualist anarchist political economy is a sustained, revolutionary attack on classic liberalism. However, it does not reject the market and favours free competition. Individualists argue that there can be no free economy within a capitalist society. They are free-market, revolutionary, anti-capitalists. Henry Seymour and Albert Tarn were its foremost British exponents.

There are four main features of this individualist anarchist political economy, drawn predominantly from Proudhon's mutualism. The first is an opposition to both private and public monopoly and all that results from it; the second is exchange based on free markets and free currencies, regulated by contract rather than law; the third is an extensive concept of property based on use and labour; and, finally, a distinct concept of equality on the basis of equal rights of ownership and access to resources, rather than equality of outcome.

Monopoly, according to the individualists, produces three agents of exploitation. A monopoly of land produces rent, a monopoly of capital produces profit, and systems of exchange are distorted by the most important monopoly of all, the monopoly of money, producing unearned interest. And the chief protector of monopoly is the state, which uses law to maintain it whilst funding itself through taxation, an additional act of robbery.

Henry Seymour's writings give the best introduction to individualist anarchist economics. He swiftly disposes with Malthusian notions that poverty is the result of population growth outstripping the means of support: 'If there are, in this world, any consistent Malthusians, any individuals who really conscientiously believe that there are too many people, let them commit suicide.'³⁰ The cause of poverty is distribution, not population, and that distribution is distorted by monopoly.

Having disposed of Malthus, Seymour moves on to discuss rent. Seymour argued that there was a natural right of occupancy of the land that is obstructed by the institution of *legal* property. 'Rent of land is consequently a tax on the right to live.'³¹ Seymour's second journal, *The Revolutionary Review*, is full of imprecations about the evil of rent. The most purple prose was left to his friend and collaborator, the American Lothrop Withington: "'Down with the rent robber!' must be the cry of humanity, or humanity must perish.'³² This invective may not have been unconnected with the inability to pay the rent for the magazine's premises, which led to its closure and Seymour's bankruptcy.

But it was interest, produced by the monopoly of money, which was Seymour's main target. He consistently identified the monopoly of money as the cornerstone of capitalist society and felt that it was an unmitigated

social evil. He reworked this theme throughout his writings, from a propagandist fable, *The Monomaniacs*,³³ to a rather unimpressive attempt at a critique of Marx.³⁴ After the collapse of *The Revolutionary Review*, he devoted most of his energies to currency reform and, together with John Badcock, founded *The Free Currency Propaganda* to continue his campaigns.

The individualists saw exchange rather than production as the lifeblood of economics. The free competition they advocated could not take place without free and equitable exchange. By limiting the supply of money and fixing it to an intrinsically worthless commodity, gold, capitalists appropriate the wealth produced by labour for themselves as profits. They do this through the state's enforcement of money, their monopoly, as the only medium of exchange. Work that is unrewarded with money is useless for the worker despite the value created. Workers compete against each other, not for market share, but for the scarce good, money. This depresses the price (wages) they receive for their labour, which, whilst increasing profits for the capitalists, in turn produces under-consumption. Unlike modern Social Democrats who feel that boosting the circulation of money through state expenditure can rectify this, Seymour felt that it was necessary to reconstruct exchange in such a way as to ensure that the natural value of labour is fully realized by the worker.

Seymour argued that capital is solely the product of labour and has no intrinsic value of itself. Capital is not essential to labour, but labour is to capital. Capital is merely the accumulated surplus of past labour. Therefore, the unearned increments and privileges conferred by the ownership of capital are no more than the theft of the value of labour from the labourers themselves.

As if it is not enough for the value of the labour of the workers to be extracted from them in rent, interest and profits, they are then taxed on what little remains. The taxes of the workers maintain the state. And what is the state's purpose? It exists to protect, by force if necessary, the legal right of the capitalists to the fruits of their exploitation of the workers. The workers pay for their own oppression: 'The State is an organized conspiracy of plunder, and the natural enemy of the working class.'³⁵

Whether directly or indirectly, Seymour asserted, 'all taxes ... are in reality paid by the laborer'.³⁶ Furthermore, the idea that the State can effectively redistribute wealth was ridiculed:

Taxes are undisguised blackmail. The suggestion, offered to any but children that the State renders anything like an equivalent in return for what it takes, never fails to provoke a smile. All are conscious of the fact, if too cowardly or contemptible to confess it, that taxes are but the bribes and fees which the workers are forced to feed the institutions of the State, whose sole function is to torture or exterminate those brave

and rebellious spirits who object to be bled by and righteously resist the leeches of Rent, Interest and Profit.³⁷

Albert Tarn contributed more to this attack on the money monopoly in the first of a series of articles in the anarcho-communist paper *Freedom*. He wrote:

The two primary purposes for which the State exists are these: (1) the maintenance of *legal property*, from which arises all monopolies of land, and means of labour; (2) the manufacture of the so-called *legal currency*, or medium of exchange; and practically speaking Anarchists attack these two monster evils.³⁸

Tarn was unexceptional in his analysis. He assigned the same role to the state as Seymour – the protector of privilege. He argued that conventional notions of money and property are not rational expressions of need; they are, instead, superstitions, irrational expressions of the power and interests of the few. However, he also introduced a novel element to his analysis – that of trust.

Currency, he argued, is based on an assumption that people do not have confidence in each other, thereby allowing the state to monopolize exchange. Implicit in this is his identification of the importance of trust in economic affairs together with his rejection of the notion that a natural state of relations between people can be established by the state. Trust is a prerequisite of a functioning society; therefore, it should flourish through experience, individual judgement and contract. The need for a currency is, superficially, a paranoid insistence on the inability of people to trust each other. In reality, this is an ideological cover for the monopoly of capital resulting in the hindering, rather than the facilitating, of exchange. 'Exchange is the life-blood of human society, and money which is an obstacle in the way of exchange is a vampire draining that life-blood.'³⁹ His solution would be acceptable to the communists and individualists alike.

But how can we do without money? Plainly enough. Start exchanging on any mutual principle upon which you and others can agree. Either by a Free Currency representing your goods or on a principle of Free Communism, meaning the free giving and taking of services, or by any other mutual arrangement you may devise.⁴⁰

The acceptance of the possibility of communism in exchange, undoubtedly inserted with one eye on the readership, did not extend to property and Tarn provoked a lively exchange with a second article, *Individual or Common Property?*⁴¹ In this, he took up the other great theme of individualist political economy, the importance of ownership.

Tarn placed more emphasis on possession than Seymour and provided a trenchant defence of individual property for a hostile audience, based on a clear distinction between legal and natural property. The difference is straightforward. Natural property is something that can be possessed and retained by ‘might or artifice’ by an individual. In effect, that means persuading someone else that it is your property. Legal property can only exist with the support of the state and the enforcement of ownership. It is in its essence coercive. Natural property, however, can be retained by individuals, either on their own or collaboratively with others, on the basis of justice without the need for the state enforcement of an abstract legal property right. Tarn illustrates this by contrasting his watch chain with the Earl of Dudley’s estates. Clearly, the chain is recognizably his and can be defended by him, as an individual, against theft. How could the Earl hold onto his land if there were no police and armies, laws of trespass, etc., to protect his exclusive ownership from those who might wish to use it? The necessity of the state to uphold his ownership shows that he has no natural ownership and is thus a thief. Therefore, he concludes, flatly contradicting anarchist communism, ‘distribution should be related to natural law based on the ability to hold and retain property without the State enforcing its removal’.⁴²

This article initiated a lively response from a communist audience, forcing Tarn to justify his views further. He now abandoned restraint and went on the offensive against communism with an effective ‘sound bite’: ‘Whilst the Communists would convert the workers into thieves, the Individualists would convert the thieves into workers.’⁴³ He argued that the way rewards would be distributed was by merit according to free contract and free competition. He took an additional swipe against the practicality of communism, pointing out that there had been no attempt to implement anarchist communism, and that it was impossible to develop a propertyless society piecemeal. Anarchist communism could never be evolutionary; it had to rely on a complete revolutionary transformation to a society without property, something he viewed as somewhat unlikely.

Tarn developed his favourite themes further by launching his own paper, *The Herald of Anarchy*. Firstly, he elaborated on the Proudhonian distinction between property and possession.

The Abolition of Property raises in some people’s minds an idea of Communism, but there is not much ground for such an idea for Private Ownership can exist without Private Property. Indeed, Property is a Monopoly or Possession, created by Law and upheld by the State. It is a Socialistic or Collectivist institution and Individualism will destroy it.⁴⁴

Tarn was not a monist, however. He argued that individual property could exist in a world without property in natural resources. The

natural right of property resides solely in labour and so there can be no natural right of property in land. The obvious analogy is with air. It is incapable of monopolization and therefore it is un-owned, it is necessary for life, but also is a free good that co-exists with private property. Tarn would have argued that land is the same. It too would have been a free good but for the intervention of the state, which had permitted its confiscation and accumulation. Although occupation and use of land does convey ownership, this is the sole title and there can be no ownership once it ceases to be used. Tarn was just as opposed to collectivization of land through the state. With typical lack of a sense of proportion, he claimed: 'The fact is, the public park is just as much an unwarrantable imposition as any other governmental institution.'⁴⁵

In contrast to land, property in the products of labour is a natural right. As Seymour put it, labour is 'the only equitable title to ownership'.⁴⁶ It is also an economic good, allowing for trade and competition. Any attempt at collectivization hinders production and prosperity. 'We claim however, that most social and industrial evils are traceable to the Socialism that already exists, and that they will only be removed by perfect freedom of competition.'⁴⁷

For Tarn, 'Anarchy is merely private enterprise carried to a logical conclusion'.⁴⁸ For enterprise, industry and competition to flourish there has to be trade, and for that trade to be equitable there has to be a free currency. Here he joins forces with Seymour. The monopoly of both paper and metal-based currencies places the whole of industry at 'the mercy of those who command that supply' and that money raises the value of gold above other commodities and therefore restricts credit. He also argued for the abolition of the banking laws, saying: 'if banking had been left entirely alone from the beginning there would have been today *no labour problem at all*'.⁴⁹ Taxes, too, are part of that process of using money to extract value from the producers. He advocated 'treating the tax-collector just as we should treat the pickpocket or the burglar'.⁵⁰ Tarn, also familiarly, promoted contract as the method of enforcement of all agreements.

The advocacy of a free currency, universal ownership and the end of monopoly automatically leads individualists to advocate a particular concept of equality, based on equal rights and leading to equal access to resources. Whereas Seymour was a proponent of absolute individual liberty in the social sphere, in economics he felt that the individual had to co-operate with others and, in order to maintain liberty, could only do so on the basis of voluntary contract and, above all, in equality. Equality is inescapable for any condition of liberty. However, Seymour's concept is highly specific:

Anarchy is the affirmation of equality. But by equality we do not mean an artificial 'levelling' of natural capacities or any such absurdity as that,

which political charlatans incessantly endeavor to fasten upon us to their own ulterior and dishonest interest. Equality, of course, in a social sense, simply means equal *rights*. And equal rights means the abolition of monopolies. No wonder the monopolists and their hirelings and dupes have discoursed so long and loudly on the ‘impossibilities of equality’. Equality is the death-warrant of a society of thieves.⁵¹

The attack on monopoly and the advocacy of extensive ownership, leading to the particular concept of equality, drew the individualists into an assault on the institutions of power and the advocacy of revolutionary change.

Revolution, politics and the state

The one thing that united individualists and communists is untrammelled hostility to the state as an agent of class rule and the protector of injustice. Its very nature turns it into an instrument of violence, as Seymour wrote: ‘the whole and sole end and aim of government is the defence of capitalism, or in other words, the monopoly of wealth.’⁵² Tarn’s analysis is more complex and he augments political economy with a wider critique demolishing the argument for the existence of government by consent. Tarn saw the state as being based on two interrelated principles, authority and submission.

The state was formed ostensibly to protect the weak. Paradoxically, that was to be achieved through their submission to the strong and it ‘gave the strong its heart’s desire’.⁵³ That submission was rarely voluntary. It was imposed by force and sanctified by law and religion. ‘Thus Government and Marriage are Divine, both resting upon social power acquired in an age of brute force.’ So the question arose, ‘How can we defend ourselves against our defenders?’⁵⁴

For Tarn, the fact that government is not voluntary is axiomatic; there is no government by consent.

When was the organisation formed, and when did I consent to become a member of it? The answer in each case is NEVER! Before I had time to look about me on entering the world, I became registered as a subject of the State – i.e., the Government. Then I was compulsorily vaccinated, next compulsorily educated, and now I am compulsorily robbed and bullied.⁵⁵

The origin of all government is the love of power, disguised by rationalizations to make it acceptable.⁵⁶ Government is profoundly dysfunctional, ‘For Government is force, and force is the enemy of reason’.⁵⁷ Not only that, but the state is also an agent of petty interference based on other people’s prejudices. The temperance movement was a focus of much of his anger.

Acts that they dared not do themselves they think they are justified in getting State officials to do for them ... Few teetotallers dare come to me and prevent me drinking a glass of ale, yet the sneaking humbugs will prevent me through the agency of the State ... The disposition on the part of faddists to seek to force their fads down other people's throats through the agency of the State, is one of the worst signs of the times.⁵⁸

And echoing current debates about binge drinking in Britain, he argued:

Were our licensing system abolished ... it is highly probable that drunkenness might temporarily increase, owing to men's power of self-control being destroyed by coercion. But in the end it would doubtless lead to far more general temperance, and indeed it is probably the only way whereby the drunkenness of our towns can be permanently diminished.⁵⁹

The debilitating effects of state regulation on the individual is one of the constant themes of individualist thought. In twenty-first century neo-liberal ideology it tends to be expressed as 'dependency culture'. However, there is a key distinction between this type of thinking and the individualist anarchists. Advocates of dependency culture describe the adverse effects of what they see as an over-generous, kindly, though misguided, state. As a result, they feel that it is in the best interest of the individual for the ever-benign state to withhold welfare benefits and encourage self-reliance, a process described in the United States as 'tough love'. The individualist anarchist would see this as a charade, an expression of the greed of the rulers in withholding from the workers the return of a small portion of what has been stolen from them in rent, interest, taxes and profit. It is a way of punishing the poor for their poverty, depressing wages, and is an act of violence, removing the means of support from the weakest without the provision of any alternative other than low-paid exploitative labour. In this form, self-reliance is a pretence that covers robbery. Individual self-reliance cannot exist without the economic reforms of free currency, universal property rights, mutualist exchange and the abolition of the source of all oppression, the ever-malign state.

The very idea that the state can be other than an expression of class rule and a legitimizer of exploitation is anathema to individualist anarchists. Tarn is explicit that the workers are mistaken to call for the state to rectify the wrongs done to them. This is simply the 'perpetuation of the instrument of their oppression'.⁶⁰ So, for Tarn, 'The question for each of us to ask himself is this – "shall I be forced or shall I be free?" ... The new and really revolutionary idea is that men shall not be forced at all.'⁶¹

For Henry Seymour, in particular, revolution was necessary and imminent. However, it is easy to misunderstand precisely what Seymour advocated as his rhetoric breaks the chains of his intended meaning. His

cod psychology also intervenes. In *The Revolutionary Review*, he seemed to suggest that the cause of revolutions is thunderstorms. This is because ‘One of the unmistakable revelations of the new psychology is that certain atmospheric densities produce insanity, wars, suicides, epidemics of crime, a spirit of revolt, & etc.’⁶² Elsewhere he extends the metaphor: ‘the storm clouds of revolution are hovering about our heads ... Behold! the red horizon forbodes [sic] a reign of blood.’⁶³ His penchant for bloodthirsty language and vivid overstatement hides the fact that what he was calling for is a peaceful economic revolution, which would bring in its wake a social revolution.

The adoption of the word ‘revolution’ was simply the way that Seymour distinguished himself from other advocates of gradualist change. He was explicit about the rejection of political violence. Physical force is only permissible in self-defence. Seymour wrote that ‘Force is or never need be more than incident to revolution. It is no necessary counterpart of it. In fact, aggressive revolution is only political method disguised.’⁶⁴ He argued that poverty and oppression lead to a lack of education and diminishing of reason; this, in turn, results in a desire for vengeance against the oppressors. The desire for revenge is much more likely to ensure ‘the ultimate establishment, in the name of liberty, of a still more despotic Power than the Revolutionists sought to overturn’.⁶⁵ It is the denial of ‘politics’ or, more accurately, political systems, that is the foundation of both economic and individual liberty. As a result, he also rejected democracy:

The Ballot Box is a ‘lottery’ – a remnant of that middle-age superstition – trial by ordeal, in which, whether this or that party wins, the people always lose. It is a tool with which political tricksters compell [sic] the people to accept the responsibilities of their crimes.⁶⁶

Later on, Seymour quoted the Christian anarchist, John Morrison Davidson, approvingly: elections were ‘a choice of one or two thieves between whom the people are crucified’.⁶⁷

This absolutist position on the state meant that Seymour, like Tarn, utterly rejected state socialism. He ridiculed the idea that the collective power of the state might be used to protect the weak. The state is by its nature strong and therefore its role in state socialism, where it would be given a monopoly of force, would be to protect the weak from itself – an obvious absurdity. As an individualist, he rejected the idea that the state could represent an inclusive collective interest for two reasons. First, such an interest does not exist, the sovereignty of the individual is absolute; and secondly, the power of the state will always rest in the hands of the people who control it and, as such, they will always operate state machinery in their own interests. The state will always crush those that seek to assert their rights as ‘to give people their rights involves the abolition of the

privileges and class-supremacy of political government. Justice can only come from individual economic independence'.⁶⁸ This cannot be established through political organization, only through economic action. Fundamental to this is the development of mutualist systems of exchange.

The first stage of this economic revolution would be the abandonment of gold as the source of monetary value, opening up currency to free competition. It would then be possible to move towards a 'rational' paper money secured against 'every conceivable species of non-perishable market value'.⁶⁹ Rather than have convertibility against gold, currency would be convertible against the products of labour. As a result, the only limit to the availability of credit would be the capacity of the worker.

The second stage of Seymour's revolution would be the organization, by the workers themselves, of systems of equitable production and exchange. By engaging in free and open competition, the market would then work to increase wealth. Conventionally understood free markets and free trade are nothing of the sort as they are distorted by monopoly power.

Revolutionary action is not political; it is educational, raising the awareness of the workers of their power and their possibilities. Once that awareness had developed, 'the first move in the direction of Anarchy would naturally assume the shape of an Organization of CREDIT, LABOR, and EXCHANGE'.⁷⁰ Initially Seymour felt that this would be sufficient to initiate revolution.

The organization of labor in free competition with capital will eventually turn the government bankrupt, for whether this or that party holds the national reins, the capitalist *always* rules. The Anarchist doesn't want to speedily abolish government with dynamite, but simply proposes to starve out the State on business principles.⁷¹

Later Seymour advocated more forcible methods of collective action to augment mutualist self-organization: 'The next step would be an organized resistance to the landlord – a flat refusal to pay rent. If this is done on a sufficiently grand scale, the State would collapse of itself'.⁷²

The effectiveness of this strategy to effect a total social and economic revolution must be in doubt; certainly the individualist anarchists did not succeed as educators. There is little evidence of workers heeding their advice. There is, however, one tantalizing leaflet in the Nettlau collection at the IISH in Amsterdam. A Mr G. Bonham of 7 Shrewsbury Road, Bayswater issued an undated handbill in around 1890. Entitled *Free Co-operation*, it sought to found an association to find premises for 'direct trade without profit' and a meeting room for business. It stated:

Through liberty and co-operation the world may yet be saved from much of the misery which will attend the approaching industrial collapse that

threatens it, and which may end in the sacking of cities and universal carnage.⁷³

It is impossible to say whether anything came of this initiative but it did show that there was some activity generated by individualist anarchism, though not on anything like the same scale as that stimulated by the anarchist communists and syndicalists. Mr Bonham clearly failed to save the world, though for at least trying he deserves this small stake in posterity.

Sex and society – the emancipation of the individual

When it comes to the issue of individual liberty and sexual and social emancipation, all anarchists – as well as some liberals and socialists – are seemingly individualists. All celebrate the liberty that will flow from their particular version of social justice. The basis of the radical critique of marriage is a rejection of domination through the rendering of one person as the property of another. The inalienable right to own and control one's own body and sexuality became the cornerstone of a growing feminist movement. The idea of free union, unregulated by law and without the sanctification of religion, united individualists, communists and freethinkers. Those influenced by egoism added their own twist by asserting the absolute autonomy of the individual. Whatever the differences in nuance, all agreed that the economic emancipation of the worker had to be accompanied by the social liberation of the individual.

For Seymour, 'there is no liberty which is not individual liberty'⁷⁴ and such liberty can only exist in an absolute equality of rights.

The fundamental claim of Anarchism, or equal, individual liberty, is then the right of any individual to do exactly as he or she pleases, with one simple provision: that in the exercise of this right, the similar or equal right of every other individual is properly respected.⁷⁵

This is more libertarian than Mill's famous harm principle, as it makes no moral judgement of actions but only demands reciprocity. This is not the reciprocity of rights and duties much favoured by communitarian theorists. In fact, some individualists rejected the notion of duty itself. The most eloquent attack comes from Seymour's collaborator in the Free Currency Propaganda, John Badcock, who, unsurprisingly given his Stirnerite sympathies, goes further than Seymour. For Badcock, duty is merely a device of rulers to ensure personal compliance with something

disagreeable or oppressive. It is an unwanted and, at times, dangerous sense of obligation.

Nelson is debited with saying 'England expects every man to do his duty'. This expectation reckons upon the superstition and ignorance of the masses, and enables the governing classes to have a stronger hold over the classes beneath them than they otherwise would have.⁷⁶

Badcock shows the influence of Stirner again in saying that what people, including other anarchists, saw as a duty of working for others and as acts of self-denial were, in fact, acts of self-gratification. This echoes John Henry Mackay's celebrated fictionalized description of Charlotte Wilson as the woman who left behind a life of privilege to unconsciously follow 'the call of her own happiness', not to serve 'the cause of humanity', as she believed.⁷⁷ This is not to denigrate people's actions but to identify that the search for individual happiness is both powerful and positive. However, self-sacrifice is no more than individual choice and must never be ossified into dogma. Badcock's conclusion is firmly egoistic:

The only way to escape from bondage is to deny all rights and duties whatsoever. Look to self-interest *direct* for the attainment of your ends, and you will see that all the good things in life, all harmonious relationships you cling to, will be preserved *because you like them*.⁷⁸

This may seem to mirror the amorality of the 1980s 'greed is good' mentality, but the reality is that the individualist anarchists favoured the pursuit of self-interest in a society which was structured in such a way as to prevent exploitation, rather than one where it can be gratified only through the intensification of exploitation, by gaining wealth at the expense of others. Self-interest is only universally functional in a free society. John Basil Barnhill elaborated on these themes in his journal, *The Eagle and the Serpent*, published between 1898 and 1903. The paper boldly announced its 'Creed and Aim' as

A race of altruists is necessarily a race of slaves.
A race of freemen is necessarily a race of egoists.
Freedom cannot be granted. It must be taken.

To convert the exploiters to altruism is a fatuous programme – a maniac's dream. The only remedy for social injustice is this: the exploited must save themselves by enlightened self-interest. The exploiters are certainly egoistic enough; the only hope for the exploited is for them to become equally so – yes, consistently, persistently egoistic. Egoism spells justice and freedom as surely as altruism spells charity and slavery.⁷⁹

Social change simply occurs through the oppressed refusing to be so and using whatever power necessary to enforce their self-interest. 'The majority of the exploited are content to be exploited. If they can be taught to know what justice is and to want it, they will demand and get justice and not have to go whining for alms and charity.'⁸⁰

In an attempt to win interest, letters and copies of the journal were sent to many prominent radicals, but the response showed its limited impact. Kropotkin was 'too busy'⁸¹ to respond, George Bernard Shaw gave a backhanded recommendation: 'The journal ... promises to be sufficiently foolish to make people think',⁸² whilst Seymour engaged in more eccentricity – egoists 'lack a fullness in the upper portions of the cerebrum, while the cerebrum is well developed'.⁸³

The journal's approach to gender was particularly interesting. In an article headed 'Why Women Need Egoism', it argued that women were double victims of altruism. Marital duties are an expression of altruism at its worst, designed to ensure the husband's ease, and even the most altruistic man becomes an egoist with his wife. As a result,

Disappointed altruists who desire to be healthy, beautiful, happy and wise will find in egoism their only salvation because it teaches self-knowledge. Woman will learn to get hold of herself, to be her own guide. When she becomes clear-sighted through a rational way of living, she will discern where her duties lie. The duties of an egoistic woman lie in the same direction of an egoistic man, namely, first to make herself happy and secondly to make others happy. No egoistic woman will give a gift unless she has received one of equal value. She will make no one happy unless she is made happy likewise.⁸⁴

Whether it is of 'altruism' or duty, this critique points to the other main theme in individualist writing, the removal of legal restraint on sexual relationships. Henry Seymour was a supporter of the work of 'advanced' thinkers on sex and his arguments were based, as always, on his libertarianism and his faith in 'scientific' understandings of human nature. Seymour's view of marriage was straightforward: 'Marriage destroys love through property.'⁸⁵ The intervention of law into sexual relations has made women the property of men and in doing so has not only enslaved women, but also destroyed any affection that lay underneath the commitment. He argued both for economic independence for women and their 'release from domestic slavery' through 'the abolition of the marriage laws'.⁸⁶ Economic emancipation of the workers would mean nothing without the release of women from the ownership of men.

However, Seymour then went one step further, attacking the social taboos of Victorian society by demanding the demystification of sex and its removal from the context of sin. 'The sexual organs ... require the

same liberty of exercise as any other organ of the body. Abstinence is productive of as many evils as excess.⁸⁷ The mystification of sex is in itself psychologically destructive, 'breeding fear',⁸⁸ whilst the 'silly sanctities of virginity'⁸⁹ simply reflect the property base of marriage and are solely a way of enhancing women's market value. However, Seymour could not wholly escape the prejudices of his age. Following on from his feminist statements, he lapses into the more conventional view that sexual repression produces the 'peculiar diseases of women – prostitution, masturbation, and licentiousness in general'.⁹⁰

Actually, Seymour seemed to be rather attracted to licentiousness. He wrote like the most devoted swinger. As an early advocate of polyamory, he viewed sexual jealousy as 'an ignorant and despotic prejudice worthy only of reprehension and rebuke' based on 'a presupposition of property in human beings'.⁹¹ In *The Revolutionary Review*, he took on Lothrop Withington's defence of monogamy, arguing for voluntary polygamy and polyandry. He favoured 'the observance of variety in sexual intercourse, for reasons in accord with science' and dogmatically asserted, 'the one-love theory ... is narrow and exclusive and begets narrow mindedness. It is not adapted to our sexual requirements: change is essential'.⁹² His collaborator, John Badcock, was far more thoughtful in his pamphlet, *When Love is Liberty and Nature Law*.⁹³ He argued that the basis of friendship is equality and that relationships can never be successful where one partner subjugates the other. As a result, 'perfect equality between man and woman is only possible when neither has a legal claim upon the other'.⁹⁴ He therefore advocated self-regulated partnership agreements, if necessary enforced through private insurance companies. This is far more succinctly argued than Seymour's wild attack on monogamy and, arguably, more in tune with reality.

One of the more delightful items of ephemera in the Nettlau collection is a beautifully produced *Marriage Protest and Free Union Declaration* by Emma Wardlaw Best and Arthur Wastall. This leaflet, decorated with their suitably solemn photographs, declares that they were going to 'discard the marriage ceremony and form an autonomistic alliance'. In 1897, they actively put these theories into practice and moved to the Seychelles.⁹⁵

Albert Tarn also took up this theme of the relationship between law, religion and sex in his discussion of the nature of freedom in a free society. Together with Seymour and Badcock he rejected marriage, feeling that law destroys love. He summed it up perfectly:

Only in freedom can love thrive. If the birds can live happily in their conjugal relationship without the sanction of priest or State official, why may not human beings? Let the preachers of morality go and read their sermons to the swallows and the tom-tits, and try and convert them from their 'sinful' mode of life.⁹⁶

The contradictions of liberty: Collaboration, conflict and conspiracy

There is a central problem lurking within individualist thought: the potential contradiction between competition and co-operation and its consequences for social cohesion, conflict and peace. Though individualists did not indulge in utopian speculation about the reform of human nature, they did tend to assume that necessary collaboration through the division of labour, production and exchange, together with constraint resulting from rational self-interest in freely entered contractual relationships, will produce broadly peaceable and harmonious societies.

This is certainly true of Seymour, who saw the market as being an agent for the promotion of collaboration. However, Albert Tarn is more circumspect. Tarn had already identified, through his concept of property, the necessity of self-defence, implicitly highlighting levels of conflict inherent in the idea of free competition. This surfaces in his treatment of crime and his call for a Free Police. Though he does indulge in some arguments about environmental conditioning and the destructive effect of coercion, he is more concerned about how free individuals defend themselves against the attempts by others to take away their freedom. Thus, he can demand 'Liberty for every man to be able to defend himself against all other men, and to associate with others for the purpose of organising protection.'⁹⁷

Tarn located the origin of war with the state, but he did not believe that its removal would necessarily produce a society acting in accordance with Kropotkin's concept of the human instinct for mutual aid. By accepting competition, he assumed that conflict would continue and that it needed to be contained by self-defence. This is an area of profound ambiguity. One the one hand it is consistent. On the other, in the twenty-first century, it has to be read with a sense of unease. The example of paranoid and, at times, dangerous political movements does not give confidence that conflict can be resolved purely through self-defence. The possibility of such a free society being a deeply violent one cannot be excluded. The individualist anarchists have to rely on a belief that there will be a mutual recognition of individual rights, but this aspect of their thought was seized upon by their communist critics who saw social solidarity as one of the essential elements of a free society.

Tarn, however, was confident in his advocacy of absolute individual liberty. In economics it meant free credit through 'free competition in the supply of capital to labour'; 'free access to land and the minerals beneath it'; 'perfect freedom of importation and exportation'; 'equal liberty and opportunity for all to engage in any industry whatsoever' (including the medical profession, in line with the orthodoxy within the anti-vaccination movement); all underpinned by a free currency.⁹⁸ In social

affairs, the principle is straightforward: 'Freedom of individual judgement in all matters, so long as the individual does not trespass on the liberty of others.'⁹⁹ Thus, Tarn concluded: 'Anarchy is a condition of society in which each individual would remain in full control of his or her time, person and results of labor.'¹⁰⁰

Apart from the potential for violent conflict, there is a dark side to some individualist thought. For example, Henry Seymour dabbled in conspiracy theory, asserting that the Jack the Ripper murders were carried out by paid Jesuit police agents to force the resignation of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, a belief that remained unshaken by the continuance of the murders after the resignation had taken place.¹⁰¹ Later, after he ceased being active in anarchism, he edited *Baconiana*, a journal mainly devoted to proving that the works of Shakespeare were written by Francis Bacon. Despite Seymour being in deadly earnest, these claims can be seen as harmless eccentricities. More disturbing was his anti-Semitism.

Once again, anti-Semitic sentiments reappear, as they so often do. Barnhill was an honourable exception to this tendency, using the front page of the June 1900 issue of his journal to launch a prominent attack on anti-Semitism. However, Seymour had no such reservations. For example, he wrote of the 'will and whim of a parasitic race of Shylocks',¹⁰² whilst Lothrop Withington could always be relied on to reach greater rhetorical lows: 'The old rent-robbing aristocracy, feeling sick unto death, throws itself into the arms of the Israelitish [sic] blood suckers ... our villainous Jew wreckers of industry...'¹⁰³ Seymour also indulged in the commonplace and deeply ingrained association of Jews with finance capital and usury, the target of much of his political economy. It is a small move from a politics that identifies finance capital as the enemy to one that sees Jews or some form of Jewish conspiracy as the cause of our discontents. Thankfully, there is no sign that individualists in general took that step and anti-Semitism did not become central to their critique of capitalism as it did in fascism.

These unsavoury sentiments need to be contextualized, not to excuse them, but in order to provide a critique of currents in contemporary radicalism. Seymour's are not merely quaint nineteenth-century beliefs; they are persistent flaws. For example, in the twenty-first century conspiracy theories abound. Climate change denial is a near-universal belief amongst right libertarians, the 9/11 'Truth' Movement has attracted even mainstream figures to its fringes, whilst much contemporary, obsessive anti-Zionism bears the distinctive stamp of older anti-Semitic discourses. These ideas may not be central, but they are a distasteful and dangerous intellectual baggage that needs jettisoning. Open discussion and historical exploration is a necessity if ever we are to banish this poisonous legacy from radical thought.

Individualist anarchism and its rivals

The prominence of individualist anarchism in late nineteenth-century Britain is reflected in the literature of the time. It was seen as a serious rival to anarchist communism. *Freedom*, maybe with Seymour fresh in the editorial board's mind, took it seriously enough to launch their first issue with a prominent attack on individualist anarchism.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, the pain of the strained personal relationships caused by the divergence of the two is dramatically captured by John Henry Mackay in his novel *The Anarchists*,¹⁰⁵ based on his experiences in London in the 1880s and used as a vehicle for expressing his own individualist views.

The debate over individualism was strong, though often comradely, with each side offering the other a platform. However, this was more than a contest of ideas; it was a struggle to claim exclusivity, denying the other the right to use the name anarchist. *Freedom* was ever critical, even though it welcomed Tarn's newspaper. In 1892, for example, it published an editorial about Tucker and Tarn. Entitled *Individualism, Anarchism and Socialism*, it concluded:

Individualists certainly they are, to the extent of considering society as a mere numerical addition of individual units. But certainly they are not Anarchists. ... What individualists advocate is but a system of petty monopoly: industrial, commercial and financial companies ... struggling against each other, the stronger prevailing over the weaker, the richer over the poorer, the first over the latecomer. This leads us necessarily to the constitution of government 'to keep the peace'. To think that there may be, as Tucker claims, unrestricted competition between men enjoying equal opportunities and equal social chances, is sheer contradiction. If there be real equality in society, competition is not possible; and if there be competition, then equality will soon be gone. Individualists lack the fundamental principle of Socialism and Anarchism – solidarity.¹⁰⁶

Freedom was not on its own; *The Torch* reports Merlino, speaking at a meeting to commemorate the Paris Commune on 17 March 1893, as saying that,

we Anarchist Communists have nothing in common with the Individualist Anarchists; these latter were in favour of private property and the wage system, and in what they were pleased to call voluntary government ... in fact they were in favour of the two most opposite things, Anarchism, which means complete liberty, and private property, which means oppression.¹⁰⁷

Given the hostility to the wage system shown by both Spencerian individualists and individualist anarchists alike, this is a staggering misrepresentation, which has been carried thoughtlessly through to the present. Peter Marshall, in one of the few mentions of the individualists in his lengthy history of anarchism, says: ‘... they retain the profit motive and the wage system.’¹⁰⁸

Other contemporary critics included Agnes Henry, who wrote:

The fact that the individual cannot by himself satisfy his own needs – forces him ... to associate and cooperate with his fellows. Under which circumstances he is obliged to restrain many of his individualist inclinations ... Consequently Individualist Anarchism leads inevitably in the end to Communism.¹⁰⁹

There is nothing inevitable about this non sequitur at all. It also ignores the fact that Seymour was quite clearly outlining a political economy that *would* enable individuals to co-operate on an equitable basis. Max Nettlau gave a more thoughtful critique:

Competition in matters of daily bread makes life insupportable, a continuous race and reckless crushing of the weaker and good-natured by the stronger or brutal and callous – and to this end Individualist Anarchism of the Tuckerian school would come. Competition in other matters, better named emulation, is an element of progress. And why is competition good in one case and bad in the other case? Because in one case it possesses the basis essential to all progress; in the other case not. This basis is FREEDOM. Competition as to daily bread is *compulsory competition*; competition in other matters is *voluntary competition*.¹¹⁰

This is a pertinent point particularly if, as Tarn might suggest, those competing individuals are armed. More seriously, the issue of security from want is a weakness in individualist thinking. It assumes that a free economy and free competition, given equal access to resources and extensive property rights, would produce economic equilibrium rather than winners and losers. It also assumes that all can and will produce, enforced by necessity. However, it is surely stretching the point for Nettlau to conclude: ‘We reject the so-called *individualist* Anarchism as authoritarian and coercive.’¹¹¹

The individualists fought back equally unreasonably; for example, William Gilmour wrote:

Indeed it may be said that to prefix the word Anarchist to that of Communism is altogether paradoxical ... Therefore, the *real* Anarchists are determined at all hazards to defend their right of priority to the title. Communism ... is, in its essence, government.¹¹²

John Armsden, in his contribution to James Tochatti's excellent *The Why I Ams* series, supported this by arguing that even if communism could be established it still has to be managed and that there could be 'a certain amount of administrative despotism'.¹¹³

The openness of the theoretical debate points to the fact that this split was not the same as the poisonous schisms that have bedevilled the left. An anonymous communist handbill in the Nettlau archive (taken from the *Reformers' Year Book* and republished in several editions of *Freedom* in 1902) captures this spirit precisely.

It would only be fair to state that the Individualist school of Anarchism, which includes many eminent writers and thinkers, differs from us mainly on the question of Communism ... Anarchism, however, affords the opportunity for experiment in all these matters, and in that sense there is no dispute between us.¹¹⁴

John Henry Mackay dramatised precisely this through a debate between his two protagonists Auban and Trupp, when Auban, the individualist, eventually won the concession from the communist Trupp that communism would not be enforced on mutualists.¹¹⁵ However, the novel does end with their estrangement, perhaps symbolic of anarchism's diverging paths. Most importantly, Trupp won the debate within the movement and this mirrors precisely what happened to individualism in Britain.

Individualist anarchism offered a distinctive anti-statist perspective. Property was to be extensively owned and monopoly overthrown, that very ownership would return the full value of labour to the labourer and would allow free market exchanges using a mutually agreed currency, self-interest would be expressed and restrained through contract, whilst free sexual relationships, gender equality and the overthrow of plutocracy would be central. Above all, it offered the economic autonomy and social liberty of the individual as the guarantee of wider freedom against what individualists saw as the tyranny of the collective. What is more, it engendered debate and adherents in Britain at a pivotal time in the development of radical ideas. Yet, rather than be seen as an important element of the radical milieu of late nineteenth-century Britain, it disappeared from view. Why should this be so?

Firstly, individualism had little support within the working class. Its dislike of trade unionism as anti-individual hardly endeared it to working-class organizations. Its position on property and the free market was open to misinterpretation and smacked of closet conservatism. There is an intriguing indication of class divisions within the Nettlau archive. There was a long-running exchange of letters about anarchism in the *Hull News* for 1892 and Nettlau collected the cuttings. One correspondent, J. Sketchley, explained that there were two 'great schools' of anarchism:

individualists, consisting mainly of the ‘well to do classes’, and communists, supported by the working classes.¹¹⁶

Additionally, individualism did not offer easy or instant solutions. Neither did it have romantic appeal. Universal self-employment and free exchange hardly stirred the blood in the same way as calls for a cathartic, triumphant revolution. John Henry Mackay describes this superbly in his novel. As he wrote of the audience listening to the rhetoric of the communist Trupp and being won over to the communist cause, ‘They longed for the perfection of happiness – Trupp offered it to them’.¹¹⁷ Individualism, in spite of Seymour’s vivid prose, did nothing of the sort.

Finally, and crucially, individualism faced a pincer movement from the challenge of new forms of collective power on both the right and the left. As corporate capitalism advanced, the possibility of moving towards a society of independent producers diminished rapidly and spaces for self-organization shrank. Workers saw the need for their own collective institutions to assert their rights against corporate capitalism. Simultaneously, the idea of the state, transformed by the democratic power of an enfranchised working class, as a benign instrument of collective advancement and protection was growing, with an embryonic welfare state coming into being. It was the beginning of the ‘strange death of liberal England’. Individualism looked increasingly anachronistic.

Communist anarchism could survive as the libertarian wing of a broader revolutionary socialist movement. Later it was to draw strength from its opposition to totalitarianism, being the first segment of the left to see that the Russian Revolution had ushered in a new tyranny and not a workers’ paradise. But in the later part of the nineteenth century, it was positioning itself as a champion of class struggle against both capitalism and the state, and in the next chapter we will see how British communist anarchism developed inside the late Victorian radical milieu.

Notes

- 1 John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (Paladin Books, Granada Publishing: London, Toronto, Sydney and New York, 1978). The book is important and ground-breaking, though Quail was mainly interested in action rather than theory, describing the discussion of theory as ‘balls-achingly boring’. For Quail, ‘political theory, no matter how worthy or perceptive, is curiously disembodied; it gives no clues to the passions, the heroisms or the squalid conflicts that it inspired’. I hope that this book might be a little more entertaining for the reader (p.x).
- 2 John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, p.19. For his discussion of the role of the British individualist Henry Seymour see pp.47–56.

- 3 See Frank H. Brooks (ed.), *The Individualist Anarchists: An Anthology of Liberty (1881–1908)* (Transaction Books: New Brunswick and London, 1994). Carl Watner, ‘The English Individualists as They Appear in Liberty’, *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* (Vol. VI, No.1, 1982), pp.59–82.
- 4 Max Nettlau, *Anarchism in England Fifty Years Ago*. Supplement to *Freedom*, November–December, 1905, p.38.
- 5 Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, p.36.
- 6 Ibid p.37.
- 7 A. C. Cuddon, *A Contribution Towards the Elucidation of a Science of Society by a Member of the London Confederation of Rational Reformers* (The London Confederation of Rational Reformers, 1853), p.8.
- 8 See J. M. Robertson, *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (Thoemmes Press: Bristol and Sterling, VI, 2001).
- 9 A. C. Cuddon, *A Contribution Towards the Elucidation of the Science of Society*, p.2.
- 10 Ibid p.2.
- 11 Ibid p.2.
- 12 Carl Watner, *The English Individualists as They Appear in Liberty*, p.60.
- 13 *The Herald of Anarchy* (October 1890), p.1.
- 14 Ibid p.1.
- 15 G. W. Foote, *Prisoner for Blasphemy* (Progressive Publishing Company: London, 1886), pp.14–15.
- 16 *The Anarchist*, No.1 (March 1885), p.3.
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5

Anarchist communism in the era of outrage

Even as individualist anarchism continued to evolve, it was anarcho-communism that was becoming dominant, both in the anarchist movement as a whole and in the popular imagination. It was in the late Victorian period that a negative image became stubbornly attached. The notions of the bomb-wielding anarchist, the nihilist terrorist, the conspiratorial enemy of civilization are all the product of the nineteenth-century mind. Partly, this had a base in reality, as Europe experienced a number of terrorist attacks by self-professed anarchists. Only one bomb ever went off in Britain, however, in Greenwich in 1894. The only casualty was its maker, the French anarchist Martial Bourdin. This did not stop anarchist communism becoming ensnared within a nineteenth-century ‘war on terror’ as scares about the ‘dynamitards’ took hold. The reaction was familiar; moral panics, lurid exposés in the popular press, miscarriages of justice with their accompanying personal tragedies, and the arbitrary abuse of power by the state. Anarchism was now intrinsically linked in the public imagination with violence and ‘outrage’.¹ One supposedly serious and avowedly dispassionate text was not only published inside a vivid red cover with an exploding bomb on it but also contained, amongst many wild inaccuracies, statements such as the following:

The evil of Anarchism is that, in its gospel of destruction, and advocacy of personal licence under the misnomer of freedom, it attracts under its banner those who hold the very basest of impulses, and the most diabolical instincts.²

Yet, this stereotype was contested. Some novels, such as the semi-autobiographical *A Girl Amongst the Anarchists*, by the Rossetti sisters writing under the pen name Isabel Meredith; Ethel Voynich’s *The*

Gadfly, with a character modelled on Charlotte Wilson; John Henry Mackay's *The Anarchists*, drawn from his personal experiences in London; and, more obliquely, Richard Whiteing's hugely popular *No. 5 John Street*, all give a more sympathetic, though not always uncritical, depiction of the revolutionary milieu. Given the number of supportive articles in mainstream periodicals, such as *The Nineteenth Century* and the *New Review*,³ essays by leading writers such as George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde (though Wilde's essay *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* is known as a classic text, his creative work also reflected his political views. For example, the children's story, *The Selfish Giant*, published in 1888, is a beautiful and touching argument for Christian communism), it becomes clear that the negative image was not the only one fighting for attention.

Joseph Conrad's novel, *The Secret Agent*,⁴ is often cited as an illustration of the popular terrorist stereotype. Yet, Conrad was a better writer than that. The single act of outrage in the book, loosely modelled on the Greenwich bomb, is commissioned by a foreign government and carried out by an agent provocateur. Though anarchists are portrayed as humans with all their various frailties, anarchism itself is absent. It is the figure of 'the Professor' that haunts, even though he is not one of the main protagonists and appears infrequently. He is portrayed as an ascetic believer in ultra-violence who indulges in murderous eugenicist fantasies, 'calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world'.⁵ The character may demonstrate Conrad's ignorance of anarchism itself, but this isn't the point. The Professor is there as the spectre at the progressives' feast, a symbol of what Conrad saw as the latent savagery inherent in modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was certainly prescient. And this is the point, the bombs were real, calls to violence were genuine, and so anarchists who advocated revolutionary change had to examine their attitude to the means of making a revolution and the consequences that might flow from them. Much of this chapter describes how they did so. It remains a vital question for today.

Late Victorian Britain was a bustling market place of radical ideas, esoteric religious beliefs, sexual liberation and alternative lifestyles. Groups were founded and dissolved, experiments were tried and idiosyncratic political enthusiasms have left continuing legacies around the country, including Walt Whitman's stuffed canary sitting in Bolton Library in Lancashire.⁶ Anarchism was well recognized as both a contributor and competitor within this milieu. All of which prompted Mark Bevir to confront the stereotype by arguing that a commitment to revolution was being matched and eclipsed by a new ethical anarchism⁷ based on communalism and non-violence. He wrote:

To the Victorians, anarchism was an individualist doctrine found in clandestine organizations of violent revolutionaries. By the outbreak

of the First World War, another very different type of anarchism was becoming equally well recognized. The new anarchists still opposed the very idea of the state, but they were communalists not individualists, and they sought to realize their ideals peacefully through personal example and moral education, not violently through acts of terror and a general uprising.⁸

Bevir doesn't get it quite right, however. As we have seen, it was individualists who were wedded to non-violence and he wasn't the first, or the last, to group Kropotkin with Tolstoy as apostles of non-violence, even though Kropotkin *did* see anarchism coming about through a general uprising. Yet, if two such striking images could be contesting with each other at the same time, it is clear that there had to be more than one anarchist communism. I would argue that it consisted broadly of three strands.

The first came from an indigenous working-class radicalism that rather relished the idea of the slaughter of the rich. It tended to be militantly atheist and emerged from physical force Chartism. It too had intellectual roots in the early part of the century, drawing on the political economy of another of the Ricardian Socialists, William Thompson.⁹ Thompson was a significant figure in the development of socialism and, in his writings with Anna Wheeler, an important early feminist. His arguments for direct, co-operative ownership and communism in exchange distinguished him from Hodgskin, even if they shared a similar critique of capitalism rooted in the labour theory of value. Thompson, however, was no advocate of the insurrectionary and riotous traditions of British working-class protest and it was these that when combined with an anti-statist, collectivist political economy produced this aspect of anarchist communism. It found its place in the milieu predominantly through the Socialist League and its journal, *Commonweal*.

The second was to be found mainly in the group of intellectuals and writers associated with the newspaper *Freedom*. Co-founded by Peter Kropotkin and edited by Charlotte Wilson, the paper drew its ideological stance from Kropotkin and its organizational effectiveness from Wilson. Charlotte Wilson herself was typical of the new middle-class activists. She was from a wealthy professional background, married to a stockbroker, though maintained her economic independence and feminist ideas. As was fashionable, she retreated to live a simple rural life on the edge of Hampstead Heath, which is now part of one of the most affluent areas of suburban London. Her rented farmhouse, *Wylde*,¹⁰ became a focus for intellectual debate and the anarchist literary circles of the time. Wilson had been active in the Fabian Society during its more libertarian phase, leaving it in 1887 to devote her energies to anarchism.

Intellectually, the Freedom Group's roots lay in European anarchism as brought to Britain by Kropotkin and further developed by other exiles,

notably the Italians Saviero Merlino and Errico Malatesta. It fostered a range of British thinkers too and *Freedom* was by no means the only anarchist paper of its era. It was joined by James Tochatti's *Liberty*, probably the best of the journals of the time and a lively forum for competing anarchist visions. Tochatti was a Scottish merchant tailor. He was born Moncure Douglas, but took the name of his Italian grandfather. Tochatti formed *Liberty* with the anarchist poet Louisa Bevington, after falling out with *Commonweal* and the Socialist League precisely over its stance on violence. *The Torch* was more unusual still. First produced as a hand-written journal by the teenage Rossetti sisters, Olivia and Helen, it also evolved into an influential periodical of anarchist communism. As the daughters of William Michael Rossetti, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, they were helped by their entrée into artistic and literary circles given to them by their family. At its height, the now printed journal attracted a number of distinguished contributors. As advocates of revolutionary expropriation, in sympathy with the ideals of the bombers whilst being ambivalent about violence, all the anarchist communists in this strand had to face contradictions in their ideas as they explained and defended their beliefs against the prejudices of their day.

There was no ambiguity in the final strand, the often-overlooked Christian anarchist movement. Absolutely pacifist and committed to non-violence, Christian anarchism opposed both the church and the state in favour of a literal reading of Christ's teaching that saw it as preaching communal communism on earth. In doing so, they neglected the mystical in favour of the earthly Jesus. Their concern was not with the divinity of Christ, nor his self-sacrifice, but his teachings on how to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth. That meant rejecting external authority in favour of the realization of the divine within each human being. There were two distinct strands. The first was a spin-off from Christian socialism, except it sought to realize a socialist world without the state. Its most prominent advocate was John Morrison Davidson,¹¹ a Scottish radical journalist and a convert from Presbyterianism to Arianism. The second drew its inspiration from Tolstoy and his doctrines of abnegation, self-reliance and non-resistance. The best-known Tolstoyan activist was John Coleman Kenworthy, who was to found the Croydon Brotherhood Church. Both are largely forgotten today.

However distinctive these three anarchist communisms might have been, they were not hermetically sealed from each other, frequently shared platforms and interacted with others within the broader radical milieu. Their visions of a future anarchist society were similar. Yet, they were very different in their understanding of how people were going to achieve their common dream of an egalitarian, stateless and propertyless future.

Anarchism, atheism and insurrectionism

The main vehicle for the insurrectionary tradition was the Socialist League and its paper, *Commonweal*. This was not always so. The League started as a breakaway from the Social Democratic Federation, the main Marxist movement in Britain. The split was headed by William Morris, who took the more libertarian-minded socialists and the anarchists out of the SDF in response to Hyndman's growing authoritarianism. Despite Morris' status and funding, the anarchists came to dominate the League and Morris withdrew under pressure. The vigorously anti-anarchist E. P. Thompson denigrated anarchist control as a coup by 'a curious assortment of cranks and fire-eaters'.¹² John Quail was much more sympathetic to the take-over, however, arguing that the split occurred due to tactical rather than doctrinal differences. It was a victory for the activists over the theoreticians. He perceptively identified the central conflict.

While he (Morris) had made out a strong case against the policy of riot he could not (and did not) expect the Anarchists to accept it. The reasons are clear enough. For them, Morris's position implied doing nothing and doing nothing implied defeat. At the back of the Anarchist rejection of Morris's 'defeatism' was a feeling, never fully articulated, that people learned their power – and what to do with it – through riotous action.¹³

This is clearly evidenced by the more rhetorical, populist and uncompromising tone of *Commonweal* under the editorship of David Nicoll and even more so when it was revived with H. B. Samuels in the editor's chair, a man whom Quail described as 'an advocate of the random slaughter of the upper class in the name of the class war'.¹⁴

Yet, this was not the only platform for working-class native anarchism. There was also the organization of Jewish workers around the Yiddish paper the *Arbeter Frint* established through the formidable efforts of Rudolph Rocker.¹⁵ Even here, the issue of anarchist outrage caused friction. According to Rocker, the editor of the *Arbeter Frint*, Saul Yanovsky, left London for New York to found the *Freie Arbeter Shtimme*, due to the hostility he faced as a result of his opposition to anarchist terrorism.¹⁶ In addition, some of the most intriguing publications were not the major ones, but those that spun out of small, often independent, groups. Those that survive in the archives include *The Free Commune*, published in Leeds, and, from a branch of the Socialist League, the East London Anarchist Communist Group's *Anarchist Labour Leaf*. But the most astounding of all was the vivid, eccentric and very independent *Chatterton's Commune; The Atheistic Communistic Scorcher*.

The sole author, Dan Chatterton, was a noted eccentric and well-known character who lived in grinding poverty and latterly earned his living through bill posting and paper selling. It is irresistible to include him in any account of late Victorian anarchism. His output is hugely entertaining, if frighteningly bloodthirsty in its exhortations to gory revolution. All his sundry pamphlets were self-published and the *Scorcher* was hand-printed¹⁷ using second-hand type, sometimes on very cheap paper. Later issues were all produced on flimsy, yellow tissue paper. His output is fully preserved as he deposited a copy of every one in the British Museum Library.

Born in Clerkenwell in North East London, Chatterton had, by his own account, been apprenticed as a bootmaker and served in the Crimea. He was a veteran of both political and secular campaigns and was also a constant presence at meetings and acknowledged as one of the great ‘characters’ of the revolutionary movement. He was often depicted in novels and memoirs. John Henry Mackay fictionalizes him as an ‘old, gray-headed man with ... sharp features ... who was hurling his wild accusations against the existing order with such youthful passion and defending his ideal of fraternity and equality with such youthful warmth’.¹⁸ Yet, to describe Chatterton as simply an angry old man is to miss the point. The pictures given of him were all affectionate but often patronizing. He can be seen as a more significant, if idiosyncratic, figure than an exotic adornment to the anarchist movement. Andrew Whitehead’s comprehensive article¹⁹ takes up John Quail’s plea to rescue him from oblivion.²⁰ He writes:

The History of the left has conventionally been written as the story of movements and organisations. Those who left no institutional legacy, who were not pioneers of party or union, whose pamphlets have not been collected by libraries, have been more-or-less neglected. There’s an injustice in this – not so much a personal injustice, as an injustice to the generations that follow who are deprived of a proper sense of the complexity of the past. Those mavericks who kept aloof from organised politics and struggled alone to preach and persuade according to their own idiosyncratic values could have quite as much importance in transmitting ideas, in however a vulgarised form, to a popular audience as the closely printed journals and the in-house political rallies.²¹

Whitehead concludes that this ‘haphazard, maverick tradition’ may have been ‘inconsistent, sometimes immodest, often quixotic but which did not mean they are unimportant’.²² Moreover, Chatterton’s significance is not just evidenced by his minor contemporary celebrity, but also by the quality of his writing.

Today the internet could have been made for Chatterton. However, he would almost certainly have been lost to posterity unless he had acquired

cult status for his blogs. His ubiquitous presence and direct intervention in meetings gave him his status as much as his writing, yet his efforts to see his publications preserved showed how determined he was to leave his mark. Though a stranger to orthodox grammar and punctuation, there is a raw power and intelligence in his pamphlets and journals. He was a tabloid revolutionary, simplifying issues with clarity and insight. This extract from his column *Notes, by the way* is a typical example. The grammar, punctuation, spelling and layout of all quotations are as per the original.

A, Tiny Picture by John Van Eyke – one of the Burghley House collection, – was sold by Messr's Christie on Saturday, for 2,500 guineas.

Daily News June 11th 88.

Eliza Sweeny. aged 33, was found dying in a van, – No home no friends. clad in rags tied on with string. Removed to St. Gile's Workhouse, She died the same evening. from an effusion of serum on the brain, accelerated by irregular habits and exposure.

Who – did Murder Eliza – Swoeney.? – Why the Bloke that legally misappropriated the 2500 guinea's To be sure.²³

This raw anger at injustice was not the only aspect of his output. Chatterton was tireless in his championing of female equality and emancipation (in contrast to most writers of the period he was also assiduous in avoiding gender bias in the use of generic terms), published a popular booklet of guidance on contraception, was violently republican and also unfailingly exhorted the masses to a murderous class war.

Workers, is it worth your while to demonstrate peaceably? Oh! No!
Stand away from both, rascals.

Revolt. Let your next demonstration be one of Force, for your own emancipation.²⁴

And, more spectacularly

BLOW OUT
BLAST OUT
BURN OUT
WAR to the BLOODY KNIFE.
Masses, kill the classes,²⁵

All witnesses recount that this violent rhetoric was in complete contrast to his gentle, if belligerent, personality. Perhaps the most moving of his writing is on the atheism he carried forward for all his adult life. In his article, *Where are you going to when you die?*, he was particularly eloquent.

Sisters and Brothers, do not waste your existence in such accursed folly – Rather make the granduer of Life while you are a sensitive entity, Throw God and the Devil to the wind’s as relics of the old Barbarism.

Though we cannot – live for ever without a break in the link, – Though nature has so much brutal force in her composition, – Yet Utilise the beauty that lays well in her bosoms fold. The limpid refulgent Love – gleaming in my Sister womans eye, The honest grasp of my Brother Man The – deep draught of every pleasure finds Me. an old man with heart and brain leaping bounding with – exquisite knowledge of Life well lived, (we need no Heavens) – we. want no God. We fear no Devil. Sister Woman – we revel in your Love, Brother Man We. glory in your respect, Ay’e we have taken our fill and we still Enjoy.

OH Christian, you may say you have a glorious certainty of joy in Heaven. But your only hope is blind faith, your basis is Fear, The teaching of Priestcraft in youth, – How many commit suicide in a Religious monomania – A doubt whether they are saved at all – We are free from such brutal Fear, – Calmly we faces the forces Life and Death, To Day We are so better than your God. that we should shudder to be like Him. There is no Monster God.²⁶

Chatterton was on the fringes of anarchism. He advocated an annually elected Senate of twelve people who would submit laws for approval by referendum, but described himself as an anarchist and opposed all authority. Perhaps the most important role that he played was to give voice to the working-class traditions of combative British radicalism as it merged with the ideas of Continental intellectuals. He was a living link with the physical force tradition of Chartism and the popular secular radicalism of the early nineteenth century. Dennis Hardy claims that anarchist communism ‘developed in England more as the result of ideas brought from the Continent by political refugees and foreign workers, than from a continuing tradition of native anarchism’.²⁷ Chatterton shows he is only partially correct.

That voice of working-class radicalism could also be heard in Joseph Lane’s *An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto*, written for the Socialist League in 1887 but rejected by William Morris. Lane was born in Oxfordshire, had little formal education and had been a farm labourer before coming to London and becoming involved in a number of radical organizations together with other anarchist activists, including Frank Kitz.²⁸ Max Nettlau thought highly of Lane and Lane’s manifesto is not

just indicative of working-class radical sentiment, it also shows the importance of the autodidact tradition and the role of working-class politics in fostering self-education. Although Lane eschewed the label anarchist for his manifesto, it eloquently articulated all the main tenets of belief of the anarchists in the Socialist League and is a testament to the later accomplishments of someone starting out without a formal education.

The manifesto is built on three basic principles: atheism, anti-statism and communism. The attention Lane gave to atheism is significant for two reasons. First, militant atheism indicated the importance of freethought in fostering libertarian ideas and, secondly, it highlighted the importance of counter-culture as part of the anarchist worldview. It may seem anachronistic to use a twentieth-century term such as counter-culture in a nineteenth-century context, especially one carrying the self-indulgent hedonistic baggage of the 1960s, but it is a highly appropriate way to describe the anarchist perception that social change and the ability to pursue a chosen lifestyle were just as much a part of the process of liberation as political economy. Eschewing Marxist-derived notions of economic determinism, many anarchists of this period saw culture as the main generator of the hierarchy they opposed as they challenged the mores of Victorian society.

Lane is explicit about the importance of culture; his analysis of power is not purely materialist. He based his thinking on a clear distinction between the two founding oppositional principles of society, authority and liberty. The maintenance of authority against liberty needs an ideology and that ideology is religion. Monarchy and nationalism alike derive from religious thought. Religion is essential to authority, not only justifying injustice as divinely ordained, but also leading to the favouring of 'fiction over reality'.²⁹ Military force has its part to play, obviously, but it is only second to religion in the hierarchy of tools for domination.

Lane was challenging the liberal doctrine that the rise of capitalism was contingent on the increase in certain liberties. Instead, he argued that capitalism grew under the umbrella of an all-pervasive authoritarianism and is an expression of it. Therefore, it is the destruction of the state as an institution that will precipitate the transformation of the economy and not the other way round. There can be no compromise between liberty and authority and atheism is the key to social revolution.

It is by the aid of this notion of a God governing the world, that all forms of servitude, moral and social, have come into existence and been established religion's despotism, classes, property, and the exploitation of man by man. To enable men, therefore, to attain to freedom and to knowledge, that is to realise the object of the Revolution he must first expel God from the domain of knowledge and consequently from Society itself. We can therefore only consider as true revolutionary socialists, conscious of the object they pursue, those who, like ourselves, declare

themselves Atheists and do whatever in their power lies to destroy this corrupting notion of God in the mind of the masses.³⁰

The working-class revolutionary voice was firmly secular.

Lane's anarchist communism is unexceptional. The state is simply an expression of authority and must be destroyed and with it the notion of politics itself, or, as he called it 'the science of government'.³¹ The destruction of government ends a continuing cycle of repression as each new regime exercises its powers in its own interests against the people. This applied as much to socialism as it does to capitalism. He wrote: 'we oppose with all our might the reactionary notion which consists in the pretence that the revolutionary socialists must seek to seize upon the political machine, and to acquire power for themselves.'³²

On political economy, Lane rejected any Fabian attempt at amelioration. He subscribed to the nineteenth-century socialist orthodoxy of the iron law of wages, that the capitalist recoups any gain in wages by the workers through higher prices, rendering attempts at improvement within the system ineffective. Rejecting both political power and monopoly capitalism, Lane called for a form of syndicalism, 'the organisation of industrial and agricultural groups, having studied and being able to apply the laws of exchange possessing the key and secret of the contradictions and antagonisms of the bourgeois political economy, standing possessed, in a word of social science'.³³ The faith in social science is typical of its time and it is on this that he bases his optimism about the capacity for rational self-organization without the market, which, in turn, allows for the rejection of property.

Lane dismissed any idea that either property or possession (he made no distinction between the two) can be liberating. Private property is simply a 'direct emanation from the principle of authority, and is based upon the theory of remuneration, or reward for individual efforts',³⁴ whereas all production is collective and so there should be no individual reward.

Social wealth has a threefold source: the forces of nature, the instruments of labour, and labour itself. An individual does not create the forces of nature, and therefore he cannot appropriate them to his own use; at most they are the common property of all men. An individual does not create the plant and machinery of work. He therefore cannot appropriate them to his own use. It is the generations of men that from century to century have transformed the raw materials into tools of production, and consequently the theory of plant and machinery being regarded as a stock of property held in common must be the only principle accordant with equity and justice ... It follows therefore that private property cannot be regarded as legitimate from any point of view.³⁵

Instead, he advocated a society with ‘every member working to his ability and receiving according to his needs’.³⁶

Interestingly, it was property rather than religion that he saw as the fundamental cause of the oppression of women. Unlike Chatterton, he was not careful about the use of gendered language in his writing, but he was just as ardent a feminist. As far as Lane was concerned, gender relationships in Victorian society rendered women as property, dehumanizing and enslaving them. In his advocacy of female liberation, he was a fundamentalist. Ending legal marriage was insufficient, a mere palliative. And rather than asserting a right to self-ownership, he was adamant that the whole concept of property itself, whether in material goods or the person, must be eradicated, heralding a complete social revolution.

Both Lane and Chatterton, in their very different ways, give us a glimpse of a working-class anarchist communism that drew from a British heritage of ideas and action. Most had few inhibitions about revolutionary violence as a method of change, though not all shared the bloodthirsty relish of a Chatterton or Samuels. However, the activists gathered loosely around *Freedom* newspaper had more reservations. So too did those who worked with James Tochatti and his paper *Liberty*. Predominantly, though not exclusively, middle class, they were forced to define their position against the growing popular image of anarchism as a terrorist movement and, in doing so, they had to refine their own revolutionary theories and come to terms with the practice of ‘outrage’.

Making the revolution: Violence and education

Whereas the individualist anarchists saw the use of force as legitimate only in self-defence, mainstream anarcho-communists argued that there was no way in which a revolution could take place without the use of violence. Errico Malatesta, himself no friend of ‘outrage’ despite E. P. Thompson’s hostile and inaccurate description of him as ‘the stormcock of Anarchism and inheritor of Bakunin’s conspiratorial mantle’,³⁷ is typical of those communist anarchists who justified the use of violence as a revolutionary tactic. Even so, he sought to stay within the individualists’ more generally acceptable stance by stretching the definition of self-defence to the limit. Writing in *Liberty*, he blurred the issue of moral agency:

Violence is not in contradiction with Anarchist principles, since it is not the result of our free choice, but is imposed upon us by necessity in the defence of unrecognized human rights which are thwarted by brute force.³⁸

This idea that the placing of a bomb is not an act of free choice is a novel variation of the concept of freedom. However, such a description was understood, if not fully accepted, by those who were not enamoured by the taking of human life in a revolutionary struggle but who, nevertheless, shied away from outright pacifism.

A typical approach was that of Louisa Bevington. She has been thoroughly misrepresented as an unconditional opponent of violence, notably by Bertrand Russell. In a footnote he wrote:

The attitude of all the better Anarchists is that expressed by L. S. Bevington in the words: 'Of course we know that among those who call themselves Anarchists there are a minority of unbalanced enthusiasts who look upon every illegal and sensational act of violence as a matter for hysterical jubilation. Very useful to the police and the press, unsteady in intellect and of weak moral principle, they have repeatedly shown themselves accessible to venal considerations. They, and their violence, and their professed Anarchism are purchasable, and in the last resort they are welcome and efficient partisans of the bourgeoisie in its remorseless war against the deliverers of the people.' His [sic!] conclusion is a very wise one: 'Let us leave indiscriminate killing and injuring to the Government – to its Statesmen, its Stockbrokers, its Officers, and its Law.'³⁹

However, Bevington certainly did not denounce violence out of hand. She understood and sympathized with what drove the bombers and refused to condemn them. She had an eschatological view of the revolution that would bring about an anarchist society, which would itself be inherently non-violent, but saw how impatience, anger and oppression compelled the anarchist to take up arms against the violence of the state. Her opposition is not to violence *per se*, but to 'unintelligent' violence, which she sees as being 'inexpedient'. The section Russell omitted makes this clearer.

Killing and injuring are intrinsically hideous between man and man. No sophistry can make 'poison' a synonym of 'food', nor make 'war' spell 'peace'. But there are cases where poison becomes medicinal, and there is such a thing as warring against the causes of war. No Anarchist incites another to violence, but many an Anarchist repudiates, as I do, the hypocritical outcry against Anarchist militancy raised by those who pass their lives in active or passive support of the infamous institutions which perpetuate human antagonisms and effectually hinder the arrival of that peace and prosperity for which the world is waiting.⁴⁰

Charlotte Wilson appeared more determined to distance herself from violence, but still engaged in justificatory arguments. She asserted, on behalf

of the Freedom Group, that violence is neither integral to anarchism nor is it necessary as a form of political action. She wrote

The man who in ordinary circumstances and in cold blood would commit such deeds is simply a homicidal maniac; nor do we believe they can be justified upon any mere ground of expediency. Least of all do we think that any human being has a right to egg on another person to such a course of action. We accept the phenomenon of homicidal outrage as among the most terrible facts of human experience; we endeavour to look such facts full in the face with the understanding of humane justice; and we believe that we are doing our utmost to put an end to them by spreading Anarchist ideas throughout society.⁴¹

However, this did not lead to outright condemnation of the bomber. In fact, Wilson went on to argue: 'The guilt of these homicides lies upon every man and woman who, intentionally or by cold indifference, helps to keep up the social conditions that drive human beings to despair.'⁴² It is an elaborate sophistry that allocates equal guilt for murder to both the murderer and the politically apathetic or the sincerely hostile. Even in the wake of 9/11, the 'the Americans had it coming to them' school of thought only sought to blame the foreign policy of the American government and not all the people who lay outside the small circle of the American left. Wilson does not quite express the chilling, and reprehensible, view shouted by the bomber Emile Henry⁴³ and reiterated by the Marxist terror groups of the 1960s and 70s that 'there are no innocents', but she comes perilously close.

Nothing could be more explicit in exposing the difficulty for revolutionaries in developing a coherent stance on the tactic of outrage than this moral equivocation. Outrage engendered conflicting emotions; moral revulsion at the taking of human life, the dismay of the damage being done to the image of the Anarchist cause, the longing for revolution, and a sense of solidarity with fellow anarchists, expressed as an 'understanding' of their actions. The result was far from Bevir's description of a non-violent movement committed to moral education. Instead, although there was, especially amongst middle-class intellectuals, a repudiation of the bombers, it was often hesitant and equivocal rather than absolute.

Yet, education also played an important role in the making of the revolution. It was not seen as separate from revolutionary violence, but was integral to it as a necessary precursor. Those who believed in a spontaneous revolution arising out of a growth of class-consciousness had to face an inescapable fact. Anarchism was the aspiration of a minority and even faced considerable hostility from both left and right. If the revolution was to take place by the masses acting freely without guidance or coercion then there had to be a more general understanding of anarchist ideas and aspirations. The only alternative to despised Leninist vanguardism was education.

Education was the key way that anarchists could address popular misapprehensions and, without doubting their own beliefs, persuade the working classes of their power and interests in creating a revolution. However, education is not just a pacific course of action. Advocates of propaganda by deed viewed the very process of struggle as educative. For example, H. B. Samuels could write an endorsement of education without backing too far away from his enthusiasm for the prospect of bloodshed.

... there is but ONE means and that is EDUCATION – which gives knowledge and leads to action. The education that bitter experience teaches us, the education that is gained by strikes and lock-outs and revolts, the education that makes us think and act like men, the education that can only be acquired by learning the lessons that the struggles of the past and present teach us; and this education cannot be gained through the ballot-box or through legal enactments; those who say it can, are liars, rogues and cowards, and prove our natural enemies.⁴⁴

The synthesis of education through action with the making of a revolution was most effectively expressed by Errico Malatesta. Malatesta's roots were in the Italian labour movement and, despite a modestly prosperous upbringing, he earned his living as a mechanic all his life, giving him a practical insight into the views of working people. His four periods of exile in London gave him influence in the British anarchist movement, as did his close friendship with Kropotkin. That friendship was not uncritical however. They fell out over the First World War and there were doctrinal differences as well. Malatesta felt that Kropotkin was too 'optimistic' in asserting that working-class consciousness and spontaneity would be the source of revolution and its sole organizing principle. This he laid at the door of Kropotkin's scientific determinism, claiming that, despite his valuable insights, Kropotkin used science selectively to defend preconceived notions.⁴⁵ Revolution and the future Anarchist society were not an inherent reflection of nature and natural law. He put this succinctly in his last published writing, a critical reflection on Kropotkin.

If it is true that the law of Nature is Harmony, I suggest one would be entitled to ask why Nature has waited for anarchists to be born, and goes on waiting for them to triumph, in order to destroy the terrible and destructive conflicts from which mankind has always suffered.

Would one not be closer to the truth in saying that anarchy is the struggle, in human society, against the disharmonies of Nature.⁴⁶

Rather than relying on spontaneity, Malatesta argued that the revolution, and the post-revolutionary period, had to be organized.

Malatesta's rejection of the biological foundations of human society meant that he saw conscious action as the only possible source of change. That change would of necessity be violent. He felt that the state would not collapse of its own accord. Violence was the essence of the state and was the way in which it deprived people of their freedom. Counter-violence would have to be used against it. Malatesta remained deeply pragmatic about violence though. He rejected pacifism but he was vehemently opposed to 'outrage':

It is interesting to observe how both the terrorists and the *tolstoyans*, just because both are mystics, arrive at practical results which are more or less similar. The former would not hesitate to destroy half mankind so long as the idea triumphed; the latter would be prepared to let all mankind remain under the yoke of great suffering rather than violate a principle.⁴⁷

Not only did he reject Kropotkin's 'optimism', he also opposed insurrectionism for both moral and practical reasons. Most importantly, he thought that any insurrection at the present time would be crushed.⁴⁸ The alternative of revolution by industrial action through a general strike also met with his scepticism. A general strike would not cause the collapse of capitalism and the workers themselves would feel some of the worst hardship. He did not share the conventional wisdom of the time that there were large surpluses waiting to be liberated and redistributed by the masses. So, a general strike without revolutionary action would soon be crushed, as the workers would be denied the essentials for survival and starved back to work. The only way of preventing this, Malatesta argued, was for action to organize production and distribution. Seizure of the workshops, factories and land were, for him, the essential forms of expropriation if the revolution is not to fail. As a result, a general strike could only be a preliminary to a revolution, not the revolution itself.⁴⁹

Malatesta did not relish violence and, particularly in his later writings, he was fully aware of the potential that violent means could produce tyrannical ends: 'If in order to win (the revolution) it were necessary to erect the gallows in the public square, then I would prefer to lose.'⁵⁰ For violence to be used intelligently and effectively as *anarchist violence*, then education is obligatory. Education is not the alternative to violence; it is its necessary precursor. It ensures that force is used constructively, and does not become counter-productive.

The main aim of education is to break the metaphysical beliefs that surround and support the state. He argued that though government is essentially a protector of domination and exploitation it also has other, more positive functions. As such, it makes it harder for people to

conceive of living in a stateless society, especially given the nature of mass indoctrination.

... someone whose legs had been bound from birth but had managed nevertheless to walk as best he could, might attribute his ability to move to those very bonds which in fact serve only to weaken and paralyse the muscular energy of his legs ... Just imagine if the doctor were to expound to our fictional man with bound legs a theory, cleverly illustrated with a thousand invented cases to prove that if his legs were freed he would be unable to walk and would not live, then that man would ferociously defend his bonds and consider as his enemy anyone who tried to remove them.⁵¹

Breaking indoctrination is not enough; people have to develop their solidarity, a sense of unity.

Malatesta saw humans as possessing two instincts, self-preservation and the preservation of the species.⁵² This is the conflict between individualism and socialism. Malatesta asserted that ultimately it is solidarity that is the 'state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and well being'.⁵³ This cannot be forced; such a state is only conceivable when 'the interests of the individual and those of society coincide'.⁵⁴ Solidarity is not spontaneous; it has to be learnt through action. That is the fundamental purpose of working-class and anarchist organizations. They are both forms of experiential education, forged through class struggle.⁵⁵ This, by itself, is not sufficient to reach the state where individual and collective interests coincide. For that to happen it is necessary to undermine the forces that allow for some people to prosper at the expense of others by removing the twin institutions of government and property. This means the use of violence, because it is through violence that the state oppresses and robs the working classes.⁵⁶ The revolution will be a violent upheaval, which takes time and organization to prepare for. It will be a process that abolishes property through expropriation of the means of production. It is after the revolution that government collapses and then there begins a gradual, evolutionary reconstruction of society based upon interdependence.

Malatesta's advocacy of the need for educative struggle was not a short-term vision and reflected his pragmatism, which, in turn, was based on his day-to-day contacts with working people that set him at a distance to the predominantly middle-class revolutionaries who placed such great faith in the romantic notion of the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses. For instance, Charlotte Wilson wrote: 'We Anarchists, who desire neither to rule nor to serve, prefer to trust the reason of the workers, enlightened by their bitter experience of past slavery.'⁵⁷ For Malatesta, it is not the experience of slavery that brings enlightenment, but the solidarity of intelligent and organized struggle against it.

The expropriation of property

If there was one thing that united all sections of the revolutionary communist movement, it was the need to expropriate property and eradicate it from human society. Louisa Bevington was a typically vigorous advocate.

I advocate and I look forward to wholesale expropriation because I do not believe there is any such thing as a right to property, and because I hold that it is disastrous, nay, fatal, to the welfare of all individuals composing the community, to have to regulate their lives and affairs in accordance with a fictitious abstraction which has no warrant and no basis in the natural laws of life. I desire universal expropriation, not merely because the power that property-holding gives to man over man is in wrong hands, and consequently abused, but because it seems clear to me that property-holding is all abuse in itself, and that to hold property is to make wrong use of anyone's hands at all. I desire to see the bottom knocked out of the noxious property idea itself, for good and all.⁵⁸

For Bevington, property embodied domination and oppression. Furthermore she denied any idea of natural rights in property: 'there is no such thing as a natural title to what is after all an artificial and merely nominal relation between a man and his product; a relation having no basis in reality.'⁵⁹

A man who has made such use of material that a hat is the result, has made a hat. That is all he has made. He has not made a 'right to property' in the hat, either for himself or anybody else. Before this exercise of his faculty there existed the materials, tools, and himself. There exist now, the tools, and himself, and the hat. He is related to the hat as its **producer**, not as its owner. If he has no hat and wants one, the obviously fit place for the hat is on his head. He then becomes further related to the hat as its **wearer**; and still the word 'owner' remains a term without special meaning. But say that he already has a hat and the first passer-by has none, and wants one, then the fit place for one of the hats is on the passer-by's head.⁶⁰

She thought the very idea of ownership was an absurdity and an obstacle to the proper use of resources.

From the point of view of social common sense it is as preposterous to own a pin as to own a planet. To 'own' merely means to constitute yourself, or let others constitute you, an arbitrary hindrance between the pin and the first person really in need of it.⁶¹

Redistribution and a change of ownership would merely create a new class of owners and thereby allow the return of oppression. The entire concept of property has to be eradicated.

Charlotte Wilson placed her opposition to private property in her general political economy, arguing that the ‘usufruct of the instruments of production – land included – should be free to all workers and groups of workers’. She went on to describe how voluntary organization would arrange specialization of voluntary labour before goods are ‘massed in large stores and markets’ from which ‘each individual should supply his needs therefrom as his self-knowledge prompts’.⁶² Somewhat disingenuously, and surely to the alarm of most liberals, she describes this as ‘the theory of *laissez faire*, modified and extended to meet the needs of the future, and avoid the injustice of the past’.⁶³

The prevailing sentiments in the movement were more romantic than Wilson and an apposite illustration is the lyrical pamphlet produced by the Aberdeen anarchist, H. H. Duncan.⁶⁴ It encapsulates much of the anarchist communist vision. It is a celebration of nature and dreams of a future society that drew strongly on Kropotkin and reflects the anti-industrialism of the arts and crafts movement. Duncan was certainly a critic of capitalist progress. He wrote that well-being was unrelated to the continuous growth of production. However much additional wealth has been produced, capitalist industrialism failed to change the status of the worker, who remains a slave despite any marginal increase in affluence. However, Duncan also talked ecologically. The price of industrialism and the increasing wealth of the few have not just been paid by the worker but by nature itself.

Instead of green fields with their sweet fragrance, or the woods with the rustle of the leaves, and the song of the winged choristers; instead of the ever active burn, gurgling down the hillside, eager to join the river and so flow gently to the sea, we now have huge factories, filling the air with smoke; instead of the wood we have the stifling alley. The song of the bird is gone, and instead we have the poor street singer. The happy burn is supplanted by the common sewer. The rivers are polluted. Nature in her marvellous beauty is ruthlessly destroyed, all for the sake of the grasping landlord and the unscrupulous capitalist.⁶⁵

But the revolution will come, abolishing law, government and all coercion. Society will be reordered.

In such a state of freedom men will naturally form communes or villages all over the land; they will associate because they are of a sociable disposition, because they love the companionship of their fellows. They will also combine for purposes of work because they know by experience the saving of energy resulting therefrom.⁶⁶

Here then is an ethical, bucolic vision of an earthly paradise; only it is one that will come about through the power of a mighty revolution. It is Mackay's dream of perfect happiness.

Though the acceptance of the use of violence as a necessary means of liberation was common in the anarchism that sought to end class struggle through the triumph of communism, there was also a tradition of non-violence and pacifism, with equally deep roots in radical thought. The idea that revolutionary means and ends were intrinsically bound together in a chain of cause and effect was beginning to produce a preference for non-violence. Though secularists also embraced it,⁶⁷ non-violence found its most prominent expression in late nineteenth-century Britain through Christian anarchism.

Christian anarchism: Community and non-violence

The visionary and utopian aspect of anarchism, projecting a view of the future society as a peaceful and collaborative commonwealth, attracted a group of writers and activists who saw this as essentially a Christian vision. Their entry into the fray was not without resistance. Frank Kitz was particularly hostile: 'The intrusion of Christianity into the Socialist movement today is designed to vitiate it and thwart its aims.'⁶⁸ Louisa Bevington was even more vehement still. Asserting 'Religion is mankind's greatest curse!', she continued:

Unfortunately, religion is not kept out of the labor movement. Priests and parsons, who should be a horror to mankind, as their presence adds an additional element of corruption, sneak into it, and labor politicians use their services as the Liberals and Tories do. There is actually in existence a body of persons who prostitute the noble word 'Labor' by coupling it with the disgusting word 'Church', forming the 'Labor Church', which is looked upon favorably by most of the prominent labor leaders. Why not start a 'Labor Police'?

We are Atheists and believe that man cannot be free if he does not shake off the fetters of the authority of the absurd as well as those of every other authority. Authority assumes numerous shapes and disguises, and it will take a long period of development under freedom to get rid of all. To do this two things are wanted, to rid ourselves of all superstition and to root out the stronghold of all authority, the State.⁶⁹

Though Bevington did add in a grudging footnote – 'This open statement of our convictions does not imply any spirit of persecution on our part

against those who believe in the absurdities of the different religions⁷⁰ – this scarcely amounted to a welcome. Yet, despite the virulence of this hostility, by looking at handbills together with the anarchist and mainstream press it is clear that, far from being excluded, prominent Christian anarchists shared platforms and publications with the secularists. Although they were not in the majority, they were still a significant part of the milieu.

Of the two leading Christian anarchists, J. C. Kenworthy and J. Morrison Davidson, Davidson had the wider public recognition. He was a Scottish journalist and popular historian. Qualified as, and publishing under the title of, Barrister-at-Law, he never practised law and earned his living from his writing and journalism. He was a pioneer of labour history,⁷¹ and a prolific author. He moved through radicalism to collectivist socialism and finally to anarchism and each tradition left a trace on every phase of his subsequent intellectual development. Though London based, Davidson's sense of his Scottishness and his commitment to Scottish nationalism never left him. The execrable Peter Latouche wrote of him patronisingly: 'although a man of great learning, (he) speaks with a marked Scotch [sic] accent.'⁷² Davidson's religion was central to his politics; the two cannot be divorced. His Christianity and anarchism were mutually reinforcing and he took unwaveringly radical positions in each. In his view, the anarchist communism of his day was the realization of Christ's teachings. His was a version of liberation theology.

Davidson corresponded with Tolstoy and proudly displayed the Russian's endorsement of his *Gospel of the Poor*⁷³ in advertising material, but although he shared Tolstoy's commitment to non-violence he did not fully adopt his particular political philosophy. What he did share, though, is Tolstoy's denunciation of organized religion and the 'official Christianity' of the established churches. This was simply an unholy alliance of religion with both mammon and the state. Davidson's prose is redolent with his dislike of what he sees as a corruption of the Christian message. The Victorian church was simply a state religion, which was capable of endorsing war and capitalism alike. Its doctrines concentrated on the birth and death of Jesus, elevating mythology and suffering, whilst treating his life and teachings as an embarrassment. Davidson's Christ is a revolutionary, and his politics are all elaborations of the principles laid down in the New Testament and the practices of the Early Church. As he vividly put it,

The vile Imperial homicide Constantine ... craftily contrived to wed the Church to the State in an incestuous union, and from then till now Christianity ... has borne on its dishonoured forehead the sign of the State Beast.⁷⁴

The political economy in Davidson's work is an amalgam of mainstream anarchist ideas, though he always related it back to his religion. He argues

that rent and profit are unnatural extractions from the labour of the worker: 'How wages are to be made to swallow up rent and profit is the whole problem on the correct solution of which depends the economic salvation of mankind.'⁷⁵ His answer is collectivism. Davidson's collectivism is highly eclectic. He drew ideas from many different sources. From Kropotkin comes the belief in integrated industrial and agricultural labour, made possible through the appliance of advanced intensive agricultural methods. This is linked with one of his pet obsessions, free public transport. Identifying the growing centrality of mobility to a modern economy, Davidson saw how it is important for building the possibilities of integrated but dispersed communities, allowing the movement of goods and people between industrial and agricultural areas. He argued strongly for a collectivized, and free, public transport system as a basic right.⁷⁶

From the individualist anarchists he took up the cudgels for monetary reform. He wrote often about the gold standard, which, typical of his use of the Bible as an ideological reference point, he referred to as '*the Cult of the Golden Calf*'.⁷⁷ His analysis was identical to Seymour; gold is a device that allows for the extraction of value by its monopolists as interest. Also, his writing is infected by the same anti-Semitic tropes describing finance capitalism as 'Shylockism' and invoking 'Lendlord Rothschild and the robbers by *Usury*'.⁷⁸ In more than one publication, he attempts to define how value can be measured and translated into a paper currency.

What is the root fallacy of Moneytarism? It lies in this, that *gold is not, never was, and never can be a measure of value*. Value is a Ratio between Commodities – a mere 'mental affection' – and ratios are not to be *measured by metals* or anything else. They can only be *expressed by numbers*. Thus:

Bushels of corn.	Gallons of wine.	Number of sheep	Yards of cloth
20	20	1	10

That is twenty bushels of corn exchange for twenty gallons of wine, or one sheep, or ten yards of cloth. Divide their Least Common Multiple by each number respectively, and we find their true exchange relations ...

Now, take the integer *one* as the unit of purchasing power and print on pieces of durable paper of convenient size ... single units and multiples of units of such purchasing power, and you have an ideal medium of exchange which cannot be cornered, nor made the subject of usury.⁷⁹

Whereas Seymour's analysis was based on natural right, Davidson's was firmly ethical. Currency reform is a device that was not merely a form of economic justice, but the 'reconciliation of ethics and economics'.⁸⁰ The basis of his thinking is once again biblical. He quoted St Paul's doctrine

that ‘he that will not work, neither shall he eat’. Such moral sentiment lay behind the workhouse in nineteenth-century Britain (and modern authoritarian approaches to welfare). However, Davidson had a different interpretation. He asserted that those ‘who will not work’ actually referred to the rich living on interest and rents. Wealth is not a reward for virtue, but for sin – the sin of theft.

And, Alas! Those very men whom the Apostle would have condemned to death by starvation by reason of their enormities, are precisely those before whom we all fall down and worship. Like the Jews of old, we crucify the Communist Christ and release Barrabas, of whom it is emphatically recorded, ‘Now Barrabas was a robber’.⁸¹

Currency reform is a way of abolishing sin. But Davidson’s commitment to Christian communitarianism would always make him uncomfortable with individualism. Elsewhere he backed away from currency reform in favour of exchange based on labour value (see below). However, unlike many anarchist communists, he still envisaged exchange and reward for labour as essential, though, in contrast to the individualists, he rejected the market and competition in favour of scientific administration by the community in a propertyless society. Private property, especially in land, is for him ‘an institution at constant war with the benevolence of God’.⁸²

Davidson’s theology also lay behind his rejection of other conventions of Victorian liberal thought. For instance, he derided Malthus’ essay on population as ‘perhaps the greatest libel ever perpetrated on Divine Providence’.⁸³ Davidson was clearly, in current vernacular, ‘pro-life’, but not in the conventional anti-abortion sense. Instead, he argued that God would not give life where it could not be sustained. Poverty and starvation is a product of human society, not divinely created nature. He also made two very pertinent points. First, he saw population as producing rather than merely consuming wealth: ‘Malthusianism is an attempt to increase wealth by decreasing the number of wealth producers!’⁸⁴ Secondly, the key to the prevention of overpopulation is, in fact, affluence: ‘There is, moreover, good reason to believe that human fecundity declines with increase of comfort.’⁸⁵ Davidson was clear that the apparent link between overpopulation and poverty is chimerical; deprivation is merely the result of human institutions.

He also had no difficulty in totally rejecting the commonplace solutions to poverty posed by conventional Christians. Thrift, temperance and even vegetarianism raised his ire. They are diversions away from a proper analysis and collectivist solution. Self-improvement through moral restraint could never bring anything other than marginal gain to the workers. Davidson subscribed to the theory of the ‘iron law of wages’, that remuneration ‘always tends towards the minimum on which they (the workers) are willing to subsist’.⁸⁶ Trade unions were too limited in aim and were seeking

merely to create a labour aristocracy whose improved conditions are at the expense of other, less skilled workers.⁸⁷ The solution to Davidson could only be Christianity and that meant embracing communism.

The true Founder of Socialism or to be accurate, Communism, was Jesus of Nazareth, and all genuine Collectivists are, consciously or unconsciously, His followers.

... Some, it is true, have the hardihood to speak of Christ as an Individualist, but this is completely to misunderstand both His precept and practice. The Founder of Christianity was absolutely without selfishness which is the essence of Individualism. The Father in Heaven, whose divine attributes were so splendidly reflected in the Son of Man, had certainly nothing in common with the cruel God of Supply and Demand. To conceive of Christ as a member of the Personal Liberty and Property Defence League is to call sweet bitter and bitter sweet. His entire system of moral philosophy is altruistic.

His response to the rich young man who asked what he should do in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven was staggering: 'If thou wilt be perfect go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come and follow me.' For the young man the ordeal was too severe. 'He went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.' The fact is not recorded, but he doubtlessly eventually joined the Personal Liberty and Property Defence League at Jerusalem and became a Vice-President.⁸⁸

Leaving aside his faith in its literal truth, Christianity played an essential role in reinforcing and confirming Davidson's political ideas. His conception of Christian ethics provided the base for his vision of life in a future communist society. It performed the same intellectual function for Davidson that mutual aid did for Kropotkin. 'The Spirit of Jesus is needed to put a soul into materialistic Socialism.'⁸⁹ That 'soul' was the idea of community, based on Davidson's contention that the Early Church was just such a community rather than an institution. It is community that he posited as the replacement for the state.

At one stage, he was torn between state socialism and anarchist communism and sought a compromise. He wrote about how there is the need for 'an economic Columbus to discover for us the true stepping-stone or just mean between two competing Socialisms, viz., State Socialism and Anarchist Socialism'.⁹⁰ There is an almost Fabian approach to gradualism in his writing, seeing devolved local government and the new parish councils as a move to communal autonomy and containing the possibility of establishing the common ownership that would undermine the state.⁹¹ However, he consistently leant towards anarchism. His scepticism about the state would always take him there: 'the State has never been known to

do what is obviously right, and if we have regard to its base and bloody origin, probably cannot.”⁹² By the latter part of his life, he was firmly inside the anarchist camp. He had always rejected the Victorian liberal state and the institution of representative democracy as embodying a system that protected monopoly and transferred power from the people rather than give it to them. The state was in its essence anti-Christian.

In truth, to Christ the state was, in its very essence, a thing of evil – an institution in all its objects in necessary antagonism to the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven which He came to establish on earth.⁹³

Instead of the state, Davidson called for a ‘Voluntary Commune’ which embodies the Christian community. It is this concept that is rightly called ethical, though it is also rooted in socialist political economy. ‘His talisman – that little word *Love* – dissolves the State with its compulsory sanctions and establishes the voluntary commune. *Patriotism* ceases and *Humanitarianism* takes its place.’⁹⁴ This would be without property as ‘Holy Writ tells you emphatically that “the Earth is the Lord’s”, not the landlords, and that “the earth He hath given to the sons of men”’.⁹⁵

Davidson took some care to describe his utopia in detail. Land and resource restoration is the key, avowedly owing more to Thomas Spence than Henry George. His central theory was that there are currently two sources of value, labour value and scarcity value. The former is universal and natural; the latter is the product of monopolization. Therefore, ‘The first mortal blow ... to be dealt at the “classes” is for the community at large to assume control of every natural monopoly or “scarcity value”’.⁹⁶ The collectivization of natural monopolies provide all with access to everything they need, eliminating the need for credit and hence starts the process of eroding interest, or usury as he usually terms it, which is based on monopolization. Both free exchange and fair reward for labour ensue. Davidson, having abandoned his earlier schemes for currency reforms, tried to ensure this through a time book system, where hours of work are recorded and exchanged for goods whose value, in turn, is calculated in accordance with the time taken to produce them. This is similar to the scheme of the American individualist anarchist, Josiah Warren, though Davidson’s views subsequently changed. The whole question of exchange slipped out of his worldview as he became increasingly immersed in communist ideas. He later wrote of the future consisting of ‘A *moneyless* Communistic brotherhood where there was *neither buying nor selling*, and where the distinction between *mine* and *thine* should be unknown’.⁹⁷

With collectivization comes the end of competition and profit. ‘Competition is the method by which avarice asserts itself; Profit is the resultant plunder. The former says: Thou *shalt* covet. The latter: Thou *shalt* steal.’⁹⁸ The market would be abolished as production and distribution

would be on need alone and not be speculative. Distribution would be scientifically controlled through a centralized depot with local branches 'in constant communication through telegraph or telephone ... with the Bureau of Statistics', thereby allowing a precision 'that will make the blundering greed of existing Individualism at once ridiculous and contemptible'.⁹⁹ It is odd to think that Davidson is one of the precursors of the bar code.

Reading this, Davidson appears more like a state socialist, especially given his advocacy of collective ownership of the railways, referenda, and his habit of talking about a 'Socialist State'. In fact, this represented both his residual, more orthodox, socialism and the fact that he used the term 'State' loosely and interchangeably with 'community'. He never envisaged government in the same light as Marxists and his views were closer to Proudhon's federalism than to the idea of a workers' state.

With the coming of this new community, law and contract will disappear. Inheritance would be abolished with property passing into the hands of the community on the death of the property holder. Furthermore, 'for the first time since the world began, woman will, in every respect be the equal of man.'¹⁰⁰ Education will be transformed. He shared all the positivist prejudices, wished to abolish the classics, promote science and to establish a single, scientifically constructed, universal language. Again, his arguments are familiar: 'All the modern languages ... are but jungles of verbiage, which retard rather than facilitate human thought.'¹⁰¹ This 'scientific' monoculturalism was reinforced by his insistence that religion will persist and that it will be Christianity. The Church will go, there is no need for a corrupt clergy to intercede between Humanity and God, but the triumph of communism *is* a victory for Christianity. It is the only possible religion. His Eurocentrism and confidence in cultural uniformity is discomfiting to a modern reader and reflects the worst of Victorian progressive conceit.

Davidson's journey towards anarchism gave his writing the feel of a compendium of radical ideas. He was constantly assessing and reassessing their worth and thus he did not present a fixed vision, rather a dynamic intellectual voyage. The one consistent theme is his radical Christianity and, though it is not fully developed in his later work, he is beginning to express a more fully Tolstoyan position.

Verily the State is the Evil. Back to the Land! Back to the Simple Life!
 Away with Governments, Palavers, *Dumas*, and Courts of Law!
 LONG LIVE THE COMMUNE!¹⁰²

The bulk of his work, however, was not Tolstoyan. The most prominent advocate of Tolstoy in British anarchism was John Coleman Kenworthy.

Tolstoy's philosophy can seem bleakly ascetic and it is certainly challenging. Arguably, it is rooted in his mental crises, precipitated by a personal sense of sin and failure, and at its heart is a moral vision. Tolstoy

wrote with exceptional clarity and painful mental honesty. For him, all is interdependent.

We live as though we had no connection with the dying washerwoman, the fifteen-year-old prostitutes, the woman fagged out by cigarette-making, and the strained, excessive labour of the old women and children around us who lack a sufficiency of food; we live – enjoying ourselves in luxury – as if there were no connection between those things and our life; we do not wish to see that were it not for our idle, luxurious and depraved way of life, there would not be this excessive toil, and that without this excessive toil such lives as ours would be impossible.¹⁰³

Wealth impoverishes the poor but it also corrupts them, creating envy and the unsustainable desire to live like the rich. This compounds the corrupting effect on the rich, creating selfishness and a wilful ignorance of the effects of luxury on others. The direct responsibility for this state of affairs lies with us all and demands an individual response, which rests on his contention that there are no rights, only duties.

There is an inseparable unity of religion and politics in Tolstoy's political thought. He did not see Christ as a socialist, he saw him as a redeemer. Personal redemption can only come through the renunciation of sin and the greatest and most corrupting sin is wealth, which is solely possible as a result of the continuing misery of others. Secular anarchist communists saw redemption as being social, not personal, and material rather than spiritual. A new society would be ushered in through collective action. Oscar Wilde could write sardonically: 'Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore ... In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it.'¹⁰⁴ In contrast, Tolstoy insisted that individual duty is inescapable. It is central to our relationships with each other; we cannot live in a libertarian arcadia. We therefore have to repent, embrace duty and choose to live differently.

And therefore the man will never answer the question: *What to do?* until he ceases to deceive himself, and repents. And repentance is not dreadful, just as the truth is not dreadful, but is equally joyous and fruitful. We need only accept the truth completely and repent fully, to understand that no one possesses any rights or privileges or can possess them, but has only endless and unlimited duties and obligations; and man's first and most unquestionable duty is to participate in the struggle with nature to support his own life and that of others.¹⁰⁵

To liberate others, people have to refuse to live off their labour and, instead, work for themselves. They must voluntarily renounce wealth, comfort and privilege. Kevin Manton referred to this as 'an abstentionist position'.¹⁰⁶

However, for Tolstoy it was anything but. The act of renunciation and repentance *is* activism and engagement. Through changing yourself, you change the world. Above all, that change is non-violent. Tolstoy's acceptance of the Sermon on the Mount's injunction to 'resist not evil' was absolute. Doing good and self-reform is revolutionary.

Kenworthy accepted these principles, as well as Tolstoy's rejection of church and state, and became the main vehicle for their expression in Britain. He visited Tolstoy in Russia, sending back star-struck reports,¹⁰⁷ and became an effective and popular speaker. A prolific writer, with a somewhat excessive use of capital letters, radical Christian morality was at the heart of his beliefs.

Economic principles are ... governed by Moral considerations. Morals are, finally, dependent upon our conception of the solution of the great mystery – What is to become of us hereafter? That is, Morals are based upon Religious Belief. Which is as much to say, that Economic questions are, finally, Religious questions.¹⁰⁸

Tolstoy's call to work for oneself is a moral choice to remove the burden that one individual places on others.¹⁰⁹ This morality was, according to Kenworthy, the distinguishing feature of his anarchism. He described the differences among anarchists as being between those who favoured force and those who advocated persuasion.

Two camps are formed; in the one are Santo, Vaillant, Henri, and the dynamitards; in the other are – whom can we name besides Tolstoy? – and the so-called 'Christian Anarchists' ...

The real root of difference which divides The Anarchist into the opposite groups of the Violent and the Peaceable is not sufficiently understood. It is the *Materialist* Anarchist who becomes the dynamitard. ...

The 'Christian Anarchist' ... is then one who believes that Jesus taught the renunciation of all that is not held in perfect Honesty and Love; and that he was right in so teaching. Today discipleship of Jesus must mean what it meant to Francis of Assisi, what it meant to Tolstoy; namely first to set one's own life in order ... then by the power of words and *example* to induce others to do the same.¹¹⁰

The basis of Kenworthy's political economy is fairly orthodox. Malthus is rejected for the same reason Davidson gives; it is a 'blasphemy'.¹¹¹ The unholy trinity of rent, interest and profit are seen as the basis of exploitation. Both church and state are rejected: 'State and Church are twin sisters, prostitute to Mammon.'¹¹² The church has nothing to do with Christianity; it is purely an instrument of indoctrination, 'necessary for the

classes to persuade the people that wrong is right, and folly, good sense'.¹¹³ Parliament is a sham, 'a cunningly devised deceit for protecting the work of oppression and exploitation. Not that the Members know it! Men's worst deeds are done mostly in ignorance'.¹¹⁴ Law is more insidious still. It is the embodiment of force and domination. Kenworthy felt that there are only two types of governing principles. Custom 'is the direct Will of the People, enforced by spontaneous action'; Law 'is the will of a Privileged Class, maintained by violence over the rest of the People'.¹¹⁵

This distinction between custom and what he called 'force-law' is important. Kenworthy talked of the need for governance in economics, yet he was not advocating a residual state but a 'multiplicity of councils' working by consensus,¹¹⁶ administering the needs of the community. Interestingly, and drawing on Ruskin, he weaves moral concepts fully into his economics. A clear example is the way he distinguishes between 'Wealth' and 'False Wealth'. His definition of Wealth is that it 'comprises those products of Labour which are good to be used and enjoyed by man'. False Wealth is 'bad to be used or enjoyed, such as adulterants of food, unhealthy luxuries, pestilential dwellings, bad books and pictures'.¹¹⁷ Thus, wealth production is not simply good in itself, there has to be a judgement made about its worth in moral terms. The criteria Kenworthy proposed for such judgements are 'Usefulness' and, rejecting Tolstoy's despair about the worthlessness of his own literary work, 'Beauty'.¹¹⁸ Kenworthy did not argue that unemployment and poverty were the result of under-consumption caused by the extraction of surplus value. They were related to over-production of 'False Wealth', which displaces the production of necessities, raising their costs, whilst producing a competitive market that, in turn, depresses prices and forces the labourer down to subsistence level. What should exist is commonality of interest between producer and consumer in satisfying work producing good quality products to replace the current exploitative alienation.

At the heart of his economics is property. Kenworthy rejected unconditional and unlimited ownership, which leads to monopoly. However, he seemed to contradict himself in some of his writings. In *'From Bondage to Brotherhood'*, published in 1894, he seemed to be a full communist, arguing that 'rather than kill to protect property', we should 'destroy property to save life'.¹¹⁹ Writing of the state of abundance that would exist in a future society, he writes:

As to dwellings, houses such as are needed are built for those who need them. There is no talk of 'ownership', as the houses belong to everybody, and are used by those whom they best suit, for so long as they are suitable.¹²⁰

However, in *'The Anatomy of Misery'*, first published a year earlier but subsequently reissued several times, he apparently broke away from the

complete denial of property and adopt a more Proudhonian approach to possession based on the idea of utility.

Our principle of Possession, or Ownership must therefore be, That Property is to be distributed to all according to their ability to Use it; or, in other words, according to their Capacity and Need. This principle we will term Use-possession.

It follows that some articles, such as food, clothing, houses, etc., will come into the Possession of Individuals. Other articles, such as manufactories, roads, railways, ships, etc., will be Possessed by the groups of individuals who are concerned in their Use. Use-possession will necessarily be Individual or Communal, as circumstances require.¹²¹

In this book, Kenworthy is not a monist in his approach to ownership. He advocated – much as Proudhon did – individual possession for use. This is not unconditional; it is only acceptable where it is beneficial to the community as a whole. Land, however, is to be collectively owned by the community and freely open to all.

The reconciliation of this apparent contradiction is to be found in Kenworthy's concept of community. The tenor of his writing and all his journalism is communist. However, the community Kenworthy envisages collectively controlling all wealth is not global but highly localized. In contrast to Davidson's demand for free railways, Kenworthy thinks that they would be abolished and even shipping would be sharply reduced as 'few goods are brought in, and but few sent out'.¹²² His vision is of predominantly self-sustaining small communities, held together by the Christian ethic of brotherhood, being able to order their own affairs through custom, including the regulation of possession.

It is this idea of community that is central to Kenworthy's description of the nature of change that will bring an anarchist society.

Clear-headed and practical men have again realised that the workers must possess their Land, and pay no Rent; that they must possess their Capital, and pay no Interest; that they must themselves conduct Trade, and allow no Profit; that they must govern themselves, and pay no Taxes to a class-government; that the organisers and managers of business must be chosen by, and must serve, those under them – the greatest being the servant of all, as Jesus commanded.¹²³

This liberation cannot be achieved through violent revolution.

No Violent Revolution has ever ended oppression ... the struggle and passion of warfare destroy in men the right feeling, the clear judgement, necessary to establish a beneficent social system.¹²⁴

Neither can a simple change of government bring about the new communal anarchy.

Government itself is the oppression from which we suffer. Put men into a position to bear rule over others, and back them up with armed force, and they will inevitably use their power to aggrandise themselves. To give any man, or class of men, the power to force the will of another man or of another class, is to debauch the one and enslave the other.¹²⁵

For the radical Christian that Kenworthy was, the corruptibility of humanity is balanced by the possibility of its perfectibility. However this involves moral reform: 'There is no remedy for social evils, except that each man shall 'cease to do evil and learn to do well''.¹²⁶ Morality is the device that ensures that oppression cannot return. The process of learning the new morality of brotherhood is not intellectual; it is practical. Brotherhood comes from working together and 'earning our livings honestly from our own resources'.¹²⁷ Through work and co-operation people learn the principles that, for Kenworthy, lay at the heart of the Christian ethic. He further argued that morality is entirely natural as Jesus' teaching is 'the most truly scientific conception of life which the world has, so far, produced'.¹²⁸

As a result, Kenworthy did not offer the vision of a sudden transformation.

Those who understand the power of the modern commercial machinery, know, past doubt, that if you workers so willed, the General Strike and General Co-operation would gain England for you in a week, and turn it into Paradise in a twelve month. This is fact, and no fairy tale.

But the revolution will not come thus heroically. Ours is the day of small things; of spreading abroad the new spirit; of uniting our men and women; of framing and executing plans of business organisation; of reducing principles and preaching to complete practice in our deeds. Yet out of small things, the great shall come; who can say, how soon?¹²⁹

This would usher in his utopia, a stateless society where 'marriage has become free and pure', where people 'well balanced and healthy in mind and body, are no slaves to, but masters of their passions', where 'Art thrives everywhere', and 'a profound earnestness underlies all'.¹³⁰ It sounds terribly boring.

Kenworthy had already given up a prosperous business career to become a writer and propagandist and now his followers were as good as their word. The first Brotherhood Church had originally been established by John Bruce Wallace in London in 1891; now Kenworthy's supporters were to add to the network by establishing one in Croydon. A range of experiments in communal and co-operative ventures followed. Kenworthy was deeply involved in the colonies in Purleigh in Essex, and Whiteway in the

Cotswolds,¹³¹ and he inspired a prosperous cycle manufacturer, G. Gibson, to set up the Leeds Brotherhood Workshop on communist principles in 1897. Everyone who wished to could turn up and work, there were no rules or formal membership, the only accounts were to record simple profit or loss, and there were no wages, everyone could take what they needed from the general fund.¹³² Needless to say, it was not a commercial success.

This experimentation was the high point of the Christian anarchism of the period. Though most of their attempts at establishing anarchist communities collapsed, the Brotherhood Church still exists, as does the Whiteway Colony, although it was forced to abandon its Tolstoyan principles. Christian anarchism sits awkwardly amongst the secularism of both individualist and communist variants and it is tempting to treat it as a footnote to the movement in Britain. But to do so would see anarchism as being composed of hermetically sealed and separate components. This is not so. Whatever the considerable differences between the parts of the movement, even a cursory reading of the anarchist press reveals significant interaction and debate. Nellie Shaw, in her history of the Whiteway Colony, gave a memorable picture of this diversity in her reminiscences of Sunday at Kenworthy's Croydon Brotherhood Church.

It may be doubted if ever a more mixed and diverse crowd ever gathered within four walls than used to assemble weekly at the old Salvation Army tin tabernacle in Tamworth Road. Every kind of 'crank' came and aired his views on the open platform, which was provided every Sunday afternoon. Atheists, Spiritualists, Individualists, Communists, Anarchists, ordinary politicians, Vegetarians, Anti-vivisectionists and Anti-vaccinationists – in fact every kind of 'anti' had a welcome and a hearing, and had to stand a lively criticism in the discussion which followed.¹³³

In addition, the Christian anarchists were pointing to another development – the growing attachment of one part of the movement to non-violence and pacifism, something that would gather momentum in the twentieth century. The debate over means and ends that anarchist outrage had inflamed was to be long-lasting. Christian anarchism was not only an active part of the late Victorian milieu; it left a legacy.

Taken as a whole, the picture that emerges of anarchist communism is of a diverse and dynamic movement that was united on the central vision of a future human society living without government or property, but was divided as to the means by which it was to be achieved. There were those that favoured non-violent direct action and social experimentation, whilst others sat inside the tradition of class struggle and revolutionary upheaval. The division exists to this day, whilst the common dream is no closer.

This rift augmented the polarization between individualism and communism. And the movement was to diverge again. One path, revolutionary syndicalism, rooted in the idea of social transformation through class struggle, is beyond the scope of this study. The other, a forerunner of social ecology, was to develop a distinctive ecological perspective that offered the possibility of synthesis between disparate anarchist ideas. Its foremost advocates were natural scientists as well as social critics. The foundations were laid by the Reclus brothers and were built on in Britain by the work of the remarkable figure of Patrick Geddes.

Notes

- 1 Outrage was the name given to what we would now call acts of terrorism.
- 2 Peter Latouche, *Anarchy! An Authentic Exposition of the Methods of Anarchists and the Aims of Anarchism* (Everett & Co.: London, 1908), p.123.
- 3 Including one by Wordsworth Donisthorpe – ‘In Defence of Anarchy’, *The New Review* (September 1894).
- 4 Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: a Simple Tale* (Methuen, 1907).
- 5 Ibid p.171.
- 6 A summary, together with a picture of the canary, can be found here <http://www.boltonmuseums.org.uk/bolton-archives/walt-whitman/> (accessed 23 August 2012). The story of the Bolton Whitmanites is recounted in a splendid short book, Paul Salvesson, *With Walt Whitman in Bolton – Spirituality, Sex and Socialism in a Northern Mill Town* (Little Northern Books: Huddersfield, 2008).
- 7 Mark Bevir, ‘The Rise of Ethical Anarchism in Britain, 1885–1900’, *Historical Research* (Vol. LXIX, No. 169, June 1996), pp.143–65.
- 8 Ibid p.143.
- 9 See Richard K. Pankhurst, *William Thompson (1775–1833): Pioneer Socialist* (Pluto Press: London, 1991), p.30.
- 10 The house still stands and is now Grade II listed. It was offered for rent in 2010 at £2,500 per week. It no longer represents the simple life.
- 11 Oscar Wilde was certainly a libertarian Christian socialist, though he stood apart from the two mainstreams of Christian anarchism.
- 12 E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1976), p.567.
- 13 John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, p.97.
- 14 Ibid p.161.
- 15 Recounted in his memoir of the period: Rudolph Rocker, *The London Years*.

- 16 Ibid p.63.
- 17 There is a story that his somewhat corpulent wife used to press the type by sitting on it, though this may well be apocryphal.
- 18 John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists*, p.33.
- 19 Andrew Whitehead, 'Dan Chatterton and his *Atheistic Communistic Scorcher*', *History Workshop*, No. 25 (1988), pp.83–99. According to his website, <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/dan-chatterton.html> (accessed 25 August 2012), Whitehead is planning to write a more substantial biography of Chatterton. I really hope he manages it.
- 20 John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, p.62.
- 21 Andrew Whitehead, *Dan Chatterton*, p.83.
- 22 Ibid p.97.
- 23 Dan Chatterton, *Chatterton's Commune: The Atheistic Communistic Scorcher* (Vol. 1 No. 14).
- 24 Ibid Vol. 1 No. 1.
- 25 Ibid Vol. 1 No. 14.
- 26 Ibid Vol. 1 No. 29.
- 27 Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (Longman: London and New York, 1979), p.165.
- 28 Nicolas Walter's 1978 short biographical essay on Joseph Lane is available here: <http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/joelane.htm> (accessed 27 August 2012).
- 29 Joseph Lane, *An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto* (Cienfuegos Press: Sanday, Orkney, 1978), p.24.
- 30 Ibid p.28.
- 31 Ibid p.28.
- 32 Ibid p.28.
- 33 Ibid p.30.
- 34 Ibid p.33.
- 35 Ibid p.33.
- 36 Ibid p.39.
- 37 E. P. Thompson, *William Morris*, p.567.
- 38 Errico Malatesta, *Liberty* (September 1894), p.71.
- 39 Bertrand Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1919), E-text version from the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/RusProp.html> (accessed 11 March 2005), 1997, p.55.
- 40 L. S. Bevington, *Anarchism and Violence* (James Tochatti, 'Liberty' Press: London, 1896), pp.9–10.

- 41 Charlotte Wilson, 'Anarchism and Homicidal Outrage', in Nicholas Walter (ed.), *Anarchist Essays* (Freedom Press: London, 2000), p.79.
- 42 Ibid p.79.
- 43 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus*, introduction by George Woodcock: (Black Rose Books: Montréal and New York, 1988), p.159.
- 44 H. B. Samuels, *Commonweal*, November 1893.
- 45 Errico Malatesta, 'Peter Kropotkin – Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend' (1931), in Vernon Richards (ed.), *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (Freedom Press: London, 1965), pp.257–68.
- 46 Ibid p.267.
- 47 Errico Malatesta, *Anarchia* (Numero Unico, August 1896), in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta*, p.61.
- 48 Errico Malatesta, 'The General Strike and the Revolution', *The Torch* (August 1894), p.6.
- 49 Ibid p.6.
- 50 Errico Malatesta, *Pensiero e Volontà* (1 October 1924), in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta*, p.173.
- 51 Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy: A New Translation from the Italian Original* (Freedom Press: London, 1974), p.12. Later in the pamphlet, latent anti-Semitism surfaces again. He wrote: 'Rothschild does not need to be either a Deputy or a Minister; it suffices that Deputies and Ministers take their orders from him' (p.20). Though Maletesta is using Rothschild as an example of the rich and not of the Jews and so may not be being overtly anti-Semitic, he is repeating a common anti-Semitic trope about the world being controlled by a cabal of Jewish bankers.
- 52 Ibid p.24.
- 53 Ibid p.28.
- 54 Ibid p.28.
- 55 Errico Malatesta, *l'Agitazione* (18 June 1897), in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta*, pp.89–90.
- 56 Errico Malatesta, *La Questione Sociale* (25 November 1899), in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta*, p.51.
- 57 Charlotte Wilson, 'Anarchism by an English Anarchist', in Nicholas Walter (ed.), *Anarchist Essays*, p.21.
- 58 L. S. Bevington, 'Why I am an Expropriationist', in *The Why I Ams: G. B. Shaw, Why I Am a Communist and L. S. Bevington, Why I am an Expropriationist* (James Tochatti, 'Liberty' Press: London, 1894), p.10.
- 59 Ibid p.11.
- 60 Ibid p.14.
- 61 L. S. Bevington, 'Property', *The Torch* (December 1894), p.7.
- 62 Charlotte Wilson, 'Anarchism', in Walter (ed.), *Anarchist Essays*, p.21.

- 63 Ibid p.21.
- 64 H. H. Duncan, *A Plea for Anarchist Communism* (James Blair: Aberdeen, 1893).
- 65 Ibid p.6.
- 66 Ibid p.12.
- 67 For example the Dutch anarchist F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, whose pamphlet *The Pyramid of Tyranny* was serialized in *Freedom* between May 1900 and February 1901.
- 68 Frank Kitz, *Recollections and Reflections* (Opulscula Socialista, Vol. 1, Carl Slienger – originally published by Freedom Press: London, 1912 – London, 1976), p.7.
- 69 L. S. Bevington, *An Anarchist Manifesto* (issued by the London Communist Alliance, Metropolitan Printing Works: London, 1895), pp.7–8.
- 70 Ibid p.8.
- 71 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Annals of Toil: Being Labour History Outlines, Roman and British* (William Reeves: London, 1899).
- 72 Peter Latouche, *Anarchy!*, p.209.
- 73 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Gospel of the Poor* (William Reeves: London, 1893).
- 74 J. Morrison Davidson, *Christ, State, and Commune* (C. W. Daniel: London, 1906), p.12.
- 75 J. Morrison Davidson, 'The Old Order and the New', in *Individualism to Collectivism* (7th edn, Francis Riddell Henderson: London, 1904), p.30.
- 76 J. Morrison Davidson, *Free Rails and Trams* (Politics for the People, No IV, William Reeves: London, 1890).
- 77 J. Morrison Davidson, *Four Precursors of Henry George and the Single Tax as also the Land Gospel According to Winstanley 'The Digger'* (Labour Leader Publishing Department: London and Glasgow, 1899), pp.139–51.
- 78 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Annals of Toil*, p.462.
- 79 Ibid p.466.
- 80 Ibid p.467.
- 81 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Old Order and the New*, p.75.
- 82 Ibid p.61.
- 83 Ibid p.107.
- 84 Ibid p.107.
- 85 Ibid p.108.
- 86 Ibid p.107.
- 87 Ibid p.110.
- 88 Ibid pp.89–90.

- 89 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Gospel of the Poor* (William Reeves: London, 1893), p.144.
- 90 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Annals of Toil*, p.490.
- 91 See especially J. Morrison Davidson, *The Village for the Villagers: The Village Magna Charta: The Parish Councils Act 1894* (4th edn, William Reeves: London, 1895).
- 92 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Annals of Toil*, p.468.
- 93 J. Morrison Davidson, *Christ, State, and Commune*, p.7.
- 94 Ibid pp.10–11.
- 95 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Village for the Villagers*, p.2.
- 96 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Old Order and the New*, pp.150–1.
- 97 J. Morrison Davidson, *Christ, State, and Commune*, p.8.
- 98 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Old Order and the New*, p.154.
- 99 Ibid p.157.
- 100 Ibid p.164.
- 101 Ibid p.166.
- 102 J. Morrison Davidson, *Christ, State and Commune*, p.31.
- 103 Leo Tolstoy, *What Then Must We Do*, trans. by Aylmer Maude, introduced by Ronald Sampson (Green Books: Bideford, 1991), p.130.
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6

The rise of ecological anarchism

Elisée Reclus and Patrick Geddes

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, two distinct anarchist positions existed in Britain, each representing one of David Graeber's models of political economy: exchange and communism. Yet, despite the optimism of some of its most prominent advocates, the anarchist dream was no nearer realization. Individualism was being undermined by the growth of the collective power of the corporation, whilst the prospect spontaneous revolution or the Christianizing of humanity, as envisaged by communists of different persuasions, seemed, at best, remote. In reality, they were impossibilist strategies.

As the realization of this began to hit home, some individualists made their peace with capitalism and embraced classic liberalism, whilst those whose outlook was broadly socialist turned to syndicalism as a practical programme of revolutionary change. Syndicalism was first defined in a resolution passed at the Basel conference of the International in 1869, stating that: 'The councils of the trades and industrial organizations will take the place of the present government, and this representation of labor will do away, once and forever, with the government of the past.'¹ Drawing in leading activists, such as Rudolf Rocker, John Turner and Guy Aldred, syndicalist activities peaked during the labour unrest in the years before the First World War.² For advocates of syndicalism the educative experience of economic struggle and the federal structure of trade unionism would make it the ideal instrument for the seizure of the means of production, thereby allowing collectivization without the state. Trade unions seemed to offer an alternative to political action and, especially given the sharp conflicts of the

day, provided a strategy that, though defensive in the short term, could be highly practical and give the opportunity for developing workers' organizations as the embryos of a new society.

Although it had a firm grip on reality, in that it was based on observable conflict and existing organizations, syndicalism's claim to universality could only be sustained if a specific concept of class conflict in a developed industrial society was seen as the necessary historical vehicle for revolutionary change. It tied anarchism to a Marxian, and a firmly 'progressive', social analysis, the very one that anarchism had questioned in previous years. This cemented the divisions in the anarchist movement and marginalized two important strands of thought, the individualist's emphasis on equitable exchange and ownership together with Kropotkin's warning about the fatal mistake of the neglect of agriculture. On top of which, Robert Michels³ argued that the very structures of a political party, i.e. oligarchy, bureaucracy, and leadership, which syndicalists so despised, would be the inevitable result of trade union organization. Even if it were possible to prevent the emergence of self-interested and aggrandizing leaders, he argued, the mere fact that syndicalist trade unions were a minority of the working class meant that instead of the 'dominion of the leaders over the masses' the result would merely be the 'dominion of a small fraction of the masses over the whole'.⁴

Others may have been less troubled by syndicalism itself, yet were perturbed by the divisions in the movement and became anxious to prevent a schism. They stressed the commonalities of the different anarchist strands, adopting the label 'anarchism without adjectives', first coined by the Cuban, Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, who was also exiled in London where he died in 1915. One of the more eloquent statements was that of the American anarchist, Voltarine de Cleyre, in her essay *Anarchism*, first published in 1901. She wrote of the visceral need for freedom, embedded in the passions of every individual, as the central uniting factor of all variants of anarchism. And so she called for diversity of thought and practice, for experimentation and for tolerance: 'Each choose that method which expresses your selfhood best and condemn no other man because he expresses his Self otherwise.'⁵ Yet earlier in the piece she hinted at something else; in discussing the polarization of opinion between individualist and communist anarchism, she wrote: 'Truth lies not "*between* the two", but in a synthesis of the two opinions.'⁶ The choice seemed clear – synthesis or schism, diversity or the dogma of certainty.

Amidst the continuing debates and intellectual experimentation, a synthesis was beginning to emerge, not one based on the existential need for liberty but in ecology. An ecological anarchism that unified many of the pre-existing themes of anarchist thought into a coherent critique of progress was being developed. The collective material interest in the environment inspired ideas that transcended class, were self-consciously rooted in the

natural world, and approached the resolution of particular social problems in ways that were both libertarian and practical. Its foremost advocate in England was the remarkable figure of Patrick Geddes, though he also drew on the work of his close friend, the revolutionary communist and geographer Elisée Reclus.

It is hard to summarize the life of an energetic polymath like Geddes in a few sentences. Born in 1854, he grew up in rural Perthshire, Scotland, had an academic career in the natural sciences and became Professor of Botany at Dundee University despite holding no paper qualifications, having never sat an exam. He was an early sociologist, became a radical educational reformer, a pioneer of adult education, established student halls of residence and created his own college in the South of France. As if that was not enough, he engaged in urban and rural development in Edinburgh, Cyprus, Palestine and India, mounted exhibitions and pageants, was involved in conservation – saving Thomas More's old house, Crosby Hall, from demolition and moving it from the City of London to its present location in Chelsea – and so much more. If there was one person who explored ideology through praxis, it was Geddes.

Geddes is still best known as one of the founders of town planning and most published work about him is to be found in the discipline of geography rather than politics. Even one of his best biographers, Helen Meller, probably unintentionally, depoliticizes him. She wrote: 'Geddes was able to view the political debate about the future as largely irrelevant. He chose to consider that his position was above the fierce discussions about capitalism and its social consequences.' She went on to describe how he felt his views 'cut across party lines' and 'would appeal to people of all political persuasions'.⁷ However, Meller's view of Geddes was shaped without a full understanding of anarchism and the intrinsically anarchist ideas of this intensely political polymath.

Geddes' place in the anarchist pantheon is now becoming recognized. The anarchist writer and journalist, Colin Ward, had long claimed him as part of the anarchist tradition,⁸ and academic authors are catching up. Peter Hall writes of the 'incalculable influence' of Kropotkin on Geddes⁹ and how 'From Reclus and Kropotkin, and beyond them from Proudhon, Geddes also took his position that society had to be reconstructed not by sweeping governmental measures ... but through the efforts of millions of individuals'.¹⁰ Jozef Keulartz places Geddes as an intellectual forebear of Murray Bookchin and social ecology, writing that: 'Bookchin should be seen, first and foremost, as an heir to the tradition established by Geddes and Mumford'.¹¹ Carissa Honeywell also sees him as illustrative of a 'radical pragmatism' that sought to put anarchist ideas into action on a smaller scale. She is absolutely correct to say 'that it is a mistake to see reformist pragmatism or small-scale practical change as a dilution of anarchism'.¹² I would go further and suggest that his ecological anarchism

was the basis of the practical synthesis that de Cleyre was asking for. Geddes was not just an organizer of practical action; he was an important theorist in his own right.

Geddes frequently cited Kropotkin and Reclus as his key influences and, though he talked positively of anarchism in much of his published writing, he shied away from identifying himself as an anarchist. However, not only was his self-proclaimed anarchist influence always prominent, but his approach to his sociological and civic studies was also consistently libertarian. Moreover, Geddes shared some of the prejudices and addressed many of the analytical issues raised by anarchist thought. Geddes both knew and read Kropotkin, although even his influence was overshadowed by Geddes' personal, intellectual and scientific partnerships with the Reclus family. Elisée Reclus is central to ecological anarchism and must be understood in order to place Geddes' thought in its proper context.

Elisée Reclus – revolution, evolution and ecology

Reclus was a distinguished French geographer, developing an holistic social geography. He was also an active revolutionary, permanently exiled from France due to his activities in the Paris Commune. The picture that the English-speaking world has of Reclus has been highly dependent on Marie Fleming's two books.¹³ Fleming strongly emphasizes Reclus' anarchist communism and revolutionary sympathies, stressing his understanding of the need for revolutionary violence and his somewhat eccentric defence of robbery as a process of restitution. For her, Reclus the socialist is predominant. She stressed his activity in the International and his assertion of the primacy of class struggle. Not only that, Fleming saw anarchism itself as being synonymous with communist revolutionary action only. As such, she can baldly state: 'The anarchist movement is generally held to have reached an end with the trial of leading French anarchists in 1894.'¹⁴

Reclus certainly was an avowed revolutionary communist and this would not seem to have much relevance to the work of Geddes. Fleming does not mention him in any capacity at all. Geddes was neither an advocate of revolutionary violence nor of class struggle, yet still he claimed Reclus as his mentor. The phrase he used to describe the ideas of both Kropotkin and Reclus was 'constructive anarchism'.¹⁵ Fortunately, John Clark and Camille Martin have provided a corrective.¹⁶ Their book consists of a set of new translations of some key texts by Reclus together with a long introductory essay depicting him as predominantly a radical ecologist. This partly reflects Clark's own role in contemporary anarchism and his breach with Bookchin over Deep Ecology.¹⁷ The authors' ecological convictions may lead them

to understate Reclus' revolutionary socialism, but their particular interpretation shows the themes and ideas that attracted Geddes and which he was to build on. Arguably, these too are the most original aspects of his writing and, by placing an emphasis on Reclus' concept of ecology, the book brings home his relevance to the current age when the era of faith in a global proletarian revolution has passed.

However, Clark and Martin are less aware of the significance of Reclus' connection with Geddes, as well as his follower, the American writer Lewis Mumford. Whereas for Fleming the anarchist movement ended in 1894, for Clark and Martin ecological anarchism died with Reclus until resurrected in the 1970s.

The kind of ecological perspective that Reclus developed ... effectively disappeared from mainstream social thought early in the century and did not re-emerge significantly until well into the 1970s in response to growing awareness of the ecological crisis. In the meantime, ecological thinking remained an undercurrent of anarchist and utopian thought and practice ... However, it did not become a central theme in anarchist and utopian theoretical discussion until the ideas of Paul Goodman and Murray Bookchin began to have a noticeable influence in the late 1960s.¹⁸

Ecology as a discourse played such a strong part in nineteenth-century anarchist thought it would have been unlikely to disappear. The conjuring trick that makes it vanish is the exclusion of Geddes and his followers from the tradition. Just as Geddes has been portrayed without anarchism, anarchism has been represented without Geddes. Reading Geddes in the context of anarchism vividly displays his ideological foundations. In fact, it is his bashful anarchism that made it possible for Meller to depoliticize him, especially when seen in the context of Reclus' analysis of the contemporary state.

For Reclus, the state is the physical embodiment of authority. As such, it becomes a machine for its own self-perpetuation. As a result, any revolution or political action that seeks merely to establish a new authority will fail. This is the inevitable consequence of all political movements. As Reclus put it: 'Throughout history, those who revolted against any authority almost always did so in the name of another authority, as if the ideal required nothing more than changing masters.'¹⁹ New laws and institutions cannot produce liberation. 'As soon as an institution is established, even if it should be only to combat flagrant abuses, it creates them anew through its very existence.'²⁰

Representative democracy is similarly flawed. In elections, 'it is certainly not the most honest of candidates who have the best chance of winning', and a legislature will 'be generally inferior in moral qualities, since it is

dominated by professional politicians'.²¹ Whilst bureaucracy is always obstructive:

The cogs of the administrative machine work precisely in the opposite direction from those functioning in an industrial establishment. The latter strives to reduce the number of useless articles, and to produce the greatest possible results with the simplest mechanism. By contrast, the administrative hierarchy does its utmost to multiply the number of employees and subordinates, directors, auditors and inspectors. Work becomes so complicated as to be impossible.²²

Reclus demolished the myth of the efficient bureaucracy and with, one perceives, a deep sense of personal frustration, railed at the 'arrogant, do-nothing petty bureaucrat who, protected by a metal grating, can take the liberty of being rude toward anyone'.²³

Geddes, too, showed his own dislike of bureaucracy in discussing his design for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, using words that will bring sighs of recognition for anyone who has endured the current fashion for managerialism in British universities.

Universities do not exist to be administered. The Administration exists only to serve Universities. Though records are indispensable and regulations may be useful, even necessary; the true regulation of the University comes from the mind, conscience, and character of those who make it up. Hence I have segregated the administrators where they may be good servants, for when they usurp the central position of a University, as so often in Britain or America, they become the very worst of masters.²⁴

There is a lack of sympathy in Reclus' writing for the administrative worker compared to his romanticization of the industrial worker. An anarchist critique can be made that points to the use of petty rules and restrictions as a way in which pressured and underpaid staff can reclaim elements of control in an increasingly authoritarian environment, rather than being a means of simply taking pleasure in the exercise of power. However, the main point Reclus makes is that the state can never produce desired ends; power corrupts at all levels. This is where Meller is misleading when she writes of Geddes that he was somehow above politics. In fact, he rejected conventional political action as the logical result of his political beliefs. He was trying to appeal to no one. Instead, he viewed action as the highest expression of political purpose.

This rejection of the state is also a source of misunderstanding about Geddes' views on women's suffrage. Geddes' position on female emancipation was different to that of Reclus. Reclus saw the subjection of women arising out of male violence enslaving women and turning them into

property. This was an intrinsic part of the rise of property as an instrument of oppression.²⁵ As such he could even write that

Obviously, all of the claims of women against men are just ... She has an absolute right to recrimination, and the women who occasionally take revenge are not to be condemned, since the greatest wrongs are those committed by the privileged.²⁶

Whilst Geddes was strongly in favour of female equality and felt that society was weakened by the exclusion of women, he viewed male and female roles as being specialized and complimentary, justifying his position with some particularly dubious biology, especially in his book on sex, written with J. Arthur Thomson. Geddes' description of women as being anabolic, preserving energy, and men being katobolic, expending energy, is hideously stereotypical, even if it would give women a primary role in his life-enhancing future society. He implies that men are active and women are nurturing, having a 'larger and more habitual share of the altruistic emotions'.²⁷ He commits further horrors, even going so far as to write of men as having 'bigger brains and more intelligence',²⁸ whilst his observation of the 'stronger lust and passion of males'²⁹ shows an uncritical acceptance of Victorian notions of female sexuality. Reading this certainly makes one feel for the forbearance of his capable, supportive and devoted wife Anna, without whom he would have accomplished so much less.

Though Geddes and Thomson's socio-biological study of sex had difficulty breaking stereotypes, it was still a breathtakingly open discussion for its time. It is just that the authors were less capable of abandoning the assumptions of late Victorian society than some other writers and were distinctly uncomfortable with the concept of social androgyny. Crucially, however, female emancipation could not be seen as simply a process that fully integrated women into an unchanged society. They deprecated the view that 'all things would be settled as soon as women were sufficiently plunged into the competitive struggle for their own daily bread'.³⁰ There was a need for social transformation. Thus, comments about Geddes' views on women's suffrage are misplaced, as Geddes viewed the vote as meaningless *per se* compared to social action and reconstruction. As Reclus put it: 'To vote is to give up your own power ... To elect a master or many, for a long or short time, is to resign one's liberty ... To vote is befitting of idiots ... To vote is to prepare shameful treachery and traitors.'³¹ With such sentiments, to campaign for the vote would be absurd.

Reclus also stressed that women's cause 'merges with that of all oppressed people, whoever they may be' and, taking a sideswipe at Josephine Butler (despite expressing his support in 1882),³² 'will need to occupy themselves henceforth with all people who are wronged, and not only the unfortunate women forced by poverty to sell their bodies'.³³ As Fleming succinctly puts

it, 'like Marx and Engels, Reclus subordinated the question of sex and gender to that of class'.³⁴

Of course, control of income and independence were, in reality, the urgent needs of working-class women, as active feminists such as Josephine Butler were fully aware. Women's interests were far from identical to those of the males of their social class. Pressing economic requirements and political recognition were not to be put aside until sometime in the future when women could be equal partners in a hazy, conflict-free, organic relationship. Both Reclus and Geddes' attitudes to female emancipation were deeply tinged by male condescension.

Of far greater importance were Reclus' theories of change and progress. His lasting influence lies in this fusion of anarchist revolutionary thought with the birth of late nineteenth-century ecology. The distinctiveness of Reclus' approach to social change is that he did not engage in what he saw as a false dichotomy of evolution or revolution. Evolutionary gradualism had often been proposed as an alternative to revolution. For Reclus this is illogical. Revolution is the consequence of evolution.

The word Evolution, synonymous with gradual and continuous development in morals and ideas, is brought forward in certain circles as though it were the antithesis of that fearful word, Revolution, which implies changes more or less sudden in their action, and entailing some sort of catastrophe. And yet is it possible that a transformation can take place in ideas without bringing about some abrupt displacements in the equilibrium of life? Must not revolution necessarily follow evolution, as action follows the desire to act? They are fundamentally one and the same thing, differing only according to the time of their appearance. If, on the one hand, we believe in the normal progress of ideas, and on the other, expect opposition, then of necessity, we believe in external shocks which change the form of society.³⁵

Superficially Reclus' theory of history bears tinges of Marxism in that he asserts that accumulated change forces sudden progressive leaps, but there all similarity ends. The engine of change is not class war but the dialectical relationship between humanity and the environment, both natural and social. Evolution is constant but the environment tends towards inertia, attempting to hold back necessary change, in the same way a river, swollen with rain, is constrained to an ever more ferocious torrent until it finally breaks its banks and floods.

Each transformation of matter and each realization of an idea is, during its actual process of change, thwarted by the inertia of the environment. A new phenomenon can thus come into being only through an effort that is more violent, or a force that is more powerful, than the resistance

... Such are revolutions – necessary consequences of the evolutions that preceded them.³⁶

Reclus was not a pure materialist, insisting that the way humans imaginatively interpret their environment also shapes progress. His account of social change is highly complex. Not only that, but Reclus was no Hegelian either. He did not see dialectical change as automatically leading to a higher form. Revolutions and evolutions alike are not necessarily linear and progressive. They can be both progressive and regressive. His model is nature:

Everything changes; everything in nature moves as part of an eternal movement. But where there is progress, there can also be regression, and if some evolutions tend towards the growth of life, there are others that incline towards death. To stop is impossible, and it is necessary to move in one direction or another. The hardened reactionary and the gentle liberal, both of whom cry out in fright at the word ‘revolution’, nevertheless march onward to a revolution – the last one, which is eternal rest. Disease, senility, and gangrene are evolutions just as much as puberty is. The appearance of worms in a corpse, like the first cry of an infant, indicates that a revolution has occurred. Physiology and history demonstrate that some evolutions indicate decline, and certain revolutions mean death.³⁷

As in nature, progression and regression occur simultaneously, therefore it is not possible to simplify historical interpretations of an epoch. However, Reclus admits to one constant. The cause of regression is authority, the source of progress is liberty.

There is a fundamental cause – indeed, the cause of all causes, that epitomizes the history of decline. It is the establishment of mastery of one part of society over another, and the monopolizing of land, capital, power, education, and honors by a few or an aristocracy.³⁸

Reclus’ positivism led him to conclude that humanity was governed by natural laws, but those laws were dynamic, with constant interplay between human culture and the environment. Reclus’ model of nature is an ecological one based on complex and dynamic systems. His insistence on such a holistic interactive approach means that he is not determinist, nor does he suggest that there is an immutable human nature. As Clark and Martin write:

In stressing the dialectical relationship between nature and culture, he [Reclus] focuses on the interaction between many natural and social factors in shaping human society, on the inevitability of change and

transformation, and on the open-ended character of human and natural history.³⁹

They continue by pointing out that Reclus was aware of how humans 'by understanding the determinants of the social world' 'can transform themselves into active, conscious agents in shaping their own liberation and self realization, and that of the entire planet'.⁴⁰ Importantly, they comment:

... nature shapes humanity at the same time that humanity reshapes the natural world. While modern civilization had devoted much attention to the latter side of this dialectic, the power of humanity to transform nature, it has exhibited little concern for humanity's moral responsibilities in its interaction with nature.⁴¹

This is the crucial aspect of Reclus' thought. Humanity is not merely a part of nature; it is a feature in natural evolution, an evolution it can consciously shape. However, for a progressive development of humanity to take place, it has to abandon concepts of domination, both social and natural, and to pursue knowledge and understanding in order to deliberately shape progress. This gives education a central role in Reclus' thought.

In 1877, Reclus published a short article on *The Future of our Children*, speaking against the exploitation and brutalization of children in the family, work and education. His commitment to anti-authoritarian education is explicit. 'But are not the schools also shops whose mechanism is scarcely less dangerous than that of the factory? The master seizes the child and brutalizes him from the very beginning with formulas, senseless words, gestures minus ideas.'⁴² However, Fleming placed greater emphasis on Reclus' position at the Lausanne Congress of the Jura Federation in 1882. There, rather than preparing the ground for revolution, Reclus argued that a free education system could only emerge *after* the revolution had taken place.⁴³ This was another example of giving primacy to the revolutionary Reclus.

Reclus returned to the attack in 1895. His pamphlet, *The Ideal and Youth*, lamenting the lack of contemporary student radicalism, still speaks to those old enough to remember the late 1960s. His educational idealism, compared to the financial pragmatism currently being used to sell student fees, makes for refreshing reading. The educational system as it stands, he wrote, is destructive of learning and of the human personality: 'from the first day of school the normal life of the child is contrary to nature ... Does it not run counter to the great objects of education as understood by the wise in all ages: strength, grace, beauty.'⁴⁴ A student is stifled and 'furnished with his text book as the convict with his chain'.⁴⁵ The sole purpose of learning has become instrumental: 'Now, from the very constitution of society students become aware as a preliminary fact that they will amass money by means of their diplomas.'⁴⁶ But, for Reclus, knowledge and

learning are the basic prerequisites for human progress. Learning is neither instrumental nor is it to be solely confined to the academy, and he not only stresses the practical aspects of education but the solemn duty which learning confers: 'To know lays upon us the obligation to teach.'⁴⁷

The centrality of education, in the broadest sense, to the process of change was made explicit by 1905. Reclus embedded learning at the centre of his liberation ecology. In his essay on progress, he stressed how humanity's active ability to shape its present and future depends on understanding the past.

All past civilizations, even those of prehistory, offer us a glimpse of the treasure of their secrets and, in a certain sense, are gradually merging into the life of present-day societies. We can now look back on the succession of epochs as one synoptic scene that plays out according to an order in which we can discover the logic of events. In doing so, we cease to live solely in the fleeting moment and instead embrace the whole series of past ages recorded in the annals of history and discovered by archaeologists. In this way, we manage to free ourselves from the strict line of development determined by the environment that we inhabit.⁴⁸

Reflection and learning are required for human progress, as

Self-conscious progress is not a normal function of society, a process analogous to that of a plant or an animal. It does not open like a flower, but rather must be understood as a collective act of social will that attains consciousness of the unified interests of humanity, and that satisfies them successively and methodically.⁴⁹

And education is vital, as he lyrically puts it:

Man loves to live in dreams. The effort which Thought must put forth in order to seize hold of realities seems to him too hard, and he tries to escape the task by taking refuge in opinions ready-made.⁵⁰

Education engages with reality and breaks simple faith in favour of the power of reason: 'Beatific faith is the pillow of the weak in mind.'⁵¹

The emphasis on interaction with nature places humanity back in the natural world and much of Reclus' writing deals with this relationship. His respect for nature was reflected in his vegetarianism. Reclus felt that the way we treat animals reflects on our attitudes not only to the natural world but to the human world as well.

It is in no way a digression to mention the horrors of war in connection with massacres of cattle and carnivorous banquets. People's

diet corresponds closely to their morality. Blood calls for blood. In this connection, if one considers the various people he has know, there will be no doubt that in general, the agreeable manners, kindness of disposition, and equanimity of the vegetarians contrasts markedly with the qualities of the inveterate meat eaters and avid drinkers of blood.⁵²

The virtues ascribed to a meat-free diet may be somewhat overstated. It may be a cheap jibe, but, after all, Hitler was a vegetarian.

In this essay, and in his article '*The Great Kinship*', Reclus argued that animals are natural companions for humans rather than food and that the process of domestication of animals has led to their reversion into an inferior species compared with the natural wild creature from which they are descended. However, he avoided dogmatism by concluding:

But it is not for us to found a new religion, and to hamper ourselves with a sectarian dogma; it *is* a question of making our existence as beautiful as possible, and in harmony, so far as in us lies, with the aesthetic conditions of our surroundings.⁵³

Making human life a thing of beauty involves a profound understanding of the environment.

The industrialist who tries to make use of what the earth produces inevitably sees around him unutilised riches. As for the simple man who is content to love nature for itself, he finds in it his joy, and when he is unhappy, his sorrows are at least mitigated by the sight of wild countryside ... And if nature has the power to console or to strengthen individuals, what could it do over the centuries for whole peoples? Without a doubt, magnificent vistas greatly contribute to the qualities of mountain populations, and it is no mere figure of speech to call the Alps the boulevard of liberty.⁵⁴

Failure to respect the environment brings disaster in its wake. In discussing the decline of Spain as a great power, he added something that historians do not normally mention.

But did the Spanish passion for cutting down trees due to their fear of birds ... contribute nothing to this terrible decline? The earth, yellow, rocky, and naked, has taken on a repugnant and fearsome appearance: the soil is impoverished, and the population, which has been decreasing for two centuries, has to an extent lapsed into barbarism. The little birds are avenged.⁵⁵

Remarkably, given these sentiments, Reclus did not fall back into the trap

of the 'back to the land' movement, a repudiation of modern urban society. As a progressive, he felt that humans cannot develop in relative isolation, they need society, and, in particular, they need the city to flourish. 'When cities grow, humanity progresses, and when they shrink, the social body is threatened with regression into barbarism.'⁵⁶ Ultimately, ruralist movements can never succeed, as the growth of cities is based on humanity's greatest need, association. 'Certainly we need the rustling of trees and the babbling of brooks, but we also require association with other people and, indeed, with all people. The entire globe becomes for humanity a great city that alone can satisfy us.'⁵⁷

For Reclus, the city is organic; it must grow and reinvent itself or it will die.⁵⁸ It flourishes when it is in harmony with its environment, which includes both regional resources and the limits imposed by methods of communication. Reclus envisaged global networking and the development of a world culture and single language that would link independent cities into a free, globalized community. In contrast to the natural city, a city becomes ugly and vulnerable to decay where it is based on artificial circumstances such as the reliance on a single industry, particularly a polluting one, or an administrative centre, such as a state capital. He saw one of the worst offenders being the type of development based on the fantasies of speculators 'planned beforehand by architects who have never visited the site, much less gone to the trouble of consulting the future inhabitants'.⁵⁹ Considering some of the disasters of modern housing, Reclus' critique is highly prescient.⁶⁰

Maintaining his biological analogy, Reclus asserted that the lifeblood of a city is its people, and the health of each individual contributes to the whole. Through association and interaction a higher state of evolution is reached. Art reflects the consciousness of the population,⁶¹ but even in the most developed of contemporary cities, there was a disease eating away at the health of the city – poverty.

Even in cities in which the administrators try to veil all these horrors hypocritically by hiding them behind decent whitewashed fences, the misery breaks through nonetheless. Behind them, death carries out its work even more cruelly than elsewhere. Is there among our modern cities a single one that does not have its Whitechapel or its Mile End Road? As beautiful and imposing as an urban agglomeration may be in its entirety, it always has its open or hidden vices, its defects, and its chronic sicknesses. These will lead inevitably to death if healthy blood does not once again freely circulate throughout the organism.⁶²

Reclus praised the work of Geddes in restoring the old town in Edinburgh, but warned, again presciently, against a process of urban renewal that merely displaces poverty elsewhere. And so there is one overriding necessity

for the healthy evolution of a city – an end to ‘the antagonism between Capital and Labour’.⁶³ And so, Reclus draws us back full circle through his ecology to his anarchist communism. True social interaction can only happen between those who are free and equal, and that means the abolition of exploitation through the ending of private property.

Conservative-minded politicians are inclined to conjure up rhetoric about duty and respect as virtues. What this really means is obedience. Just as Badcock disposed of duty from an egoist perspective, in 1894 Elisée Reclus wrote: ‘Isn’t the loss of respect a quality par excellence of contemporary society?’⁶⁴ Like Badcock, he saw a conservative virtue as an unintelligent vice. Disobedience is part of a process whereby people begin to reclaim what used to be theirs. ‘Faith in greatness has disappeared ... people no longer believe in the sacred origin of private property’;⁶⁵ this will lead, he supposed, to the abolition of the state and for the workers to ‘calmly reclaim possession of all the products of their common labour’.⁶⁶

Reclus was not so unrealistic as to insist that this change was imminent. It would depend on continuous evolution. He did not share Kropotkin’s belief in spontaneity. But he did point to the fact that, though there were no historical precedents for the type of urbanized anarchism he advocated, anarchist practice and morality was widespread throughout society. There were the obvious experiments of the anarchist colonies but, most importantly for Reclus, anarchism was embedded in the lives of ordinary people.

But where Anarchist practice really triumphs is in the course of everyday life among common people who would not be able to endure their dreadful struggle for existence if they did not engage in spontaneous mutual aid, putting aside differences and conflicts of interest. When one of them falls ill, other poor people take in his children, feeding them, sharing the meagre sustenance of the week, seeking to make ends meet by doubling their hours of work. A sort of communism is instituted among neighbors through lending, in which there is a constant coming and going of household implements and provisions. Poverty unites the unfortunate in a fraternal league. Together they are hungry; together they are satisfied ...

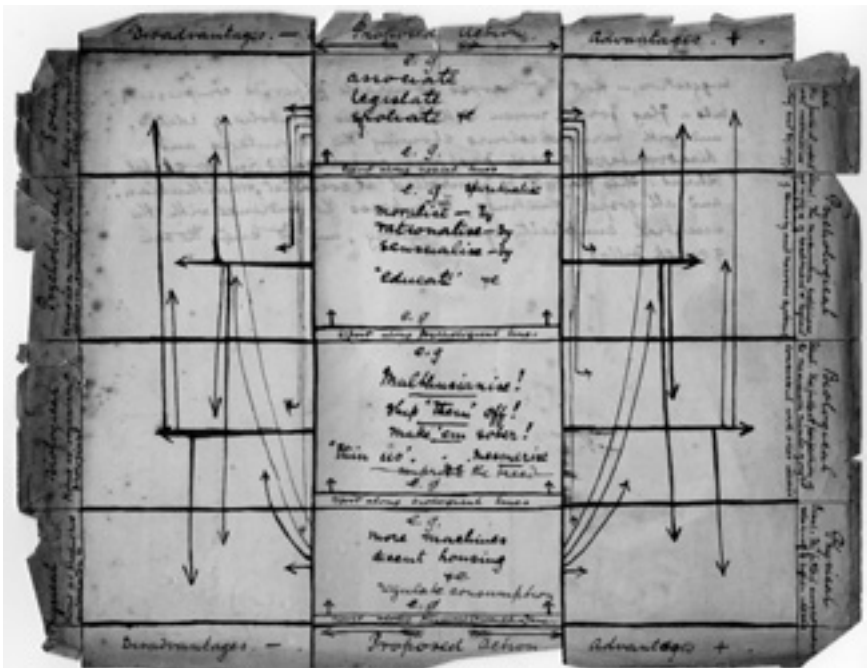
A miniscule society that is anarchistic and truly humane is thus created, even though everything in the larger world seems to be in league to prevent its being born – laws, regulations, bad examples, and public immorality.⁶⁷

Here then are the main themes that interested the ever-practical and formidably energetic Patrick Geddes: living cities, practical and radical education, social evolution, environmental awareness, and an end to poverty. He picked all these up in an exhausting programme of social reform and experimentation as he, too, set out to create his own realms of anarchy within contemporary society.

Patrick Geddes

Geddes can be problematic. His methodology is difficult to grasp, he was poorly organized, and often dependent on collaborators, such as Bramford and Thomson, for his relatively few publications. He has left behind voluminous archives of – sometimes bewildering – notes and manuscripts. He developed a technique of graphic displays, grids and diagrams that he referred to as ‘thinking machines’. Utterly convinced of their universal effective application, Geddes did not see these as a personal working method that needed refining into a more conventional text, but as a dramatically new form of communication. Lewis Mumford, despite seeing himself as a ‘disciple’ of Geddes, was deeply mistrustful of the method. He saw it as being rigid and didactic, despite the fact that Geddes thought that his diagrammatic representation was a flexible tool that opened an introductory route into thinking. The literary Mumford saw only an obstacle to the fuller expression of Geddes’ ideas.⁶⁸ Helen Meller and Peter Hall have qualms too.

This one example, taken from the Geddes archives at Strathclyde University and reproduced here with their permission, gives a good sense of his working method. Responding to a paper on politics, he sketched out this flow chart to try and make sense of the interconnections between the ideas.



So convinced was he of the startling clarity of the design that he scribbled a suggestion on the back that it should be

... compressed into a flag form, woven with devices symbolic of ideals, and with various colours showing the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal ... This flag to be unrolled at socialist, Malthusian, and all gospel meetings, to impress the audience with the essential simplicity of the enquiry, and to lessen the sale of quack pills.⁶⁹

It is fairly certain that there would be an impact on the audience, but what it would be is far from certain.

It would be easy to be dismissive, however; Volker Welter, in a superb intellectual study of Geddes, makes a coherent defence of his graphic designs and stresses their integral value to the understanding of his work. There are two relevant aspects to Geddes' thought that are illustrated by his use of graphics. The first is that he is holistic and the second is that this holism is extremely complex. Thus, as Welter points out, Geddes' diagrams 'were a means to create and express order in complex systems'.⁷⁰ Welter also provides a persuasive explanatory description of the working of one of Geddes' better-known thinking machines, 'The Notation of Life'.⁷¹ His defence is compelling and should, however reluctantly, lead scholars away from a lazy bewilderment.

Mumford did have other reservations, however. In particular, he questioned Geddes' constant activity and production of vast piles of rough notes and 'thinking machines', which he saw as a work avoidance strategy to prevent Geddes putting on paper the great synthetic work that would express his total philosophy. It is probably more realistic to suggest that Geddes' increasingly desperate demands for Mumford to collaborate (as a disciple rather than a partner) were because he simply lacked the organizational skills to be able to undertake the task.

Novak hints that the grief cause by the death of Geddes' son in the First World War badly affected his productivity.⁷² It is probably more accurate to suggest that it was his wife's death shortly afterwards that took away the one person who could organize him. Geddes intimates as much in some unpublished notes for a speech: 'On an impartial survey of the situation there can be little doubt what it is that determines a man's success in life. It is his capacity for finding and capturing [sic!] a woman skilled in life economy.'⁷³ Eyebrow-raising Victorian prejudice aside, surely this was far from an 'impartial survey'; it must have been based on Geddes' own household instead. As well as displaying the limitations of Geddes' views on gender, it suggests that his emotional outburst to Mumford on their first meeting in New York was not really that he wanted Mumford as a replacement for his son, but for his wife.

The picture of Geddes that emerges is of someone who was vigorous and

manic by turn, a compulsive talker, and a writer of voluminous fragments. These include items that are frankly incomprehensible, such as a letter summarizing his life under the title ‘Optimiam Individual-Ontogeny’.⁷⁴ Other pieces try creative expression that verges on the comically banal – for example, his attempt at the ‘Poetisation of Sociology’:

Four stanzas. Or Five?

1. The People
2. The people perish for lack of knowledge
3. Where no vision is the people perish
4. Whereas, when knowledge and vision combine, the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light⁷⁵

Occasionally, he can lose his progressive optimism. In this piece, he writes movingly about the slow death of last humans in a world about to be extinguished by a new ice age.⁷⁶ It is possibly a metaphor for his own, failing dreams.

And what more has cosmic science, for any of us, if this be indeed a cooling globe, doomed to be the frozen moon of an earthly sun, whose heat and light have ended, and so to circle aimlessly till some vast collision at once dissipates and rekindles the whole skeleton system in stellar catastrophe. And even if this be the beginning of a new cycle, a new and relatively uniformitarian evolution, where can it look forward to, save the same end?⁷⁷

The final problem that Geddes has given writers is that many of them have great difficulty with Geddesian multi-disciplinarity. It is a comment on the compartmentalization of current academics – something that Geddes deplored – that they simply do not have the breadth of knowledge to be able to write comprehensively on his ideas. Writing by those with a strong grounding in anarchist theory has certainly been lacking, but there has also been a neglect of his work by political scientists in general, once again obscuring his political commitments.

An example of this tendency comes from Welter’s otherwise impressive analysis where, on several occasions, he displays limitations around radical political thought. So, for example, he is correct to emphasize Geddes’ interest in spirituality, not as a believer but as a positivist who is interested in religion as transmitter of culture. However, he gives this primacy over most other aspects of Geddes’ thought and does not mention anarchism or even political radicalism. To illustrate this omission, Welter includes the assertion that ‘since the 1870s Geddes had been acquainted with Annie Besant, a future influential figure in the international theosophical movement’.⁷⁸ Of course Besant did not become a theosophist until 1887.

Until then, and for more than the first decade of her association with Geddes, she had been a member of the National Secular Society, was an atheist, socialist, feminist, birth control campaigner and labour organizer. The association is much more evidence of his membership of radical circles.

In addition, it is with weary resignation that the reader finds that those who actually do mention anarchism in the context of Geddes nearly always characterize it as violent⁷⁹ and often appear to be poorly informed on anarchist ideas and history. Geddes' own rejection of violence was unequivocal and he did not share the sophistry of anarchists, including Reclus, who argued that violence was the act of people driven to desperation by the suffering caused by the injustice in the world. He was much more succinct and perceptive.

Each new doctrine of whatever kind is an intoxicant in its day to a proportion of its excitable youth, who employ direct physical force. This is the auto-intoxication of hysterics.⁸⁰

Murdo Macdonald, despite an initial, near-compulsory mention of bombs and assassinations (many with, at best, tenuous associations with anarchism), was more thoughtful. He quoted Geddes' correspondence with a person critical of his positive use of the term 'anarchy'.

He [Geddes] stoutly rebutted the criticism, although at the same time he makes clear that he has no intention of fully allying himself with anarchy, any more than with any other political philosophy. He does, however, make clear that he firmly believes in the desirability of the political state to which anarchy refers, namely that it 'simply means what it says an-archy – without government i.e. without governmental compulsion.'⁸¹

How he could not ally himself with anarchism whilst simultaneously firmly believing in it is perplexing. One conclusion can be that both his generalism and his pragmatism⁸² made him anxious to avoid labels. Then again, he probably did not want to be associated with socialist notions of class struggle.

Helen Meller makes a very succinct point when she argues:

He was hostile to a centralised state and welfare policies believing always that the individual had to be the focus of policy, not the masses. No state machine, he believed, could control or develop the interaction of the individual with environment, which was the only path for future progress. By making this stand Geddes was to take himself outside the political debate in which the future social progress of the nation was actually worked out.⁸³

However, it did make him central to the anarchist debate. Interestingly, Meller indicates not just his unease with the growth of social democracy but the fact that Geddes was uncomfortable with the anarchist communist acceptance of class war, despite its prominence in Kropotkin's and Reclus' thought. In reality, whether he was conscious of it or not, Geddes' contribution to anarchist thinking formed a possible bridge between the individualist anarchists and the communists. It is certainly arguable, too, that his approach to 'constructive anarchism' is an effective vehicle for a creative synthesis of anarchist perspectives and their application in practical social experimentation.

There is a great deal of published material on Geddes and the purpose of this chapter is not to re-examine the scope of his work. It is also severely limited by its author's own, very un-Geddesian, specialization and scientific illiteracy. Instead, the aim is to resurrect Geddes as a political figure, and to show how the intellectual fecundity of the libertarian left in late Victorian Britain was of such an influence. This section, therefore, is not so much about what anarchism contributed to Geddes, whose extraordinary generalist thinking should never be confined into a single specialist compartment, but to start to think about what Geddes did for anarchism.

The future society that Geddes envisaged would be dynamic rather than static, based on continuing evolution. He refers to it as '*Eutopia*'. The name emerged from Thomas More's famous book, *Utopia*. Geddes suggests that More was punning two ancient Greek words which would sound similar, Outopia, signifying no place, and Eutopia, a good, beautiful or true place.⁸⁴ By contracting the title to *Utopia*, More was indicating that he could be describing either or both. This intended sense became lost and the more cynical 'nowhere' became the commonly understood meaning.⁸⁵ Geddes, an admirer of More and rescuer of Crosby Hall, More's old London residence, sought to resurrect the original meaning. However, by choosing to be unambiguous about the sense of a good place Geddes was trying to insist that its achievement is practical and possible. This is because, for Geddes, action and Eutopia are one, ideas and action cannot be divorced from each other, and, what is more, his definition of Eutopia is a model of pragmatism. Eutopia is 'the realizable best that can be made of the here and now, if we invoke and use all the resources available, physical, mental and moral'.⁸⁶

There are several key aspects of Geddes' Eutopia that could have been lifted straight from Kropotkin and Reclus: mutual aid, the importance of the interaction between *social* individuals and the environment for evolution, the autonomous city with organic links to the rural areas for mutual benefit, the possibility of regression as well as progression, organic societies without government. It is arguable, too, that he shared prejudices with these anarchists as well, most notably the romanticization of the Middle Ages and the medieval city, the depiction of rural life as essentially

peaceful and harmonious, and his identification of France as a source of liberty and Germany as the representation of both Prussian militarism and authoritarian thought.

There are elements of Proudhon too in Geddes, with a similar approach to federalism, and to both Proudhon and the individualist anarchists in what he calls 'the Civic Bank'.⁸⁷ This was a suggestion for the 'extension of the credit system ... to the everyday usage of the people, and the social application to the betterment of environment and improvement of population'.⁸⁸ However, Geddes was nothing if not an original thinker and he added a number of fresh elements, which, in effect, broadened anarchist theory and laid the foundations for a coherent ecological approach that synthesized ideas and action in a way that would be familiar to the modern Green political thinker and community development activist alike. That said, Geddes' ideas were still rooted in a left critique of industrialism.

Since the Industrial Revolution, there has gone on an organized sacrifice of men to machinery. During a still longer period, there has been a growing tendency to value personal worth in terms of wealth.⁸⁹

As a result, Geddes' distinctive contribution to anarchist discourse is best approached through his rather neglected writings on political economy.

The first distinction between Geddes and the conventional left is that though he saw clear divisions in society, they were not based solely on economic class. Class oppression is a symptom of the state of evolution of society; it is not the cause. In a very sharp analysis, Geddes refused to play the orthodox game. He certainly deprecated natural rights, especially to property: '*Natural* is a good word; it proves anything.'⁹⁰ He also exploded sarcastically the myth of the entrepreneur as the heroic figure of the age with despotic powers.

For must he not be rewarded for his generous abstinence from consuming his whole wealth in a moment; compensated for his enormous risk of loss in astutely finding the best investment for it; rewarded for his unparalleled labours of superintendence, performed, of course, by deputy? That under these circumstances this benignant autocrat should be entitled to absolute obedience, enforced by one penalty, that of instant dismissal.⁹¹

But in doing so, he was not tempted to mythologize the worker. He castigated socialism for merely being 'the old orthodox economics turned inside out'. All socialism does is reverse the capitalist myth, making the capitalist villain and the worker hero. This, for Geddes, is patently ridiculous. Instead of 'stage labourers and stage capitalists', there are a 'host of irreconcilably different types and varieties of labourers and capitalists,

struggling for existence amongst each other'.⁹² The existing condition of both the worker and the capitalist is the creation of mutual interactions, the one against the other, reinforcing the worst aspects of the relationship. The answer is social evolution, firmly rooted in Reclus' ideas.

As with Reclus, Geddes was clear that humanity can both progress and regress. He used biology to explain how this occurs in human society. Just as an organism dies with a lack of nutrient, so it does with an excess. As a result, there are two types of degeneration.

... on the one hand, deprivation of food, light &c., so leading to imperfect nutrition and innervation; on the other, a life of repose, with abundant supply of food and decreased exposure to the dangers of the environment. It is noteworthy that while the former only depresses, or at most extinguishes, the specific type, the latter, through that disuse of nervous and other structures, &c., which such simplifications of life involves, brings about that far more insidious and thorough degeneration seen in the life history of myriads of parasites. It is noteworthy that both these sets of conditions of organic change exist abundantly in society, the former being known as poverty, the latter as 'complete material well-being'.⁹³

He continued: 'the influence of all this upon the degeneration of individuals and upon the decline and fall of nations alike, need not be insisted upon.'⁹⁴

This would suggest that equality of distribution would be the solution, but Geddes denied this also. It is the quality of what is produced that is crucial.

The practical economist, who would increase the well-being rather than the mere number of the population, must attempt a vast proportional increase in the industries which elevate life over those which merely maintain it; and must make his ideal of progress for a long time lie in raising quality of production over mere quantity of it.⁹⁵

Geddes was trying to move from a material economy to what he termed a 'life economy'. This is absolutely essential, because he was one of the early ecological thinkers to identify limits to growth. For Geddes, increased production produces increased population and therefore increased demand. A focus on seeing wealth and well-being in material terms alone also creates additional demands from consumers. And if production is constantly increasing, he asks, 'What will happen when the coal is exhausted, or the Western corn-lands filled up?'.⁹⁶

Although supposedly biological in source, this is really the revival of an older critique of decadence. Geddes was writing against Adam Smith who, by dethroning virtue and elevating vice, felt that the collective good rested

in continuing production and consumption to meet the demands of petty desires. Geddes, the Presbyterian moralist and ecologist, felt that, in today's terminology, this was not sustainable. Humanity cannot escape morality: 'the road to real and permanent wealth, individual and social alike is up the harder and less inviting path of self-denying culture.'⁹⁷

Despite rejecting this aspect of Smith's writings, Geddes did not jettison the principle of markets, though he would not see himself as a market theorist. In one respect, he is clear that Smith is right. Market demand reflects human desires. However, he did not see prosperity arising from this, simply because he did not have a quantitative concept of wealth. The solution to successful evolution is not increased production. 'Now, the essential scientific fact about the evolution of any species ... is improved average quality. Increase in quantity is not evolution; nay it is even apt to be the precise reverse.'⁹⁸ In doing so, he set himself against the conventional notion of material progress.

Geddes' criticism of socialism and liberalism, both of which he often derided as '*futilitarianism*', was based on their focus on purely material, monetary distribution. Cultural evolution is what matters. It is a process that will transform the 'individual Race for Wealth into a Social Crusade of Culture',⁹⁹ and in doing so will change the pattern of consumption and reform production. Geddes rejected the view that producers can always manufacture markets for their products.

... it is consumption which determines production far more than conversely: we are sufficiently told how the capitalist directs the labourer, but not yet sufficiently how the consumer directs them both. In short, the consumer decides what the producer shall work at ...¹⁰⁰

Social evolution will change demand to reflect the higher faculties of humans and thus market mechanisms will redirect production towards goods that are life-enhancing, beautiful and of permanent value. This cannot be achieved from above; any qualitative change in production can only happen through individual choices in an advanced society. That individual choice lies at the heart of his economics means that there are two aspects of evolution that are necessary parts of his theory. The first is idealism, collective consciousness, and the second is psychology, individual consciousness.

Geddes uses several descriptions of the makeup of civil society. He bases his ideas on his interpretation of Le Play, using the celebrated classification of place, work and folk as being the main factors in the construction of society. For the region, he uses a fourfold notation of town, city, school and cloister as the necessary components of a developed society, a typically Geddesian way of referring to physical geography, economics, education and spirituality. This classification can confuse, especially in relation to

the notion of spirituality. Geddes developed an interest in Eastern religion and culture, not because he accepted its theology or mysticism, but because its holistic philosophy matched his own approach to an ecological understanding of societies as complex systems. Geddes' use of the term 'spirituality' is somewhat different and it is best understood by looking at the political distinction he made between state and nation.

Geddes wrote about the nation as being 'spiritual power' and the state 'temporal power'. By this, he meant that the nation consists of language, literature, music, poetry, common memories and aspirations – in other words, culture. Temporal power, the state, consists of the soldier, policeman, MP, tax gatherer and that 'mysterious functionary commonly known or unknown – as the bureaucrat'.¹⁰¹ It is temporal power that is represented by property and war; it is the instrument of crude materialism. Spiritual power, if uncorrupted by such materialism, embodies mutual aid and is the key to the evolution of society. As a result, human society needs collective instruments of learning embodied in universities (he coined the term 'University Militant' to describe the university that would play an integral role in the development of its community and region), exhibitions, the Outlook Tower (Geddes' own 'index museum' and 'sociological laboratory' in Edinburgh), and visual pageants etc. All of these Geddes experimented with as well as advocated. However, this collective engagement with learning can only be effective if individuals are psychologically equipped to benefit.¹⁰²

The key to this is in one of Geddes' most charming essays, 'Sunday Talks with my Children'.¹⁰³ In this he talked of 'Out-worlds' and 'In-worlds'. Out-worlds are experiences of the material world, facts, knowledge, action and observation. But they mean little until they are brought home inside the mind, the 'In-world', where they can be reflected on, interpreted and converted into both memories and plans for future actions. This 'In-world' is just as real as the 'Out-world' and helps shape it through a continual process of reflection and action. No individual can be effective unless they operate on both levels. For example,

... those who stay behind, in the house of memory, may become more and more learned, but they will never do very much. That, in fact, is what is wrong with too many educated people; that is why they feel paralysed, and can neither speak nor act though the occasion calls.¹⁰⁴

Thus 'the true, the complete education, the coming education ... must fit for both',¹⁰⁵ thought and action, work and learning.

Education is central to Geddes. He disliked instrumentalism, loathed formal assessment and qualifications and never took a degree himself, something that no doubt saved him from an orthodox academic career, despite his chair at Dundee. He disliked the increasing compartmentalization

of academic study, and felt that learning could not take place without action. These were encapsulated by his slogans '*vivendo discimus*' – by living we learn – and his replacement for the three Rs – the three Hs, heart, hand and head. Education, for Geddes, is about how people learn, rather than how they are taught and assessed. It is a way of nurturing the natural sense of wonder in a child and preserving it through life by the development of habitual observation, itself a factor in active involvement in the world. Given free reign in the last years of his life at his own international college in the south of France, students would spend as much time gardening as on formal study. If evolution depended on interaction with the environment, education could not foster change if it removed students to a remote place of limited and specialized learning. The development of the individual was the key to realizing Eutopia. Geddes is unusual in that he made individual mental development, including imagination, dreams and ideas, central to a theory of change. Yet, it is this, and the forms of collective memory that embody the spirit of a place, which underlies his concept of Civics.

Geddes is better known as one of the founders of town planning and his method of what he called valley sections and city survey only need to be outlined here. His main conception, the valley section, constitutes a natural region from which the city has emerged and with which it interacts harmoniously and symbiotically. The region needs to be analysed geographically (place), economically (work) and anthropologically (folk) to be able to understand its evolution. Certain types of occupation are found according to the location in the region. These are miner, woodman, hunter, shepherd, peasant, and fisher. In a harmonious society they are in balance. For Geddes, modern occupations are not new; they are fresh variants of the older types. So, the military and the state embody the nature of the hunter. Modern capitalism is also a reflection of the hunter, needing to be moderated by the more peaceful pastoralist occupations.

The city survey interprets this and visualizes the city as 'more than a place in space, it is a drama in time'.¹⁰⁶ Survey and interpretation allow an understanding of this historical drama. This is vital, as 'Understanding the present as the development of the past, are we not preparing also to understand the future as the development of the present?'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, development should be in harmony with the past, a technique he called 'conservative surgery', a participative planning process whereby the past is conserved as a collective heritage, not as a static museum piece, but adapted to new, living circumstances.¹⁰⁸ This is in complete and utter contrast to the obliteration of communities in, for example, 1960s slum clearance based on an imposed, brutalist architecture. In this way, Geddes advanced a theory of modernity that saw it as a development from the past rather than a complete breach with it and which retains it as memory whilst transforming it into something radically different.¹⁰⁹

Modernity, for Geddes, was, as for Reclus, the city. This was the essence of his politics. As he wrote in an unpublished manuscript,

Politics is here to be taken in the literal Aristotolean sense of city development. To restore to Politics its lost vision of the city is the practical objective of a revitalised social philosophy. The consequent policy of civic regeneration is concerned not with making Utopias but Eutopias. The former ideal is relevant to the abstract politics of metaphysical, juristic or mechanical tradition. It is in the concrete, 'nowhere'. But Eutopia is the place where the good life can be lived.¹¹⁰

However, the city could not be isolated from its region to which it both gave and received in equal measure. Again, following his evolutionary ideas, the city does not mark a breach with the rural past; it is a development from it. And if Kropotkin was correct that a breach with the countryside had led to the downfall of the medieval city-state, maintaining harmony with the region is essential to the continuance of a healthy Eutopian city.

This is not just a social necessity but an ecological one too. Geddes and Branford, in an unpublished manuscript, also claimed that deforestation was one of the causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire. They referred to a new study that saw 'the far more terrible ruin of old Italy, as indeed of all Mediterranean lands, from Spain to Greece ... through the destruction of forests; for thus it was that most favoured of regions became increasingly desolate, and is still so profoundly impoverished'.¹¹¹ This is the factor that was neglected by socialists and revolutionaries: 'This blindness of urban thought to rural reality persists also in all schools of Socialism'. They continued:

Surely it is a commonplace to every social geographer, that of all forms of rural development over Europe, it is the forest which most definitely thrives and prospers under collective ownership, that of the village, the town and city, the province or State also.

So for Marx and his successors to have thrown away this magnificent argument for collective ownership, is to our rural minds an amazing illustration of the limitation of urban thought. No wonder the peasant ... is little moved by the urban socialist ...

... this is why the 'red' revolution is now plainly evoking against it the green banner of the peasant.¹¹²

This green revolution is to spread and come to pass, 'Yet not by militancy, but the very reverse, the methods of reconstructive peace'. The ethics of agriculture is the nurturing of life. Urban revolutionaries are mechanistic, focused on money and rooted in force.

Whereas our regional and rural interpretation is far more at home than they are in the understanding and control of the physical environment, because also with more understanding of the organic and mental life, of social origins, and of the correspondence of ethical evolution ...

We also increasingly see why such revolutions also fail so seriously to realise the common weal they desire since their banner is of the warlike urban red, not of the peaceful rural green.¹¹³

The connection between city and countryside is material, ecological and mutually sustaining but, most importantly, it also embodies a peaceful, constructivist ethic. 'Such ethics is inseparable from its social applications: our ethical urges, our social and political endeavours all need reunion in life.'¹¹⁴

This ecological and regional approach is one that is well suited to anarchist thought and it is clear that Geddes was fully aware of it. Volker Welter writes:

Geddes never arrived at a well-defined idea of the boundaries of region-cities. He declares at one point that the boundaries of modern nations are 'essentially concepts of war, and of that passive, latent, potential war' which is connected with expansion. Boundaries and war are ultimately caused by the dominant position of the hunter and his descendants amongst the natural occupations. To constrain them requires that society be given a structure composed of region-cities, which in turn means basing societies on natural geographical regions ... Boundaries then lose their importance, and as they do so the importance of the urban center correspondingly rises ... Beyond the vague idea of a 'natural' or 'geographical' region, Geddes could safely ignore the definition of boundaries, as the future would render them superfluous.¹¹⁵

Boundaries are, of course, necessary for two things, private property and the nation state. And so, the anarchist Geddes emerges, the logical conclusion is that the essence of his regional vision is one of a society without government.

Geddes is important to anarchism in his insistence that evolution is a conscious process in which individual and collective ideas are paramount. But he could never simply be a monist. There was an element of technological determinism in his thinking too. His optimism for the future was buoyed by what he saw as technological changes that would enable this social evolution take place.¹¹⁶ The industrial revolution had been characterized by technology that he called *Paleotechnic*, analogous with the Paleolithic Old Stone Age. Geddes saw this being replaced by a new, *Neotechnic* age, just as the Neolithic age saw the introduction of settled agriculture. Much of this

was based on new technology, especially electricity, which would enable a new decentralized advanced industrial economy to grow to replace heavily polluting and exploitative mass manufacturing. The *Paleotechnic* mindset on volume and money would go and be replaced by a *Neotechnic* 'Vital Budget'.

Again, under the Paleotechnic order the working man, misdirected as he is like all the rest of us, by his traditional education towards money wages, instead of Vital Budget, has never yet had an adequate house, seldom more than half of what might make a decent one. But as the Neotechnic order comes in – its skill directed by life towards life, and for life – he, the working man, as in all true cities of the past aristocratised into productive citizen – he will set his mind towards house-building and town-planning, even towards city design; and all these upon a scale to rival – nay surpass – the past glories of history. He will demand and create noble streets of noble houses, gardens and parks; and before long monuments, temples of his renewed ideals, surpassing those of old.¹¹⁷

Geddes would have been disappointed that the promise of the new technologies only produced more and greater destruction in the twentieth century, though he would blame it on the continuance and strengthening of *Paleotechnic* mentality and power structures. However, he would not be the last person to express the view that technological change will usher in a qualitatively different society. His notion of life-enhancing technology was to be taken up in again in the wake of the growth of environmental awareness from the 1970s onward and, even if overly optimistic and deterministic, still seems relevant to the early twenty-first century.

The question remains as to Geddes' position in the anarchist tradition. I have no doubt he should be included and that he created an important alternative direction for anarchist theory and action. His Victorian moral earnestness is less appealing to modern libertarians, but he made a deep and distinctive shift away from a revolutionary class analysis towards a holistic philosophy of development without the state. Through it, he emphasized ecology as the basis of the relationship of humans with both the natural and the built environment. His vision of change was participatory, valued individuals and communities, and rested on both cultural and technological change. His vision of exchange was one that saw it as a system that shaped production, rather than one that manufactured needs. In valuing quality over quantity, he was advocating a very different type of political economy from mainstream progressive thought. Above all, the change he offered was practical, diverse, and was not a violent rupture with the past, but an organic and voluntary development from it. Though it was real change indeed, it was change that would be created from below and cushioned

by the familiar. It was anything other than the violent ruptures caused by globalized turbo-capitalism. His view of the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between the rural and urban is in stark contrast with the present-day urbanization of the developing world, based on rural impoverishment and vast shanties housing the displaced poor.

Yet Geddes did not reject the urban, he celebrated it. The maximizing of liberty and the optimizing of evolution could only take place in autonomous communities that can sustain advanced human culture and that means cities. Nor, despite his stress on continuities with the past, did he want to replicate it. The past may always be with us, but our liberation from it is just as important. That liberation would happen through the evolution of historical forms into very different variants of familiar themes. In this way, he was a modernist rather than a nostalgic, believing firmly in technological and intellectual progress. It is just that he advocated a qualitatively different model, based on a social evolution that mirrored that of the natural world. Development, for Geddes, could not be imposed, but unlike Kropotkin, he did not see it as a spontaneous result of revolution. Instead, spontaneity was to be replaced by planning. Geddes' idea of planning was not an imposed process. It was based on guidance rather than direction, on example, experimentation and mutual aid; it was to be driven from below rather than imposed from above. Town and city planning as envisaged by Geddes was not governmental, but a collaborative way of developing and evolving the life of cities to promote social development and enable each individual to be a free and active citizen. It was integral to his broader emancipatory philosophy.

Geddes' major contribution to the anarchist movement was to adapt Kropotkin and Reclus' environmentalism and bio-regionalism in ways that they may not have fully approved of. Those anarchists clinging to class struggle and a distinctively libertarian socialist ideology would certainly be uncomfortable with it. Yet, here were their main themes worked into a coherent and libertarian ideology that was no longer tied to a romantic, revolutionary or impossible strategy. Instead, Geddes developed a method that was inherently peaceful and pragmatic, even if only immediately realizable in those pockets Reclus had identified. On top of which, with its acceptance of market exchange and its emphasis on cultural change and individual intellectual development, it would not be unattractive to individualists. It was through Geddes that the possibility of synthesis was made apparent, even if it was neither fully developed nor accepted.

The continuing re-evaluation of Geddes' life and work and his growing reputation is firmly rooted in his continuing relevance to ecological thinking. Often described, perfectly fairly, as being difficult and obscure, Geddes also had a powerful and effective way of expressing the key issues of his day, and none are more apt and moving as his reflection on the dependence of humans on nature from his farewell lecture at Dundee:

For an example: How many people think twice about a leaf? Yet the leaf is the chief product and phenomenon of Life: this is a green world, with animals comparatively few and small, and all dependent on the leaves. By leaves we live. Some people have strange ideas that they live by money. They think energy is generated by the circulation of coins. Whereas the world is mainly a vast leaf colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass: and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests.¹¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Rudolph Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Freedom Press: London, 1988), p.26.
- 2 See Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914: Myths and Realities* (Pluto Press: London, 1976).
- 3 Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset (The Free Press, Macmillan: London and New York, 1962).
- 4 Ibid p.322.
- 5 Voltarine de Cleyre, ‘Anarchism’, in *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltarine de Cleyre – Anarchist, Feminist, Genius*, (eds), Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005), p.82.
- 6 Ibid p.78.
- 7 Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes. Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990), p.4.
- 8 Colin Ward, *Housing: an Anarchist Approach* (Freedom Press: London, 1976).
- 9 Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow. An intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, updated edn (Blackwell: Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1996), p.144.
- 10 Ibid p.145.
- 11 Jozef Keulartz, *Struggle for Nature: A Critique of Radical Ecology* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998), p.93.
- 12 Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition*, pp.11–12.
- 13 Marie Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-Century European Anarchism* (Croom Helm: London, 1979) and *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus*, introduction by George Woodcock (Black Rose Books: Montréal and New York, 1988).
- 14 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.180.
- 15 Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person: An Introduction to the Ideas and Life of Patrick Geddes* (Victor Gollanz Ltd: London, 1975), p.136.

- 16 John P. Clark and Camille Martin (eds), *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Lexington Books: Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Oxford, 2004).
- 17 See John Clark, *Municipal Dreams: a Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin's Politics* and Murray Bookchin, *Comments on the International Social Ecology Network Gathering and the 'Deep Social Ecology' of John Clark*, all from *Anarchy Archives: An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism*. CD copy burned 3 October 2001. Maintained by Dana Ward, Pitzer College, Claremont, California. Web address. http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives
- 18 John Clark and Camille Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, pp.19–20.
- 19 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, pp.205–6.
- 20 Ibid p.207.
- 21 Ibid p.208.
- 22 Ibid p.211.
- 23 Ibid p.212.
- 24 Quoted in Phillip Boardman, *Patrick Geddes – Maker of the Future* (University of North Carolina Press: Chaptel Hill, 1944), p.359.
- 25 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 26 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, pp.209–10.
- 27 Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, rev. edn. (Walter Scott: London, 1901), p.290.
- 28 Ibid p.290.
- 29 Ibid p.290.
- 30 Ibid p.287.
- 31 Elisée Reclus, *Why Anarchists Don't Vote*, from *Mother Earth*, (ed.) Emma Goldman (Anarchy Archives, An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism. CD copy burned 3 October 2001).
- 32 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 33 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, p.210.
- 34 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 35 Elisée Reclus, *Evolution and Revolution*, (3rd edn, International Publishing Company, London, 1886), p.1.
- 36 Elisée Reclus, *Evolution, Revolution, and the Anarchist Ideal*, in Clark and Martin, p.154.
- 37 Ibid p.154.
- 38 Ibid p.155.
- 39 John P. Clark and Camille Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, p.26.
- 40 Ibid p.26.
- 41 Ibid p.27.

- 42 Eliséé Reclus, *The Future of our Children*, reprinted in Joseph Ishill (ed.), *Eliséé and Elie Reclus – in Memoriam* (The Oriole Press: Berkeley Heights, NJ, 1927), pp.331–5.
- 43 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, pp.129–31.
- 44 Eliséé Reclus, *The Ideal and Youth* (James Tochatti: Liberty Press, London, 1895), p.9.
- 45 Ibid p.10.
- 46 Ibid p.10.
- 47 Ibid p.13.
- 48 Eliséé Reclus, *Progress*, in Clark and Martin, p.237.
- 49 Ibid p.239.
- 50 Eliséé Reclus, *The Great Kinship*, trans. by Edward Carpenter, introduction by Anne Cobden-Sanderson (The Oriole Press: Berkeley Heights, NJ, 1933), p.1.
- 51 Ibid p.1.
- 52 Eliséé Reclus, *On Vegetarianism*, in Clark and Martin, p.174.
- 53 Eliséé Reclus and Ernest Crosby, *The Meat Fetish: Two Essays on Vegetarianism*, (rev. edn, A. C. Fifield: London, 1905), p.30.
- 54 Eliséé Reclus, *The Feeling for Nature in Modern Society*, in Clark and Martin, p.127.
- 55 Ibid p.126.
- 56 Eliséé Reclus, *The History of Cities*, in Clark and Martin, p.182.
- 57 Ibid p.198.
- 58 Ibid p.189.
- 59 Ibid p.192.
- 60 For a celebrated critique of the effect of such planning on the modern city, see Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1965).
- 61 Eliséé Reclus, *The History of Cities*, in Clark and Martin, p.193.
- 62 Ibid p.195.
- 63 Ibid p.197.
- 64 Eliséé Reclus, *Anarchy*, in Clark and Martin, p.140.
- 65 Ibid p.140.
- 66 Ibid p.141.
- 67 Ibid pp.143–4.
- 68 See Frank G. Novak Jr, *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence* (Routledge: London and New York, 1995), esp. pp.27–30.
- 69 Geddes Archive T-GED 2/2/3.
- 70 Volker Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA and London, 2002), p.13.

- 71 Ibid pp.31–46.
- 72 Frank G. Novak Jr, *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes*, p.23.
- 73 Geddes Archive T-GED 2/2/39.
- 74 Geddes Archive T-GED 9/2074.
- 75 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/7/35.
- 76 Undoubtedly influenced by the theories of climate change put forward by the self-educated fellow Scot James Croll, whose major work, *Climate and Time*, was published in 1875.
- 77 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/1/19.
- 78 Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis*, p.20.
- 79 See for example Siân Reynolds, *Geography and Idealism: Patrick Geddes's anarchist friends: Elisée Reclus, Pierre Kropotkin* www.patrickgeddes.co.uk (last accessed 20 April 2005). Sadly, this article is no longer available online.
- 80 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/7/35.
- 81 Murdo Macdonald, 'Patrick Geddes: Environment and Culture', in Walter Stephen (ed.), *Think Global, Act Local: The Life and Legacy of Patrick Geddes* (Luath Press: Edinburgh, 2004), p.77.
- 82 For example, Geddes turned down a knighthood on 'democratic' principle in 1912. He accepted in 1931, shortly before his death, thinking that it may help him finance his projects.
- 83 Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, p.67.
- 84 This would fail in modern Greek pronunciation as 'eu' is pronounced 'ev' or 'ef'.
- 85 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, The Making of the Future Series (Williams and Norgate: London, 1919), p.87.
- 86 Ibid p.88.
- 87 Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, ed. by the Outlook Tower Association, Edinburgh and the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction, London, (new and rev. edn, Williams and Norgate: London, 1949), p.150.
- 88 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, p.100.
- 89 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *The Coming Polity: A Study in Reconstruction*, The Making of the Future Series (Williams and Norgate: London, 1917), p.v.
- 90 Patrick Geddes, *The Conditions of Progress of the Capitalist and the Labourer* (Co-operative Printing Company Ltd: Edinburgh, 1886), p.7.
- 91 Ibid p.7.
- 92 Ibid p.9.
- 93 Patrick Geddes, *An Analysis of the Principles of Economics (Part 1)* (Williams and Norgate: London and Edinburgh, 1885), p.28.
- 94 Ibid p.28.
- 95 Patrick Geddes, *The Conditions of Progress*, p.30.

- 96 Ibid p.32.
- 97 Ibid p.35.
- 98 Ibid pp.25–6.
- 99 Ibid p.34.
- 100 Patrick Geddes, *Co-operation versus Socialism* (Co-operative Printing Society Ltd: Manchester, 1888), p.11.
- 101 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *The Coming Polity*, p.153.
- 102 Here, as in much of his writing on thought and memory, he is drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, particularly the relationship between reality, perception and action in *Matter and Memory*, authorized trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (George Allen and Unwin: London and Macmillan: New York, 1911).
- 103 Patrick Geddes, ‘*The World Without and the World Within: from Sunday Talks with my Children*’, in *Cities in Evolution*, pp.205–13.
- 104 Ibid p.208.
- 105 Ibid p.208.
- 106 Patrick Geddes, ‘Civics: As Applied Sociology 1’, in Helen E. Meller (ed.), *The Ideal City* (Leicester University Press, 1979), p.79.
- 107 Ibid p.80.
- 108 The concept of conservative surgery was the source of another recent misjudgement. Klaus and Rignall see Geddes as ‘more of a “conservative revolutionary” than a man of the Left’. John Rignall and H. Gustav Klaus with Valentine Cunningham (eds), *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left* (Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, 2012), pp.5–6.
- 109 Again, this reflects the influence of Bergson. ‘But to reach the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness, continuing and retaining the past in a present enriched by it, thus escapes the law of necessity, the law which ordains that the past shall ever follow itself in a present which merely repeats it in another form, and that all things shall ever be flowing away.’ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p.313. In the same way, Geddes develops a theory of history that is both evolutionary and transformative.
- 110 Geddes Archive T-GED 4/6/6.
- 111 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *A Contribution of Social Science towards Industrial and Social Relationships*, T-GED 3/1/16.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis*, p.73.
- 116 This insistence on the importance of technological progress and new forms of industrial society is a significant difference between him and the post-industrialism of writers like Coomaraswamy who combined

anti-capitalism with anti-industrialization, something that Geddes rejected. For a short summary of Coomaraswamy's views see Alan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, pp.123-44.

117 Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, pp.37-8.

118 Patrick Geddes, 'A Botanist Looks at the World', in *Cities in Evolution*, pp.216-17.

7

Conclusion

Anarchism was to find echoes in all later non-Marxist radical ideas. The anarchist movement itself did not disappear and was boosted by the events of the Spanish Civil War, creating an historical discourse of revolution and betrayal. Post-war it continued as a small subset of the left, posing awkward questions for their ideological presumptions and offering anti-statist alternatives. Individualism persisted, too, as left libertarianism – a critical voice agitating for social justice and free markets against mainstream libertarianism’s too-eager acceptance of corporate economic power. Elsewhere, anarchist ideas also permeated the peace movement as it waxed and waned in tune with the intensity of the threat of international conflict. Gandhi’s Tolstoyan model of non-violence and village-centred development also gathered support. Cultural movements from Dada to Punk mined an anarchistic heritage, though one that would be hardly recognized by its earnest Victorian founders. More prosaically, the part of the town planning movement that drew ideas from Howard, Geddes and Mumford carried forward a highly pragmatic version. Both collectivist and individualist versions of anarchism informed different strands of feminism. It was to be resurrected again as Green politics and articulated as part of the movement challenging globalized capitalism. Anarchists are now fighting, sometimes literally, against austerity politics in Europe and the resurgence of the far right. Anarchism is a living tradition.

This tradition has a long pedigree. It is part of a continuing critique of conventional notions of progress that developed in reaction to the growth of industrial capitalist society. Its roots lie in the ideologies of the early nineteenth century in what was one position in a wide-ranging debate about government and economy, one that combined a preference for liberty with hostility to the state. In Britain, this critique was expressed through the work of William Godwin and the Ricardian Socialists, most notably Thomas Hodgskin. However, it was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who developed this position into a recognizably anarchist discourse. There were three key elements to his analysis.

First, Proudhon was a vehement anti-capitalist. Drawing on Sismondi's description of under-consumption and Comte and Dunoyer's class analysis, he built his economic theories on a concept of universal just property, which he referred to as *possession*, a right based on usufruct. It was through this idea of extensive ownership that he sought to resolve the paradox of the productive and unproductive classes – that those who worked most starved, whilst those who worked least prospered.

Secondly, Proudhon's untrammelled hostility to the state related to its role as the protector of the unproductive classes and as the institutional guardian of injustice. That the state itself was an unproductive expropriator was the foundation of his belief that, even in different hands, it was incapable of reform and could never be an instrument of justice. The state would always be rooted in violence, deny liberty to its subjects, and impose the interests of the strong on the weak. Interestingly too, he saw the state as a corrupter of morals and work as morally redemptive. This conservative sheen to his work has helped publish many deeply mistaken interpretations, but it also the key to the third major aspect of his thought, the rejection of a notion of progress based on continuous economic growth.

Proudhon was one of the early advocates of limits to growth and thus he rejected both the economic and moral basis of mainstream nineteenth-century political economy. Instead, he proffered an alternative based on ownership for use and fair and free exchange – mutualism. This mutualism would not only ensure a just reward for labour, it would build collaboration and develop a complex, mutually dependent economy, which would mitigate the worst aspects of human nature. Competition and the division of labour would be transformed from instruments of exploitation into their proper role as the creators of a modern, collaborative economy. Such mutualism would eventually lead to layers of global collaboration through federalism.

Proudhon died in January 1865 when it was already becoming apparent that there was a different stream of anarchist thought emerging. Whereas Proudhon had rejected political action in favour of economic direct action, Bakunin, and later Kropotkin, favoured spontaneous revolution. Influenced by the revolutionary collectivism of the socialist movement, they rejected the state *and* all forms of property, including Proudhon's notion of possession. The paradox of just and unjust property was to be resolved by property's abolition. For anarcho-communists, property was the embodiment of injustice. Advocates of revolution sought a resolution of the conflicts that Proudhon saw as permanent and antagonistic, only capable of reaching a state of equilibrium through continuous social progress. Whilst Christian anarchists clung to the idea of non-violent social transformation, the bulk of the movement saw violence as a necessity. Anarchist communism was to develop as a faction of the revolutionary left.

This association with violent revolution has left anarchism with a negative image in the popular imagination. Anarchism became synonymous with bombs. The small group of anarchist terrorists in the late nineteenth century are now seen as stereotypical of the movement as a whole. I remember the title a *Guardian* sub-editor gave a review of a number of books on anarchism in total disregard of their contents: 'With a knapsack full of bombs – can violence ever be justified?'¹ As Clark and Martin argue in their critique of Reclus' position on violence, the acts of outrage themselves 'were a miserable failure', provoking repression and reaction, achieving nothing and creating lasting damage to anarchism's image that stigmatizes it to this day.²

Anarchist communism was not uncontested. In the late nineteenth century, it was one of two strands of libertarian thought with the individualist movement, closer to both Proudhon and the early nineteenth-century writers, posing an alternative to collectivism through universal self-employment and property ownership. The two not only co-existed as rivals, but there were also commonalities in ideas, continued debate and close personal contacts. However, there was an increasing tendency for each to deny the validity of the anarchism of the other and their historical development was to take them on increasingly divergent paths. Individualism itself was a broad church and consisted of explicit anarchists, such as Albert Tarn and Henry Seymour, and 'fellow travellers', like Wordsworth Donisthorpe and Auberon Herbert. Despite Seymour's occasional lapses into blood-curdling rhetoric, the overwhelming basis of the movement was non-violent, especially with Herbert's absolute pacifism.

Their cautious and peaceful advocacy of economic action lacked the spectacular appeal and impact of romantic revolution and perhaps this is one of the reasons for their relative neglect by historians. Individualism has a limited presence in the historiography of British anarchism and is widely misunderstood. The history of the left became dominated by collectivism and anarchist communism offered a familiar discourse, though without a role for the state. Individualism rejected both the state and collectivism, thereby denying itself a place within the labour movement, and can thus seem anomalous to the historian. Above all, the rise of the modern, urban, mass society made collectivism appear both relevant and practical and it dominated the twentieth century. History is kinder to victors than the vanquished.

Later, with the rise of neo-liberalism, individualism seemed to be a precursor of the Thatcherite right rather than a libertarian alternative to it. Advocacy of private property and free markets lost their meaning when stripped of their nineteenth-century context. Arguably, unquestioning collectivism has allowed the left to abandon vast areas of its natural, libertarian territory to political rivals who have adapted it to differing ends. It is intriguing to see that the collectivist anarchist Colin Ward acknowledged the

areas of common ground between himself and David Green, the Director of the Health and Welfare Unit at the Institute of Economic Affairs. Ward disapproved of the fact that 'there was no place for him [Green] on the political Left' as a critic of 'the automatic assumptions of the political Left and its faith in the State'.³

Individualism and anarchist communism shared a number of features. Both were hostile to capitalism and, especially, the rise of the corporation. In particular, they were critical of the nature of the wage system and the alienation of the products of labour from the producer. 'Wagedom', as Donisthorpe called it, was thought to be a regime that was exploitative and reduced the worker to little more than a slave. Both varieties, too, shared a particular class analysis that saw an intimate relationship between political power and modern capitalism. The state was also seen, in essence, as an expression of the power of a dominant class, however that class was constituted. It was in itself inevitably exploitative. Both variants denied the existence of a social contract or that democratic government could ever express a general will or lead to an explicit consent to be governed. As such, neither of the two movements saw political action through the state as in any way being a process of liberation. This could only come through voluntary and spontaneous direct action by the people themselves. Above all, both movements had heretical views on the great Victorian religion of progress. Despite this, the possibility of cultural and intellectual progress was central to their beliefs; they were, for instance, both trenchant advocates of gender equality and they rejected a purely material concept of progress based on unending economic growth fuelled by consumerism.

However, the differences were no less profound. Central to the dispute between the two was the concept of property. Individualism drew on an older tradition that viewed forms of property as a guarantor of individual independence and economic security and as a device that ensured that the full value of labour was gained by the labourer. The distinction individualists drew was between valid and invalid forms of property. For communists, property was in itself a system of expropriation and an institution founded in injustice, which perpetuated exploitation. It was an unbridgeable chasm. This fundamental disparity fuelled all the other differences between them. On distribution and exchange, communists relied on the old slogan of 'to each according to their needs', denying the necessity of any formal system of exchange at all. Individualists placed exchange at the centre of their political economy, basing it on contract and free currencies. This, in turn, was reflected in contrasting views of social organization. Communists relied on spontaneous collectivist organization, individualists on mutualism, universal self-employment and an end to monopoly or the possibility of monopolization. Implicit in both these approaches was the need for different methods of social change. A propertyless society was seen as the product of a universal revolution, whilst individualism

eschewed revolutionary upheaval in favour of economic self-organization and a change of individual consciousness through self-education and social evolution.

Despite these deep divisions continuing and developing, a new position began to emerge around the turn of the nineteenth century. Its emphasis was on ecology and evolution, locating left libertarianism within an understanding of humanity's relationship with the natural and the built environment. Drawing on Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus was the first to develop this perspective, though he never abandoned his own revolutionary communism. It was his younger friend and collaborator, the Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes, who fully articulated this new approach as a form of bio-regionalism allied to social and intellectual evolution. In doing so, he broke with the confines of a class analysis to root notions of social progress within a holistic approach to human and natural ecology. The omission of Geddes from the anarchist pantheon is especially curious as he is one of the few figures who represent a direct transmission of ideas from the classical anarchists to the present day via his self-confessed disciple, Lewis Mumford. Mumford in turn strongly influenced Murray Bookchin and the English anarchist Colin Ward cited them both as major sources.

Ultimately both individualist and communist anarchism came from the same school; both were grand narratives of a remade world. Equally, they rested in their own ways on a faith in two myths, the revolution as a way of remaking people and society or the evolutionary possibilities of continuous human social and intellectual improvement. Such ideas became unfashionable in a pragmatic age in search of 'what works', complacently basking in the apparent permanence of consumerist industrial progress.

As history forgot to end at the start of the twenty-first century, the nature of this progress is once again being contested. Economic and ecological crises have stimulated a vibrant protest movement and a ferment of new thinking. Many of the arguments and alternatives of the new movements are comparable to those of the nineteenth-century anarchists. Partly this is unconscious – in facing similar dilemmas, they have independently reached similar conclusions – but at other times there is a deliberate rediscovery of older ideas. Whilst the idea of total revolutionary transformation is as far away as ever, there are several highly pertinent anarchist discourses that are being articulated anew in a number of different settings. This is becoming the era of an anarchism of small things.

First, the individualist and mutualist emphasis on exchange is not just in opposition to communism – it is a standing critique of neo-liberal market thinking. Whilst fair trade has been contrasted with free trade, one of the most interesting of recent trends is the revival of the notion of currency reform. The individualist anarchist idea of free competition in currencies has even sparked a recent cause célèbre with the prosecution of Bernard von NotHaus for producing his own competing US currency, the Liberty Dollar.

Perhaps his conviction is a vindication of the individualists' insistence on the potency of such actions, particularly given the prosecutor's description of von NotHaus as a 'domestic terrorist'.⁴ The whole issue of the control of currency also brings into question the role of debt and credit in precipitating the financial crash.

On a macro level, David Graeber's anthropological study of debt proposes the revival of the Babylonian custom of periodic debt forgiveness – a jubilee – to eliminate debt bondage. Guido Giacomo Preparata⁵ sees a solution in the revival of the idea of Silvio Gesell and Rudolph Steiner of time-limited currencies, preventing accumulation of either wealth or debt and thereby curbing speculative market instability. At the micro level, David Boyle⁶ recognizes that we do have an existing multiplicity of systems of exchange and currency and argues for their 'rapid expansion ... driven by the urgent need to find ways of rebuilding social networks and supporting small businesses...'.⁷ The growth in community-based currencies, credit unions and micro-banking as a response to both the financial crisis and the conditions that led to it points to the prescience of the individualist anarchists and the possibility of collaborative and localized market exchange.

And there is something else too. These systems of exchange are the structures that enable what David Graeber has called 'everyday communism' to flourish. Nothing to do with property ownership, he writes of it as 'the foundation of all human sociability',⁸ a rough-and-ready sense of justice, of mutual aid and obligation and, above all a moral principle:

... once we start thinking of communism as a principle of morality rather than just a question of property ownership, it becomes clear that this sort of morality is almost always at play to some degree in any transaction – even commerce.⁹

So here is another glimpse of synthesis, of localized free exchange producing the sociability and mutual aid of collaborative and self-regulating communities, a unity between communism and exchange.

Secondly, this doesn't mean that we should forget property. This was a central concern of anarchists and their debate illuminates many of the key issues of our times. Peasant ownership of land has been seen as a key to food production and rural development, whilst security of tenure in urban areas is central to the development of sustainable communities. This is a challenge to the anarchist communist tradition that took the absolutist position that the abolition of property and the ending of exchange was the only way to social equality and justice. However, there is also a cogent argument to be made in favour of communally controlled common resources. Arguably, we need not take a simplistically monist position on property. As J. H. Levy pointed out, individual ownership cannot flourish

without some form of collective property alongside it. After all, the private house is of little use without the public street.

What anarchism also does is to question the way in which collective property is held. Neo-liberalism has exposed the failings of the Fabian conception of the state. The state may hold collective property, but that gives no right of ownership to the people who use it. As conventional property rights include the ultimate right of disposal, then it has proved perfectly possible for states to dispose of collective property at will, regardless of the interests of the citizens. This is why anarchists and anti-privatization campaigners have looked at alternative methods of collective property holding, for example through co-operatives and municipalization. Changing the nature of property relations and extending control over collective property would also, Green thinkers insist, allow for the empowerment of communities to regulate and control their local ecosystems. Extensive property holding, they argue, is a way to create ecological sustainability.

Thirdly, the early anarchists were critics of the new forms of corporate organization, and in an age when, as Noreena Hertz points out, 'fifty one of the hundred biggest economies in the world are now corporations, only forty nine are nation states',¹⁰ this opposition to collective economic power is also highly pertinent. But it is not simply the powerful economic and political positions of corporations that matters, the way those corporations are run should also concern us. As Nick Cohen memorably put it in his polemic in defence of free speech: 'Every time you go into your workplace, you leave a democracy and enter a dictatorship.'¹¹ Managerialism is a cult of leadership and a system of hierarchy that makes the kind of demands on staff that would please the most dedicated Stalinist. It pervades the public sector as much as the private. Anarchism, together with its own methods of organization, stands as witness to the dysfunction of bureaucratic power structures and poses alternatives.

After the explosion of individual freedoms from the 1960s onwards, there has been a backlash. Feminists are facing the need to refight old battles, free speech is under pressure from a new round of religious intolerance fed by fear of the violence of believers, and, less significantly, there is an increase in measures of social control. As well as seemingly endless moral panics on crime and anti-social behaviour, people are currently assailed by a range of initiatives from binge drinking to obesity,¹² all designed to change individual conduct. The fourth way in which anarchism contributes to modern politics is to take issue with the current fashion for the curtailment of liberty. This 'over-regulation' was the target of the polemics of many nineteenth-century libertarians. The individualists provide a rich seam of trenchant criticisms of both the effectiveness and the intentions behind governmental attempts at social reform, seeing them as an expression of class interest. They also set the pattern for a libertarian critique of some of the authoritarian left's most

favoured themes. For example, Wendy McElroy, the modern libertarian feminist, provocatively challenges what she sees as the authoritarian and statist impulses in radical feminism. Her book defending pornography¹³ is typical of her assaults on conventional, and authoritarian, wisdom. McElroy is well aware of the historical context of her critique and directly draws from libertarian feminist history.¹⁴

Finally, there is the anarchist notion of direct action. To see this solely in terms of street protest is mistaken. It also refers to a highly practical and experimental tradition, which involves people creating their own anarchist spaces where they can develop collective and individual structures that they both own and control. Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward, in particular, have explored the history of these traditions of direct action and experimentation.¹⁵ Its legacy is to be found in community businesses, squatters' movements, low-impact environmental lifestyles, etc. Ward asserted that this tradition is a strong one with deep roots in the Victorian period. It provided an alternative model of social welfare that was ignored by the triumph of Fabian statism.

When we compare the Victorian antecedents of our public institutions with the organs of working-class mutual aid in the same period, the very names speak volumes. On the one side the Workhouse, the Poor Law Infirmary, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in Accordance with the Principles of the Established Church; and on the other, the *Friendly Society*, the *Sick Club*, the *Co-operative Society*, the *Trade Union*. One represents the traditions of fraternal and autonomous associations springing up from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above.¹⁶

Self-help, outside the global economy, is both a survival technique and a way of confronting and challenging the power of that economy, but, above all, it is one that is not imposed and, being constructed and owned by those it serves, cannot be removed by a passing ideological fancy. It can also be an effective political strategy in a world free of grand narratives. As Colin Ward put it:

And the extent to which we choose, or accept, or are fobbed off with, or lack the imagination or inventiveness to discover alternatives to, authoritarian solutions to small problems is the extent to which we are their powerless victims in big affairs. We are powerless to change the course of events over the nuclear arms race, imperialism and so on, precisely because we have surrendered our power over everything else.¹⁷

For Proudhon and the later individualists, the mere practice of mutualism was itself a revolutionary act. Communists clung to the necessity of a

transformational revolution, although they also recognized the possibilities of the everyday exercise of mutual aid. It was Patrick Geddes who made the transition between theory and practice by developing a radical pragmatism, techniques of making small changes that nevertheless revolutionized the lives of individuals and communities.

Overall, the great contribution that these anarchists made to the political thinking of their time was their rejection of the conventional notion of material progress. Instead, they insisted on an alternative form of human progress as both the cause and result of social change. The type of progress they espoused was highly particular. It was rooted in intellectual and cultural development, the establishment of justice and the maximization of liberty. Human improvement certainly lay in science and technology, but it was also to be shaped by moral and ethical qualities. A future utopia of material abundance was a chimera, as too was a civilization based on increasing consumption regardless of need. Yet, human beings were capable of choosing to live in better ways, in material comfort certainly, but also as equals, without hierarchy and in balance with the natural world. Work may be inescapable, but is also sociable and enjoyable if it is undertaken without exploitation. The possibility of intellectual achievement is boundless. Above all, anarchists rejected the capitalist's sophistry that public good would spring from personal greed. Instead, they saw ruinous exploitation of the people and the planet enriching the few.

In this way, anarchism speaks to today in ways that are only too comprehensible. Rather than promising instantaneous transformation, a reinvented anarchism without adjectives offers the possibility of practical action that develops spheres of liberty within the system, without abandoning the hope that it may one day replace it. The American historian Christopher Lasch made an interesting distinction between optimism and hope. Optimism he saw as 'a blind faith that things will somehow work out for the best'.¹⁸ However, 'Hope does not demand a belief in progress. It demands a belief in justice: a conviction that the wicked will suffer, that wrongs will be made right ... Hope implies a deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it.'¹⁹ Furthermore, hope does not 'prevent us from expecting the worst. The worst is what the hopeful are prepared for.'²⁰

Anarchism is a doctrine of hope. It may reject injustice but does not offer a future imagined utopia; instead, it invites people to create their own lives, freely and without coercion. It celebrates and values all human life and, often realistically, faces the human predicament. However idiosyncratic some of the ideas that have sprung from it are, it is hardly surprising that at a time of global ecological, economic and political crisis it is being rediscovered.

Notes

- 1 *The Guardian* (9 April 2005).
- 2 John P. Clark and Camille Martin (eds), *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, p.67.
- 3 Colin Ward, *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response* (Freedom Press: London, 1996), p.15.
- 4 <http://www.fbi.gov/charlotte/press-releases/2011/defendant-convicted-of-minting-his-own-currency> (accessed 4 November 2012).
- 5 Guido Giacomo Preperata, 'Of Money, Heresy and, Surrender, Part I: The Ways of our System, an Outline', *Anarchist Studies* (Vol. 17 No.1, 2009), pp.18–47 and 'Of Money, Heresy and, Surrender, Part II: A plea for Regional and Perishable Currency', *Anarchist Studies* (Vol. 18 No.1, 2010), pp.9–39.
- 6 David Boyle, *More Than Money: Platforms for Exchange and Reciprocity in Public Services* (New Economics Foundation and NESTA: London, 2011).
- 7 *Ibid* p.24.
- 8 David Graeber, *Debt* (Chapter Five), Kindle location 1960.
- 9 *Ibid* (Chapter Five), Kindle location 2077.
- 10 Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Takeover, Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (Arrow Books: London, 2001), p.8.
- 11 Nick Cohen, *You Can't Read This Book: Censorship in an Age of Freedom* (Fourth Estate: London, 2011), p.149.
- 12 Thereby neatly sidestepping growing evidence of the more serious impact on health of inequality and poverty.
See e.g. Richard G. Wilkinson, *The Impact of Inequality: How to make Sick Societies Healthier* (Routledge: London, 2005) and Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Penguin: London, 2010).
- 13 Wendy McElroy, *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1995).
- 14 See Wendy McElroy (ed.), *Freedom, Feminism and the State*, second edn. (The Independent Institute: Oakland, CA, 1991).
- 15 See for example Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward, *Arcadia for All. The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (Mansell, 1984) and Colin Ward, *Cotters and Squatters: Housing's Hidden History* (Five Leaves: Nottingham, 2002).
- 16 Colin Ward, *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response*, p.9.
- 17 Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Five Leaves: Nottingham, 2003), p.55.
- 18 Christopher Lasch, *The True and only Heaven*, p.81.
- 19 *Ibid* pp.80–1.
- 20 *Ibid* p.81.

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