

Everyone against the One...

CONTR'UN

Special



MUTUALISM:
ASK ME ANYTHING

Writings by Shawn P. Wilbur

This issue of Contr'un includes the useful sections of a weeklong "Ask Me Anything" session on Reddit, together with various similar exchanges on various social media sites.

I AM A NEO-PROUDHONIAN ANARCHIST/MUTUALIST.

ASK ME ANYTHING.

I'm Shawn P. Wilbur. I was one of the early adopters, along with folks like Kevin Carson, of mutualist anarchism as it reemerged in recent years. I started with an interest in the North American mutualism of figures like William B. Greene, the *equitable commerce* of Josiah Warren, and the adaptations of mutualism in individualist anarchism, before starting to seriously explore the French roots of mutualism. I was blown away by the richness of the early anarchist tradition and have spent a number of years now researching, archiving and translating material, as well as adapting the anarchist theory of that early period to contemporary questions.

When I talk about “neo-Proudhonian” anarchism, or “mutualism,” what I mean is a political philosophy and social science derived in large part from the mature, “constructive” period of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s career (roughly from 1853 to his death early in 1865), but subject to a sort of challenge that Proudhon left us when he claimed that if he could live a thousand years, his thought would always progress in accordance with a couple of basic, anarchistic principles. On the one hand, I’m interested in understanding the details of the neglected social science he left us in works like *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, and on the other I’m always trying to imagine how that would have changed had Proudhon and others been laboring at it all the years that the anarchist movement has essentially neglected it.

Some basic principles: The heart of Proudhon’s “social system” - all of it really - was a sort of “anarchic encounter,” between “equals” (in standing, not in any other sense, so put away Procrustes’ bed...), on a social terrain not tilted or otherwise shaped by any sort of *governmentalism*. Instead, we have “mutuality,” understood as something like a very, very demanding version of the Golden Rule.

I’ll be in and out of the forum all week, so... AMA.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF MUTUALISM AND SOME OF THE OTHERS? MY SENSE IS THAT YOUR BROAD CATEGORY HAS MORE SPLITS THAN MOST OTHER PERSPECTIVES AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY. IS IT SOMEHOW TRACKED TO HOW THE GROWTH OF YOUR COLLABORATIONS IS INDEXED BY THE USE OF THE INTERNET TO MEET? The new forms of mutualism have this funny problem. Mutualism is really old and really new at the same time. It arose at a time when there wasn't much point in being sectarian about anarchism, has been the school that every up and coming school has had to differentiate itself from along the way, and then has emerged into an era where we are both obsessed with labels and sloppy about details.

So we've all been trying to *be mutualists* and figure out what that means at the same time. And because the most recent, arguably least "mutualist" elements of our history have been most available, translated into English, etc., we latched onto those first and then some of us dug deeper and some didn't. So mutualism reemerged in Tuckerite form, then in the form of William B. Greene's work, and then developed some of Proudhon's complexity, and then, for a few of us, developed a character, drawn from a lot of digging, that made "mutualism" not even necessary as a label, since we had dug back to the roots of anarchism itself.

If you look, for example, at what Kevin Carson is doing, in comparison to what I'm doing, the historical inspirations are drawn from radically different periods in anarchist history. Then add in the fact that people have come to "mutualism" from all over the present political spectrum, and you can see why we have the sort of chaos that we do.

What unites us, I think, is that there is, across the board, interesting and often even useful pillaging going on, from parts of the tradition that otherwise wouldn't get much play.

I guess the other way to think about the divergences, in terms of the effects of the internet and such, is that the form of mutualism is very much like a lot of the very new movements. In the failure to form a theoretical core while developing fairly strong personal ties (positive and negative) mutualism looks like, say, post-anarchism. But there is a strong nerd-factor in mutualism, so we have individuals trying hard to get the details right as well. The result is naturally chaos, with the "identity" of the "movement" being not much more than a common entry point into very diverse projects.

HOW DO MUTUALISTS RESPOND TO ANARCHISTS WHO WANT TO CONFLATE MUTUALIST FORMS OF ANARCHISM WITH CAPITALISM? I'M NOT A MUTUALIST, BUT I GET TIRED OF EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE TO OTHER ANARCHISTS AND LIBERTARIANS.

That's such a common criticism, I'll go ahead and tackle it. I think most of those who imagine mutualism is something like "self-managed capitalism" bring a very different set of assumptions about markets and capitalism to the table. For those whose anti-capitalism is informed by Proudhon, the key issue is the *droit d'aubaine* or "right of increase." Aubaine means "windfall," more or less, and the argument is that capitalism requires a particular property relation, according to which the capitalist is the default claimant for the products of collective labor, as well as anything that "falls" their way thanks to an uneven economic playing field. This is as central to mutualism as, for example, the concern about "the commodity form" is to those influenced by Marx. It means that mutualists, at least of our school, think about the question of "markets" a little differently than many of our social anarchist comrades -- and differently from many "market anarchists" as well. While markets are not necessarily central to mutualism, the role of markets is a clearly separate question from the question of capitalism.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE RIGHT OF INCREASE? I'M THINKING ABOUT GIVING *WHAT IS PROPERTY?* ANOTHER GO. WHAT WORKS DO YOU RECOMMEND TO GET ME STARTED IN MUTUALISM?

What is Property? is a great book, but it's also a difficult book, with a peculiar organization. If you want to understand that question about aubaines, or the right of increase, that's mostly early in the work, and pretty straightforward, at least after a reading or two. The "mathematical" proofs of property's "impossibility" are tougher sledding, I think, so if you bog down there, skip to the last sections on the "third form of society" and, again, read carefully.

To try to get an overview, I think the book chapter on "Self-Government and the Citizen-State," which is linked above, is a pretty decent crash-course.

His style is varied, which poses its own problems. I would love to do a revised translation of *What is Property?* sometime, since Tucker skimmed over some amusing wordplay in places, but there's no changing the fact that it's a difficult work.

WHY FOCUS ON RECIPROCITY AS A CORE VALUE? WHY NOT OTHER VALUES LIKE AUTONOMY, EQUALITY OR VOLUNTARINESS? (NOT TO SAY THAT RECIPROCITY CAN'T ENVELOP THOSE OR OTHERS)

All of those values resemble each other, of course, and *equality* is already part of what we mean by *mutual* or *reciprocal*. But anarchism emerged as a specific critique of governmentalism, which Proudhon identified with what he called "external constitution." For example, the State pretends to be the thing, outside of society, which *constitutes* society. But Proudhon's position was that nothing external to our mutual relations could realize or constitute those relations. We have various instances of that "anarchic encounter," without any external criteria by which we could privilege either party, so whatever we build on that basis either has to be mutual (equal in terms of standing, reciprocal, genuinely voluntary, etc.) or it has to fall into the realm of some kind of *governmentalism*.

If we're thinking about this simple, horizontal model of society without government, mutuality or reciprocity seems like an easy way to begin to talk about what's important. A notion like autonomy might be important to mutualists in other contexts, but more when it is a question of dealing with the consequences of coming together mutually.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON IAIN MCKAY'S PROUDHON ANTHOLOGY? IS IT WORTH GETTING? I'M TAKING A CLASS ON MARX AND THE PROFESSOR RECENTLY CALLED PROUDHON'S WORK "SHIT" IN PASSING AND SAID THAT PROUDHON FUNDAMENTALLY MISUNDERSTANDS HEGEL IN *THE PHILOSOPHY OF POVERTY*. AS WE HAVEN'T READ IT (OR *THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY*) YET, I WAS WONDERING IF YOU THINK THAT THERE IS ANY TRUTH TO THE LATTER CLAIM?

Iain's anthology is great in many ways. I was very happy to do a part of the project, although I would undoubtedly have done things differently. It lacks the philosophical and methodological

material, and as it is very much a communist's-eye-view of mutualism, that's a bit of a problem. For a quick intro to the philosophy/method issues, you might look at "The Heart of Proudhon's thought."¹ For an important disagreement about the material from The Theory of Property that was included, check out "What is certain is that property is to be regenerated among us."²

In terms of the use or misuse of Hegel, don't sweat it. Proudhon did misuse Hegel and probably misused Kant, but he did it in the process of *very ably* continuing a conversation among socialists whose names we don't generally remember. Most of what we think of as Hegelian and Kantian elements in Proudhon's thought really owe more to Charles Fourier and Pierre Leroux. Your professor likely doesn't know those names, and almost certainly doesn't know the work after *The System of Economic Contradictions* either.

We spend way too damn much time focused on a couple of paragraphs from one of Proudhon's books, in really boring contexts, when most of the fun is elsewhere.

SOMETHING THAT ATTRACTED ME TO MUTUALISM AS I WAS DISCOVERING MYSELF WAS THE PROMOTION OF ETHICAL POSITIONS FIRST AND THE SUBSEQUENT APPLICATION INTO SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL PLATFORMS FROM THERE. THIS MAKES THINGS AWFULLY MUDDY FOR THOSE THAT MIGHT BE CURIOUS ABOUT IT AS THERE IS NO WAY TO SAY "MUTUALISTS BELIEVE XXX". WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE BEST WAY TO EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE WHAT MUTUALISM (TODAY) IS? ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING HOW VARIED WE CAN BE.

Since mutualism reemerged in the context of the anarchist vs. capitalist debates of the last couple of decades, it's easy to assume it's a primarily economic doctrine. And since nobody has remembered much about mutualists but the mutual bank, it's that much easier. In terms of our variations, there's nothing to do but point to the fact that contemporary mutualism is still in its exploratory phase and that, as with the anarchist movement in general, exploration tends to break down any party lines pretty quickly.

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We may be pushing a bit past the emphasis on ethics as such, although it seemed natural to focus there as an alternative to economics. There's a whole social science in Proudhon, and a philosophy to ground it, which, if we keep pursuing it, keep pushing us towards refining what *anarchism* itself means.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROUDHONIAN AND NEO-PROUDHONIAN?

Well, the reason for the "neo" in my case has been to emphasize the focus on present concerns, even if I spend a lot of time digging around in the historical material. I reserve the right to be unfaithful to a lot of the details of Proudhon's application, while sticking close to the principles that seem to be central to his work. A real "Proudhonism" would probably betray the progressive, experimental nature of Proudhon's work.

WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED BY THE TACTICS AND STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY NEO-PROUDHONIANS TO EFFECT SOCIAL CHANGE. HAS THERE BEEN SUCCESS?

In a lot of ways it's too early to say. A lot of the social change we're likely to be involved in right now is a matter of shifting discourses. It's unglamorous work, and it certainly doesn't address even my own social and economic needs directly at this point. But I like to think that one of the reasons that we're having this conversation is that the handful of us that claim the label have been a bit diligent about applying that ethic of mutuality to our interactions with others.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON "ANARCHO-CAPITALISM" AND "VOLUNTARISM"?

I know a number of people who identify as "capitalist" who probably just like commerce. I was also an early adopter of the "anarcho"-capitalist/anarcho-"capitalist" distinction. But I think that most people who identify with the term "capitalism" really do cling to some sort of "right of increase." I'm afraid some of my

nominally anti-capitalist friends do as well, really. And I think that presumed “right” is absolutely antithetical to anarchism.

The shift of language to a focus on the “voluntary” always seems to be a rhetorical dodge. I have fun arguing with capitalists, but, honestly, almost never have interesting interactions with voluntaryists.

FROM WHAT I’VE BARELY LEARNED, MUTUALISM DOES NOT NECESSARILY EQUATE TO MARKETS. DOES THIS MEAN THAT MUTUALISM CAN BE COMPATIBLE WITH COMMUNISM?

I think “can be compatible” is fair.

Let me put things a bit provocatively. I consider mutualism to be largely concerned with the bases of an anarchist society. There is a fairly narrow envelope within which our social relations are worth calling “anarchist,” and the common denominator there seems to be what we call *mutuality*. All of the schools of anarchism which have come along since Proudhon have had some additional focus that distinguished them from that sort of mutualism. Some see that as a positive development. I’m not *always* sure there wasn’t more than a bit of distraction and decay involved. So I can pretty easily imagine an anarchist communism emerging from a mutualist analysis of our basic social situation, but I also experience a lot of conflict with communists, which seems to arise from closely-held beliefs that may or may not ultimately be compatible with the very basic analysis I associate with mutualism.

My only real concern is that anarchist communists sometimes start with the communism, instead of the anarchism, and that feeling comes from the impatient responses of communists themselves. When Kevin and I first started talking about mutualism online, communists and capitalists were united in calling us things like “nazi” in the forums, in part, I think, because the lines between sides have been drawn pretty clearly on issues like markets and property, and here we were messing with that.

What I learned from those strange days when pretty much everyone was on our backs was that my education as a social anarchist hadn’t really prepared me to talk very clearly about markets and property, outside of a fairly rote set of marxian

responses. Then I hung out with market anarchists a lot, and found they weren't *necessarily* a lot of help. I ended up spending a long time doing an against-the-grain reading of the propertarian tradition, while translating Proudhon's *The Theory of Property*, and found that there was a lot there that seemed like a useful foundation, even if what we were going to build in the end looked more like collectivism or communism. Proudhon's whole critique of capitalism depends on the notion of "collective force" and the realization that most labor was, in practice, collective. The collective nature of labor in a technologically advanced society is even more inescapable. But, at the same time, we still experience the world as individuals, and we don't have any direct access to any sort of collective vision which would not ultimately be the imposition of individual visions on the whole. We just don't *see ourselves* in that collective sense, so we have to do the next best thing, which is to see ourselves as necessarily involved and build together.

DID YOU READ DAVID GRAEBER'S BOOK "DEBT"? WHAT ARE YOU THOUGHTS ABOUT THAT BOOK? I WAS STRUCK BY HOW MANY DIVERSE FORMS OF ECONOMICS HAVE BEEN USED BY SOCIETIES THROUGHOUT HISTORY, INCLUDING MANY THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH ANARCHISM, MUTUALISM AND ANTI-CAPITALISM. MY TAKE AWAY FROM THAT BOOK IS THAT A POST-CAPITALIST PLANET WOULD LIKELY HAVE MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF ECONOMIES, INCLUDING MUTALIST VARIETIES.

I've read much of "Debt," and honestly find it rather frustrating. The details really are fascinating, but I find the general argument rather forced and some of the underlying intellectual history sort of awful. The use of the book in our circles suggests that the framing narrative means that many readers aren't focused on the diversity of practices at all, which seems unfortunate.

WHAT IS PROUDHON'S THEORY OF THE STATE?

Proudhon believed that the associations we engaged in were individuals in their own right, involving more capacities than just the sum of their parts and manifesting interests that were not necessarily the same as those of the constituent individuals.

So he could look at something like a workshop and see another individual, overlapping with the human workers, with concerns that needed to be addressed. But if those concerns dominated those of the individuals, then that would be government, and Proudhon would reject it. In the case of the State, he began by identifying and rejecting the extent to which all modern States seemed to be pretty obvious usurpations, by which the concerns of some were presented as the concerns of the whole, and individuals were oppressed and exploited. But he separated the governmental principle, by which the usurpation was naturalized, from the functions that seemed to arise from largely anarchic interactions between individuals, and posed the possibility of a State which would have no more status than any of the other citizens. Obviously, it was not Bakunin's State or Weber's...

The important thing for Proudhon is that, if there is an anarchist State that is possible, it won't be simply as an *idea*. Either particular persistent social relations will emerge, which it would be worth calling a "State," or they won't. If they do, then we need to account for them. If they don't, then they have no place in our understanding of social relations.

Proudhon's sense was that a state-like association might emerge in order to assume some of the risks of social innovation, to provide continuity across time between generations, etc.

Proudhon believed that while the associations we developed by anarchistic means needed to be taken into account, he also believe that they didn't necessarily share our individual interests, so there might well be a variety of reasons to consider withdrawing participation from institutions that were essentially anarchistic in origin. There's a lot of room for conflict and complexity in this vision of anarchism.

I GUESS I HAVE A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS: (1) DO YOU CONCEIVE OF THE MANY DIVERGENCES BETWEEN MUTUALISTS AS A WEAKNESS, A STRENGTH, OR PRETTY NEUTRAL AND MORE OF JUST A DISCOVERY PROCESS? (2) I UNDERSTAND MUTUALISM AS AN ETHICAL THEORY. DO

YOU THINK MUTUALISM IS NECESSARILY MORAL REALIST? (3) DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ALL SOCIAL SYSTEMS ARE ULTIMATELY BACKED BY FORCE, THAT SOME PEOPLE'S PREFERENCES WILL ALWAYS BE ENFORCED OVER THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITHIN ANY PARTICULAR ARRANGEMENT? (4) WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT STOCK MARKETS?

1) It's a bit of all of the above. There is a practical problem, which is that we are very focused on identities and brands. As a result, discovery processes get sneered at a bit. How can we Fight the Revolution if we don't know What we Believe? Ideology-shoppers get turned off because the whole Proudhonian social science and its application isn't clear from the back of the packages. Etc. But, for me, anarchism is basically a discovery process. Sometimes it may be a discovery process in the midst of violent upheavals in the social order, and sometimes more abstract, subtle work will be more prominent, but one of the things that defines anarchism as a practice is that we can't know positively where we're going. I think mutualists are doomed or fortunate, depending on your perspective, to a little more practice in moving forward while living with ideological uncertainty.

2) I really am not very invested in those sorts of philosophical distinctions. The sort of mutualism that interests me is a response to the absence of a priori, shared criteria in most realms, and so the ethical questions hover around this fundamental problem of establishing just relations without an pre-existing yardstick for justice.

3) I think anarchism is the fundamental denial that social relations are "backed" at all. I suspect that there will always be inequitable relations, but that the way to reduce those to the bare minimum is anarchism, which involves resisting any sort of external justification of inequity.

4) They seem to be a particularly bad manifestation of capitalist logics. Hell of a way to run an economy.

On the question of property, go back and look at Locke's formulation. There's nothing about that theory of property rights that has any external validation, but with the provisos intact it's also pretty darn hard to argue against. Occupancy and use property is in many ways very close to that theory, but with the provisos beefed up a bit, as they probably need to be in order to make the possibility of exclusive individual property

approach that *almost self-evident* status under different circumstances than those Locke faced. Occupancy and use seems like the right approach to the traditional question of property rights, but the conventions are going to be more complicated and almost certainly more dependent on local negotiation. My go-to “next step” explanation, from an old Reddit debate, is my post on the question of the morality of hotels.³

I’VE HEARD YOU EXPRESS A CRITICAL VIEW OF THE TUCKERITE/CARSONIAN IDEA THAT FREE BANKING WILL LEAD TO AN END OF CAPITALISM, I BELIEVE. WHAT ARE YOUR CRITICISMS OF IT? WHAT ALTERNATIVE METHODS DO YOU SUGGEST?

All of my critiques of specific currency or credit schemes are based on the principle that such things need to be adapted to specific needs and conditions. Kevin and I have flown the “money crank” flag high at various times, and I can’t tell you how many hours I’ve spent trying to understand the details of the various mutual banking schemes. I love that stuff. But I believe that Proudhon’s Bank of the People was not as robust as Greene’s mutual bank in the beginning, and I’m not sure that either is well-adapted to the needs of the neediest now. I also differ with the Tuckerites, I think, in feeling that our property conventions really need a thorough overhaul, if only to root out those pesky *aubaines*.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON JOSEPH DÉJACQUE AND, IN PARTICULAR, HIS CRITICISMS OF PROUDHON, SUCH AS THE WORKERS BEING ENTITLED TO THE FULFILLMENT OF THEIR NEEDS RATHER THAN THE PRODUCT OF THEIR LABOR?

Obviously, given my username, I am a fan of Déjacque, and think that translating and publishing works like *The Humanisphere* is important enough to tackle the task myself. That said, Déjacque’s critiques of Proudhon often fall pretty short. His own attitude towards women was at least complicated, and genuinely *awkward* in parts of “The Humanisphere.” I’m always amazed that more people don’t

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object to the “white knight” aspect of the letter on “The Human Being,” but, then, I guess almost nobody knows how capable Jenny d’Hericourt was of defending herself. Déjacque just makes fun of Proudhon for not being knowledgeable about women, while he contrasts his own experience in a way that isn’t entirely without a creep-factor. The essay on exchange draws a line, but unfortunately doesn’t make much of an argument. With Déjacque, you have to take communism as a premise, and if you do, then you can go on and enjoy the ways he finds anarchist adaptations of Fourier, Pierre Leroux, etc.

TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD YOU CONSIDER KARL MARX INFLUENCED BY PROUDHON? WHAT PARTS OF MARX’S THEORIES WOULD YOU CONSIDER TO HAVE BEEN SOMETHING HE ADAPTED FROM PROUDHON’S WORK/THEORIES? WHAT CRITICISMS DO YOU HAVE OF MARX AND MARXISM IN GENERAL?

I am not enough of a Marx scholar to say with confidence, and not enough of an enthusiast anymore to really care about who influenced whom. The extent to which Marx’s “critiques” of Proudhon don’t seem to address Proudhon’s thought has led me to largely leave Marx out of the conversation on mutualism when I can. It just seems like an unfortunately common distraction.

HOW DID PROUDHON AND HIS IDEAS CHANGE OVER HIS LIFETIME? TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD PROUDHON BY THE END OF HIS CAREER AGREE WITH OR DISAGREE WITH HIMSELF AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS CAREER AND WHERE WOULD THOSE AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS BE?

Proudhon’s big development was coming to terms with the “antinomy,” the ways in which dialectical development never really involves neat synthesis. So as he went along his analysis became more and more complex. The number of moving parts tripped him up sometimes.

WHAT SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES ARE THERE BETWEEN PROUDHON’S ETHIC OF RECIPROCITY AND KROPOTKIN’S IDEA OF MUTUAL AID? WHAT IMPORTANCE TO YOU ASCRIBE TO THE EVIDENCE AND CONCLUSIONS OF HIS WORK MUTUAL AID AND HOW WOULD THEY CHANGE

OR COMPLEMENT PROUDHON'S THEORIES ABOUT HOW THINGS WOULD OR SHOULD BE?

I would love to go back to Kropotkin's "Ethics" and tackle the connections between Proudhon's mutuality and particularly the bits that Kropotkin borrowed from Guyau's "Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation Or Sanction." The side of Kropotkin which corresponds to Proudhon's "immanent justice" is probably to be found there. But right now, all I can do is point in that direction.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON POST-LEFTISM? TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FIND OUR CRITIQUE OF LEFTISM CORRECT OR USEFUL? HOW CAN AND SHOULD THE INSURRECTIONISM THAT SO MANY OF US HOLD BE COMBINED WITH OR USED BY PROUDHONIAN MUTUALISM? TO WHAT EXTENT CAN AND SHOULD THE STIRNERITE EGOISM THAT IS COMMON AMONG US BE COMBINED WITH PROUDHONIAN MUTUALISM?

I've never really understood post-leftism. Many of the main early proponents are friends and people I care about and respect. We tend to bond over our shared love of beer, rants and/or Ravachol. There is a strong influence from Stirner in my own work, and I think there's been a reciprocal influence between myself and Wolfi Landstreicher over the last few years. We don't agree on some fundamental things, but [our] disagreements have been useful for me, and I think for him as well. The question of insurrection is one that I'm still wrestling with, but I think that the sort of *staging* of anarchism that I've been engaged in with the "anarchic encounter" material is not all that foreign in substance to much of what is circulating in insurrectionist circles, however little it may seem to resonate in style. I tend to think of much of what I do in terms of *attentats*, even if that sense of it is not immediately obvious.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED, THE GRUNDRISSE IS WHERE MARX REALLY ENGAGED WITH PROUDHON BEYOND THE INSULTS HE ALWAYS HAD FOR FRENCH SOCIALISTS.

Well, the *Grundrisse* is too early to deal with most of Proudhon's mature work. I have yet to run across anything in Marx that addresses the 1858-1865 work except a dismissive

mention of *Theory of Taxation*. And even in the *Grundrisse*, Marx seems intent on using the same few sections of *The System of Economic Contradictions* as emblematic of a larger problem.

I'VE BEEN PRETTY INTERESTED IN THE THEORY OF ALIENATION AFTER READING MARX'S EARLY MANUSCRIPTS AND FROMM'S BOOK THE SANE SOCIETY, THOUGH THE CONCEPT CAN BE FOUND MUCH EARLIER. DID ANY MUTUALISTS WRITE ABOUT IT?

Proudhon defined the "governmental principle" in terms of "external constitution" of social relations, which takes us right into the same neighborhood as Marx's theory of alienation. From that perspective, the very core of anarchism is an opposition to alienation. If I were to wade back into Marx's work any time soon it would probably be to follow that point of connection.

YOU MENTION PROUDHON'S "SOCIAL SCIENCE". WHAT WAS THIS SOCIAL SCIENCE? DID PROUDHON HAVE A DISTINCT METHOD? WASN'T HE JUST A 19TH CENTURY UTOPIAN IMAGINEER?

Proudhon did indeed have a distinct analysis, although it shared elements with various of his contemporaries. The elements nearly all present in *What is Property?*, although in pretty undeveloped form. The early sections of that work contain a rather Stirner-like critique of fixed ideas and the initial critique of "property" as involving the capitalists' appropriation of "collective force." Those are probably the two key elements of everything that would follow, but he didn't even begin to formalize things until the 1850s, starting with *The Philosophy of Progress*, which was the philosophical wind-up before he wrote his 6-volume *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church* (published in 1858.) For a quick summary of his key concerns and the development of his thought, my paper on "Self-Government and the Citizen-State" is probably as concise as you're going to find.

I CONSIDER MYSELF A WARRENESQUE MUTUALIST, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN DIFFERENCE?

I guess it depends on what you take from Warren. I love the way in which he managed to build labor dollars around subjective valuation, and I think there are some important general lessons to be learned from him. But he was fundamentally an inventor of systems, (or tallow lamps, or printing processes,) and I don't know enough other people enamored of his particular system to know how viable a revived equitable commerce would be.

AS WE'VE SEEN, SELF-EMPLOYED PEOPLE AND WORKER-CO-OPS DO NOT LIBERATE THEMSELVES AS WORKERS FROM MARKET FORCES. THEIR NEW BOSS IS FACELESS AND DIFFUSE: THE MARKET. INHERENT TO MARKETS ARE FLUCTUATIONS IN DEMAND THAT MUST BE CORRECTED BY PRODUCERS AFTER DEMAND HAS ALREADY INCREASED. IN DEALING WITH THESE FLUCTUATIONS, DEMOCRATIZING WORKPLACES AND PAYING WORKERS THE FULL VALUE OF THEIR LABOR BECOMES COMPLICATED OR IMPRACTICAL - THE BAKERS WORK MORE TO MAKE CHRISTMAS CAKES IN DECEMBER, THE NOTEBOOK-MAKERS WORK HARD IN THE FALL TO MEET THE DEMAND OF STUDENTS, ETC - A TEMP-LABOR FORCE MUST EMERGE TO AID THESE INSTITUTIONS IN PRODUCTION. YET IN MANY - EVEN MOST - CASES, THESE TEMP WORKERS AND SUB-CONTRACTORS ARE NOT INTEGRATED INTO WORKPLACE DEMOCRACIES AND ARE OFTEN PAID A WAGE RATHER THAN THE FULL VALUE OF THEIR LABOR. WOULD IT NOT MAKE MORE SENSE TO DEMOCRATICALLY PLAN THE ECONOMY AS A WAY TO AVERT THESE AFFRONTS TO DEMOCRACY AND WORKER POWER?

This looks more like a statement than a question, honestly. It also looks like a statement about a capitalist economy, which is not, of course, what I'm advocating.

If it had been a question about why mutualism wouldn't just recreate the precarious conditions workers face under capitalism, without recourse to central planning, several answers suggest themselves. I would expect mutualist economies to be complex, with some elements managed collectively and some through individual commerce. The central question of "collective force" is one which still hasn't been explored as much as it undoubtedly needs to be, but we've explored ideas like a "basic minimum" derived from the proceeds of the collective share of production. I guess the basic issue is whether or not market forces will be something we need

to liberate ourselves from if the *droit d'aubaine* is stripped from property, cost-price becomes at least an idea in commerce, etc.

WHAT IS THE COLLECTIVE? HOW CAN A COLLECTIVE IMPLEMENT FORCE? HAVE YOU READ MISES OR ROTHBARD? WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON MISES' CLAIM THAT THE MARKET IS THE MOST DEMOCRATIC OF RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION METHODS? DO YOU ADVOCATE FOR A MARKET OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Collective force is the output of any organized association that cannot be directly attributed to the capacities possessed by the individuals in the association, outside of the context of their organized, associated labors. A workshop or a family (etc.) is more than the sum of its parts in much the same way that a market is.

I've read both Rothbard and Mises. I remain unconvinced by the Austrian arguments.

I don't advocate for or against markets in any blanket sense, because it seems clear to me that there are any number of different sorts of "market forces," depending on what assumptions individuals bring to the market. Every context and set of conventions for property and trade provides incentives that will shape commerce, and if they are allowed to work unobstructed some kind of equilibrium will almost certainly emerge. But there is nothing particularly natural about the contexts or conventions. Those are either the result of planning or the fruits of specific histories.

I simply find the attempt to deal with the realities of human behavior in an anti-empirical way leads to all kinds of problems. The dream seems to be of a law without a law-giver, but that just strikes me as another form of authoritarianism.

SO ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE RULE OF LAW IS AUTHORITARIAN? WHAT WOULD YOU PROPOSE IN IT'S PLACE?

Anarchy? Anarchism? Isn't the whole point to be done with rulership?

Are you an anarchist, or a *mere anti-statist*? Do you believe that a “technological civilization” is impossible without some people having the power to boss other people around? Those are questions you have to answer to your own satisfaction.

But part of what I’m trying to get at in this work on Proudhon, and part of what seems to have been key in his philosophy and social science, is that this sort of abstract talk about “the State” and “the Church” and ill-defined notions of “hierarchy” or “authority” simply don’t get us terribly close to an answer to the “what does it look like?” question. Instead of attempting to focus on the “essence” of institutions, we can pretty easily learn to know *archic* relations when we see them, and develop the means to oppose them.

I wonder if part of the problem capitalists have in embracing this sort of approach is that the *a priori* arguments so common in those circles are aimed precisely at avoiding all the messy detail of actual human action.

WHAT IS YOUR WORKING DEFINITION OF MUTUAL, MUTUAL AID?

In this context mutuality probably has two main elements: 1) it involves relations ungoverned by any authority outside the relationship; and 2) it involves individuals who approach one another as equals.

Equal in this context means that, although we may find lots of different criteria by which to compare individuals in specific contexts, we don’t have any criteria for comparing them *as individuals*, and our anarchism doesn’t leave us or anyone else any means to impose one.

I’m not sure that “voluntary” implies equality, particular when we’re talking about relations that are pretty much inherently hierarchical. While I’m not opposed to everything that might perhaps fall under the notion of “employment,” the vast majority of those relations are pretty obviously based on other assumptions than equality.

In a non-hierarchical society, people encounter one another as individuals, without immediately reducing them to, or fixing them as, an example of some *type*. A dose of Stirner wouldn’t

hurt at this point, I suppose. We are perhaps more inclined than ever, even in anarchist circles, to reduce individuals to categories, and therefore to define our relations with them in terms of the external narrative we bring with us regarding the relations of these categories. In the process, we short-circuit the relations we have with other individuals. We never have any sort of “anarchic encounter” with them. Anarchists are fond of saying that “another world is possible,” but not always good at applying that phrase as a principle in their daily lives. An anarchist society will necessarily involve giving up a lot of the assumptions that we carry around in order to actually have some meaningful sort of *society* with others. Part of the way of stepping out of the governmental world is to refuse all forms of *external constitution* by law, custom, ideology, etc. The other is to learn to deal with one another as *uniques*.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON TRANSHUMANISM?

I would prefer to work on doing the whole *human* thing a little more successfully before wandering off to try to do something else.

DO YOU HAVE A DEGREE OF SOME SORT RELATED TO YOUR RESEARCH INTO PROUDHON? IF SO, HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED TEACHING? WHY OR WHY NOT? IF YOU DON'T, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED GETTING A DEGREE RELATED TO YOUR RESEARCH AND WOULD YOU CONSIDER TEACHING IF SO? WHY OR WHY NOT?

I have a master's degree in cultural studies and did all the course work for a doctorate. But I had to make some tough decisions between attempting to finish the degree and trying to keep the bookstore/performance space I owned up and running. Ultimately, I lost both. I taught as a grad assistant and part-timer for quite a few years, but the market has dried up for folks with my credentials. The investment involved in going back to pick up a ph.d somewhere now is just a bad gamble at my age.

WHAT IS HIERARCHY IN THE PROUDHONIAN SENSE? WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIERARCHY?

Hierarchy isn't particularly one of Proudhon's keywords, but it's fairly clear that hierarchy is just another form of "external constitution." So hierarchy is an authoritarian error, and its consequences are that anything built on it has a false, authoritarian foundation.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE (NEO-)PROUDHONIAN SIDE OF MUTUALISM, OR EVEN MUTUALISM AS A WHOLE, IN THE NEXT 15-20 YEARS? DO YOU THINK IT WILL BE AS KNOWN ABOUT AND UNDERSTOOD AS ANARCHIST COMMUNISM HAS BECOME?

15-20 years can be a long time. 20 years ago almost nobody knew much about Proudhon and mutualism except a few phrases. Even the standard dismissals were less well-known before mutualism started to reemerge and give people an occasion to be dismissive. So things can change rapidly. On the other hand, it's one thing to make people aware that there is another school of thought out there and another to push past the mostly rote rejections. And what I take to be the "best case" for mutualism is sort of complicated, so that's an additional difficulty.

I don't think there's any point in entering a popularity contest with communism or any of the other tendencies that people have built ideologies and firm identities around. If I have decided that "mutualism" is probably a good label to organize around, it was also pretty easy for me to walk away from that label for the better part of the last year and simply do the same work without the pretense that I was engaged in any sort of school-building.

It seems likely that mutualism or the Proudhonian element in anarchism will thrive to the extent that it can be made practically relevant to current struggles. There are all sorts of way in which the Proudhonian sociology might enrich our understanding of those struggles, but most of them will involve overcoming both theoretical and ideological resistances. The basic challenges are to make up for 150 years of lost time, and, of course, to shift the perception of Proudhon's thought which has developed to explain and defend the neglect. That means that proponents are going to have to be very, very on top of their game, engaging seriously not only with the ideas that they consider fundamentally "their own," but with the ideas of the

tendencies that currently hold a kind of hegemony within the anarchist movement.

It isn't going to be enough to just do battle with those who oppose mutualist ideas without really knowing them. It's going to be necessary to show that the whole history of anarchism might well have developed differently, and that the *potential* common ground between, say, mutualism and communism, not only exists but enriches communism, should it be acknowledged.

We might, for example, attempt to tackle the question of mutualism and the radical labor movement. Proudhon's *The Political Capacity of the Working Class* potentially has a lot to offer to those with a class-struggle focus. It certainly offers us a very different Proudhon than the one who was concerned about the efficacy of strikes in 1846, and it gives us a window in on the background of the First International. I'm back to work translating it. But let's say that a year from now we have a nice, clear English version of the text. There is still a work of interpretation and integration to be done -- probably before much of anyone can be convinced to even read the thing. It's not enough to present the facts from 1864. It's necessary to drag them into the present, and even into a somewhat different present than most anarchists live in. We have a document from the relatively early days of the workers' movement, and we want to transport it into the waning days of a certain sort of workers' struggle. How do we make the ideas in it living and new? How do we account for the 150 years of development that we can assume Proudhon would have given the ideas, had he lived that "thousand years" he talked about? Part of the answer is undoubtedly to attempt to push things farther towards that more general model of "agro-industrial federation." Another might be to attempt to integrate the theory of individualities and collectivities from the works of the 1850s more completely into the proposals in "Political Capacity" -- or even to scrap the material from 1864, except as a kind of dated example of implementation (the way I'm inclined to treat the mutual bank), in order to reimagine a 21st century application. But what does a model of class struggle, for example, look like, if we employ Proudhon's sociology? Social classes are easy to recognize as collective actors and as such they have to be incorporated into our understanding of social relations. But the sort of understanding of individual and collective interests we draw from Proudhon is going to mean that class solidarity looks rather different than it might to most self-identified class-

struggle anarchists. Some theoretical problems are solved by acknowledging that the interests of, say, *the working class* (as a collective actor) may be different from, and even opposed in some instances, to those of individual workers. As a consequence, the practice of solidarity in struggle probably requires some rethinking. The gains, in terms of insights into the dynamics of class societies, seem significant, and it seems they ought to pay off in terms of improved practice. But there is always going to be that moment when those committed to the interests of the working class have to come to terms with the fact that such a commitment walks a fine line between anarchist solidarity and an anti-anarchist *external constitution* of society by classes. Now, for neo-Proudhonians, I would hope that these sorts of awkward awakening would gradually become familiar, if not necessarily less traumatic. But if you haven't already signed on for the project, some of these adjustments are probably going to seem pretty damn extreme, costly and counter-intuitive.

Again, if we can correct the mistakes in Proudhon on sex/gender/family/etc -- not, in my mind, a very difficult project, but a serious stigma to overcome nonetheless -- then we're faced with a version of the same can of worms. Rethinking the politics of identity and identification around sexes, genders, families, etc., that are collective actors with potential interests of their own might well provide some exits from some really troubling cul-de-sacs, but the cost and perceived risk involved in rethinking the details is going to be substantial. In the end, I'm not sure that a shift from what we have now to a *mutualized* framework would be much more radical than the changes that have occurred in the related discourses in the last fifteen years, but the direction of the shift, and the negative perceptions to be overcome, mean that it would be a much more against-the-grain sort of transformation.

Face it, the approach that we've associated ourselves with poses all sorts of threats to our certainty and comfort, even in our own beliefs, at a time when there is already way too damn much uncertainty and discomfort, and in an era that is arguably at least a bit fundamentalist just about any which way you look. For me, the discoveries that the notion of "anarchy" was always a bit more complicated than we thought in Proudhon's thought, the engagement with the ungovernability of anarchism, and the possibility of an absolutist anarchism, have all been exciting and useful work, but I expect a lot of people will have wildly varying mileage...

If there are people willing to be serious, committed gadflies, teasing out the instances where there are theoretical or practical advances to be made by applying Proudhon's thought, who are also willing to cover most of the distance to meet those of other tendencies who might be open to those insights, well, mutualism might well make a fairly serious, important mark on anarchism in the next couple of decades. But that "if" is obviously a pretty serious conditional..

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF KROPOTKIN'S CRITIQUE OF COLLECTIVIST AND MARKET FORMS OF ANARCHISM IN *CONQUEST OF BREAD*?

Well, the *critique* there often doesn't sound much different than the *defense* among non-communists. Proudhon was decades ahead of Kropotkin in understanding that the contributions were *incalculable* by any external criterion, and that exchange was a conventional affair. And he was at least as insistent as any communist on the reality of an irreducibly collective aspect to any and all associated labor. But there always remains the practical question of how to equitably provide for the needs of individuals. It isn't clear how communism is a more equitable convention than *mutuality*.

Kropotkin was taking aim at a particular *collectivist* proposal, presumably something like the one we find it James Guillaume's "Ideas on Social Organization." In the process, he makes some remarks about Proudhon and mutualism which make me question whether he understood Proudhon's proposals at all. Following Marx, apparently, Kropotkin suggests that Proudhon adopted the "labor checks" of the English socialists, presumably John Gray. The trouble is that there isn't really much in Proudhon's actually free credit proposals that resembles Gray's approach. The rest of Kropotkin's critique of Proudhon has to do with his retention of "private property," but in a context that would "make Capital less offensive." And this seems like a peculiar misreading of what Proudhon actually retained in the realm of "property," since the thing he consistently attacked throughout his career was that *droit d'aubaine* embedded in property conventions, without which capitalism as such cannot survive.

I keep looking for some really telling blow in the communist critiques, but, unfortunately, from Déjacque forward, the critique seems to always rest on an assertion that communism is

more just than the arrangements individuals would make in some less pre-structured setting. And I just haven't been convinced, since the basis of the assertion always seems to be a fundamental different notion of what *must* occur in exchange than mutualists, or collectivists, believed.

There are two elements to take into account. The early sections of *What is Property?* establish the analysis of "collective force," which is key to Proudhon's economic analysis. All organized production is considered to result in some outputs not simply reducible to the sum of the inputs by individuals. The more complex the association, the greater the collective force, and naturally the more difficulty in attributing outputs to specific inputs. Then there is the question of a criterion for value. In his mature works, Proudhon begins to make the argument more forcefully that the only criterion of judgment, including the judgment of value, is *justice*, conceived as *balance*. He applies that insight directly to exchange in *The Philosophy of Progress*:

On what then does commerce rest, since it is proven that, lacking a standard of value, exchange is never equal, although the law of proportionality is rigorous? It is here that liberty comes to the rescue of reason, and compensates for the failures of certainty. Commerce rests on a convention, the principle of which is that the parties, after having sought fruitlessly the exact relations of the objects exchanged, come to an agreement to give an expression reputed to be exact, provided that it does not exceed the limits of a certain tolerance. That conventional expression is what we call the *price*.

The arguments for individual property and individual remuneration don't arise from the sort of labor calculations we might find in the work of someone like John Gray (or, it seems, Proudhon's friend Darimon) but out of his attention to this process of extending justice through balancing the interests of a variety of "individuals," from human individuals to associations.

I'M NOT VERY WELL READ ON PROUDHON'S WORK AND ALL THIS IN-DEPTH STUFF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, BUT YOU SEEM VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE SO

ANY THOUGHTS ON PEER TO PEER MUTUAL CREDIT SYSTEMS? LET SYSTEMS SEEM TO WORK ON A COMMUNITY LEVEL WHERE THERE ARE ESTABLISHED LINES OF TRUST, BUT I'M PARTICULARLY CURIOUS ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF LINKING THEM TOGETHER OVER THE INTERNET, PREFERABLY WITHOUT THE SILLINESS OF COMMODITY MONEY.

I'm a proponent of pretty much whatever currency system serves the needs of particular individuals (including no currency system and excluding only those that seem destined to perpetuate capitalist relations.) That said, I'm a hard sell on any of them in the abstract outside of the context of particular communities with specific needs. In the abstract, I like the design choices in something like Ripple much better than those in something like Bitcoin. I think I see more interest in mutuality in one than in the other. But I'm very wary of currency "solutions" that don't seem to address very specific problems.

TO WHAT EXTENT IF ANY DID KROPOTKIN INFLUENCE PROUDHON?

Proudhon died early in 1865. Kropotkin didn't begin to become acquainted with anarchist thought, in part by reading Proudhon, until 1866.

WHAT DOES BEING A "SOCIAL ANARCHIST" MEAN TO YOU? I MEAN MULTIPLE THINGS WITH THAT QUESTION:

(A) WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT OR INTERESTING DIFFERENCES THAT SET "SOCIAL ANARCHISTS" APART FROM "INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHISTS"?; IF ANY, WHAT CRITICISMS, COMMENTS, OR RECOMMENDATION DO YOU HAVE GENERALLY FOR ANY OF THEM?;

(B) WHAT IS YOUR HISTORY WITH IT? I'VE ONCE SEEN CARSON REFERENCE YOU AS A TYPE OF INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHIST, OR IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY AT LEAST "ENGAGED" WITH IT IN SOME IMPORTANT WAY, BUT THAT WAS QUITE EARLY ON (NOT LONG AFTER HIS *STUDIES IN MUTUALIST POLITICAL ECONOMY* RELEASED, I BELIEVE), SO I WAS WONDERING IF YOUR CURRENT STANCE IS THE RESULT OF A SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR ANARCHISM.

I'm pretty uninterested in trying to make these vague generalizations do too much work on their own, particularly as their general meanings have been undergoing a fairly rapid and

steady change. In the context of the late '90s, for example, "individualist anarchism" tended to mean any of a wide variety of tendencies, from what we're now calling neo-Proudhonian mutualism to Tuckerite individualism to some forms of egoism. All of those currents were marginal enough that it was sufficient to gesture vaguely at those other tendencies. A decade later, "market anarchism" emerged as a similarly vague designation for those varieties of anarchism that didn't oppose markets in all cases. The fact that a number of these previously marginal currents have established themselves much more firmly as options within the anarchist milieu has meant that we've moved pretty rapidly past the point where vague indications are much help. Within mutualism, the obvious differences between Tucker and Greene and Proudhon, or between Kevin's thought and my own, meant that lots of new distinctions would naturally be introduced. The fact that the anarchist milieu tends to get a little hung up on labels means that there have been some new confusions that have come along with what would otherwise have been clarifications.

If I talk about "social anarchism" at this point it is mostly as a gesture back to the sort of general (communist / collectivist / syndicalist) consensus that existed when I first started to explore mutualism. My background was anarcho-syndicalism, with a lot of marxist and neo-marxist thought in the mix. My professional education was in cultural studies and intellectual history, but what that really means is that I had done work in all sorts of disciplines (19th century American literature and history, popular culture theory, internet sociology, poststructuralist philosophy, etc.) When the great tug-of-war over individualist anarchism began, I was settled on a slightly heretical margin of the anarchist mainstream, in part because I already immersed in the sort of complex "individualisms" that we find in schools of thought like American transcendentalism. I had investments in the story of the various revolutions in Europe, and in the history of social change movements in the United States. When I started to really wrestle with just what the heck people like William Batchelder Greene and Benjamin R. Tucker were on about, I was surprised to find that the two stories had a lot of more in common than I had imagined. Greene quickly became the center of a really fascinating story, which forced me to integrate a number of histories that I had learned separately into some more seamless whole. And it was actually by studying the radical currents in American transcendentalism

that I stumbled on the importance of figures like Pierre Leroux and Charles Fourier to anarchism, and particularly to Proudhon. There are figures like William Henry Channing and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who are unlikely to feature in any anarchist history book, and Orestes Brownson, whose likely only to appear in a footnote, who were busily interpreting French socialist thought for a New England audience, and it was actually through engaging with them that I came to be familiar enough with some of the French radicals we tend to dismiss as “utopian” to be able to recognize their influence when I started reading more deeply into Proudhon’s work.

That’s not a very direct answer, mostly because I no longer have any real investment in any sort of individual/social dichotomy, for reasons that have everything to do with the contents of mutualist theory. I don’t feel that I’ve really shifted out of the “social anarchism” I embraced, while I’ve certainly deepened my understanding of what’s at stake. By the time you’ve embraced a sociology in which every *individuality* is also a *collectivity*, some of our common preoccupations lose a lot of their interest.

If anyone wants to consider me an “individualist” these days, I certainly don’t mind, as long as they’re not trying to say that’s *all* I am. The individualist component in Proudhon’s thought is, of course, very important, but it’s also part of an irreducible *antinomy*. And I certainly have a great deal of affection for various figures that are much more directly individualist. All the work I’ve done on Tucker, including scanning *Liberty* has been enormously rewarding, and I keep coming back to Tucker’s circle in my studies. I’ve also become very interested in folks like Emile Armand, and incorporate quite a bit of Stirner’s thought into my own analysis. I’ve just long since moved past the point of worrying too much about which side of a largely faulty divide any given thinker might fall on.



SUPPOSE YOU WERE DESIGNING A CURRICULUM FOR AN INTRODUCTORY SELF-STUDY COURSE IN MUTUALISM. WHAT ESSAYS, ARTICLES, BOOKS, VIDEOS WOULD YOU CONSIDER FOUNDATIONAL, THAT IS, ESSENTIAL -- GOOD SOIL TO BUILD LATER RESEARCH UPON? WHAT WOULD YOUR MUTUALISM 101 LOOK LIKE? I WANT TO AVOID MISSING KEY CONCEPTS OR TERMINOLOGY. PLEASE INSERT LINKS TO YOUR OWN INTERPRETATIONS AND EXPLORATIONS!

At this point, if the goal is to understand mutualism as rooted in Proudhon's thought, then the most important task is to get an overview of Proudhon's thought. I don't think there is a clearer introduction than my paper on "Self-Government and the Citizen-State." Once you understand the general development of Proudhon's thought, then you can pursue your particular interests in his works. Of course, there is still very little translated into English, so if you don't read French then the key works available are *What is Property?*, *The Philosophy of Progress* and various bits and pieces that can probably best be accessed in the AK Press anthology. I've also recently posted a rather rough translation of *The Theory of Property*.

One way to get fairly directly at what I consider central to mutualism would just be to read through the *Contr'un* blog over the 10 months that I spent distancing myself from the label, while sifting through my previous work and a bunch of historical material. If you started from "Beyond Mutualism" and worked your way to the present, chasing links where it seemed necessary, that would, I think, have you pretty well up to speed on the "anarchism of the encounter" which seems to me to be the core of any useful sort of mutualism.

DO YOU THINK PROUDHON'S "REACTIONARY" VIEWS (ANTI-SEMITISM, ETHNO-NATIONALISM, GENERAL RACISM) LEND SOME HISTORICAL CREDIBILITY TO GROUPS SUCH AS THE NATIONAL ANARCHIST MOVEMENT? STUFF LIKE THAT SEEMS TO MAKE THE LEFT-ANARCHISTS GO COLLECTIVELY APE-SH*T FASTER THAN EVEN ANARCHO-CAPITALISM.

No. What there was reactionary in Proudhon's thought was a *failure* to follow through on his anarchism. The arguments for "ethno-nationalism, general racism" are based on very selective readings anyway. But if you attach yourself to what was wrong and anti-anarchistic in a thinker, it just means you're wrong and anti-anarchistic.

Are Hotels Immoral?

I've been trying to collect my contributions to various discussion threads, where the off-the-cuff stuff seems to advance the conversation, and I'm presenting them in the form of one-sided conversations, with just enough of the contributions of others to give context. Here's another bit from Reddit, on the question of occupancy and use property norms:

Q. Are Hotels Immoral?

A. No. If someone is actively maintaining a hotel, then they are obviously occupying and using it. A large hotel is likely to be a collectively owned affair, like most large enterprises under usufructory ownership.

Q. Can that somebody hire people to help him or her occupy it and maintain it?

A. Well, not without leaving the regime of occupancy and use property. It is possible that there might be reasons to respect such an arrangement in the midst of an occupancy-and-use-based community, but at the point where it looks like there is rent-seeking and exploitation of labor going on in a mutualist community, I suspect both the labor force and the customers are likely to start looking elsewhere. Mutualist markets are most likely to manifest profits in the form of a general reduction in costs, and capitalist profits will probably stick out like a sore thumb in that context.

Contracts can solve many underlying problems, and there are plenty of other ways to establish rules for human interaction. Mutualist markets would have their particular character, and forms of profit, precisely because the rules for interaction within them are governed by norms of reciprocity, "cost the limit of price," etc., rather than the norms dominant within capitalist markets.

Most uses of natural resources or real property have a basic cycle to them. For example, it is expected that we will be out of our homes as much as we are in them. A home is, in part, a fixed place where we keep the stuff we don't want or need to carry around all day -- just as it is, in part, a place where we sleep, a

potentially private space, etc. If we're talking about agriculture, then it is expected that the land we are using will lie fallow sometimes, because of seasonal cycles or crop rotation. The folks running a hotel will be there, day in and day out, while guests will come and go, and staff will maintain the hotel for themselves and the guests alike.

Q. Doesn't that seem somewhat arbitrary, especially for things that have multiple uses?

A. Not particularly, since all we need to establish is that something is being used according the natural patterns of *some* form of use.

These use cycles are determined by the usual demands and conditions of particular kinds of resource use.

The argument against mutualist hotels depends on an understanding of "occupancy and use" which I've never seen a mutualist advance, and which also appears very different from the ways we customarily think about these issues now.

Presumably, though, any new process will also have its logical cycles. And, of course, experimentation is something we've done before, and should have no trouble recognizing as a use.

Actually, I've already given a number of examples. Cycles for agricultural use are determined by a mix of seasonal factors and developing conventions regarding "best practices" for crop rotation, fallow periods, etc. Our mutualist hotel will have guests who come and go, primarily for short stays, and hosts who are relatively stable. Etc. If I'm experimenting with a different agricultural method, then the nature of the experiment will determine how long I put resources to that use, and how much of the time during the experiment some or all of the resources might be idle. If I'm brewing small-batch beer, each experimental cycle will tend to be considerably shorter than an agricultural cycle—unless perhaps I'm aging a batch.

It's a simple standard, easily adaptable to a range of resources and uses.

This all started because somebody thought mutualists thought hotels were "immoral." That's just a version of the "mutualists will take your house when you nip out for a quart of milk" claim, and both seem to fall rather decisively before the fact that occupancy and use always seems to involve some pattern of absence and presence, fairly predictably tied to the

particular resources and the particular uses. Now, in some cases, that means that knowing whether or not a resource is currently in use might take a little research, but we expect that with all property regimes, so that can't really be a very serious objection.

Now, the "why" of occupancy and use comes from the proudhonian critique of property theories. Nothing stronger seems to hold up to scrutiny.

FAQs & Fragments

WHAT IS MUTUALISM?

Mutualism was the earliest of the explicitly anarchist schools of thought, originating with Proudhon and his circle in the 1840s (although Josiah Warren's experiments in the 1820s are frequently added retroactively to the tradition, since the two schools both influenced the American individualist anarchists.) It's largely an ethical philosophy, although it developed in a series of studies of political economy, such as Proudhon's writings on property.

IF YOU ARE A MUTUALIST, WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT IS SUPERIOR TO ANARCHO-CAPITALISM?

Mutualism differs from anarcho-capitalism in a variety of ways, the most important being its radical skepticism about private property and its rejection of a "right of increase." The conclusion of Proudhon's lifetime worth of work on property was that its defenders had ultimately not made a principled case for rights of exclusive individual property, and that the consequences of the existing forms were not what those defenders claimed. Eventually Proudhon came to advocate property for the term of occupancy and use (generally some use-cycle, tied to the needs of the particular form of land-use). Some mutualists are fine with that, while others prefer some more informal sort of usufruct arrangement, and a few of us have proposed more elaborate extensions and completions of Proudhon's analysis.

IS MUTUALISM COMPATIBLE WITH VOLUNTARISM?

Mutualism is much more concerned with systematic and structural barriers to equitable exchange, so often we find ourselves at odds with voluntaryists over just how voluntary a given relationship actually is, and how much it is merely the best individuals can do under unjust circumstances.

WHO ARE THE PROMINENT MUTUALIST ECONOMISTS OR PHILOSOPHERS, AND WHY ARE THEY CORRECT/INCORRECT IN THEIR STATEMENTS?

There are two main schools of mutualist thought at the moment. One, which is more strictly a “market anarchism” and draws historical inspiration from Benjamin R. Tucker’s individualist anarchism, is probably best represented by Kevin Carson. The other, which draws on the “classical” sources, including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, William Batchelder Greene, and a variety of others figures, has probably been developed farthest in my own work.

As for why mutualism has entered other discourses, there’s a lot of brand-new stuff currently happening in mutualist circles, and it has shaken up some of the comfortable divides between social anarchists and market anarchists. There’s a lot of curiosity and quite a bit of animosity directed towards the tradition, though things certainly aren’t as heated as they were even just a few years back.

The “right of increase” is essentially the belief that the possession of wealth is itself a license to accumulate more wealth, if one can do it in a way which doesn’t involve overt violence. Any number of pre-existing conditions can influence the outcomes of otherwise uncoerced exchange: significant inequalities in access to resources or markets, state-backed subsidies and privileges, etc.

Proudhon’s critique essentially addressed the various explanations for private property rights and found that they all involved confused or contradictory arguments -- so that there appeared to be no principled reason to believe that private property rights exist, let alone respect them. And the consequentialist claims that property regimes promote liberty, equality, social stability, etc., seemed to be equally empty.

And if property claims are on shaky ground, from either a principled or a practical point of view, then it’s not a question of “abolishing” something which only exists because it is enforced.

It's just a question of finding relatively peaceful means of putting our property regimes on a firmer footing.

CAN THAT SOMEBODY HIRE PEOPLE TO HELP HIM OR HER OCCUPY IT AND MAINTAIN IT?

Well, not without leaving the regime of occupancy and use property. It is possible that there might be reasons to respect such an arrangement in the midst of an occupancy-and-use-based community, but at the point where it looks like there is rent-seeking and exploitation of labor going on in a mutualist community, I suspect both the labor force and the customers are likely to start looking elsewhere. Mutualist markets are most likely to manifest profits in the form of a general reduction in costs, and capitalist profits will probably stick out like a sore thumb in that context.

Most uses of natural resources or real property have a basic cycle to them. It is expected that we are out of our homes as much as we are in them. A home is, in part, a fixed place where we keep the stuff we don't want or need to carry around all day - just as it is, in part, a place where we sleep, a potentially private space, etc. If we're talking about agriculture, then it is expected that the land we are using will lie fallow sometimes, because of seasonal cycles or crop rotation. The folks running a hotel will be there, day in and day out, while guests come and go, and they will maintain the hotel for themselves and the guests alike.

Your question was: "why abandon the communist project once we have reached "mutualism"?" The implication seems to be the common one that communism goes farther somehow than mutualism, when, in fact, anarchist communism seems to be mutualism limited by some specific notions about property which are in some important sense obligatory. To answer this new question--"why not communism?"--it would be necessary to know which of the various "communisms" you are talking about, but in general my sense is that mutualism, while more demanding, is also simply more anarchistic than any of the schools that came after it, as it is simply consistent anti-

authoritarianism, without any specific demands about what the character of interpersonal relations must be. If someone chose communist property relations as a means of approximating mutualist justice, I'm open to that possibility, but it doesn't look like the best way to apply the basic anarchistic ethic.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE CHOOSE MUTUALISM OVER FULL COMMUNISM?

This will perhaps seem hard for some communists to believe, but for at least some of us full communism is still just communism. I would honestly prefer full mutualism, as long as we are taking the m-word to mean the truly anarchic system of balancing individual and social interests which Proudhon started to sketch out in his later works.

I'm saying that *full mutualism*, "the truly anarchic system of balancing individual and social interests which Proudhon started to sketch out in his later works," strikes me as a more complete and appealing sort of approach to a free society than communism.

IN AN ANARCHIST STATE/COMMUNITY, WOULD A FORM OF MILITARY BE POSSIBLE, IF CONTROLLED BY THE PEOPLE, I.E. SOME KIND OF ASSEMBLY TO WHICH ALL CITIZENS ARE WELCOME?

To the extent that external defense or "internal" enforcement of norms is necessary, it will be as a defense of anarchy, action taken against the imposition of hierarchy in some particular context and at some particular scale. Such actions will themselves necessarily be, in some senses, a departure from anarchistic ideals, and choices about them will have to be made on some more or less pragmatic grounds. To be consistent, anarchist societies will generally take the least punitive action necessary to repair the damage done or threatened to the society.

I suspect that any "anarchist society" will always include aspects which are, in fact, not in line with our ideal, imposed on us either by external adversaries or by our own imperfect understanding of how to live without authority. In order not to allow those societies to devolve into some authoritarian social form, anarchists will have to be aware of the places where their

practice is imperfect, and be willing to take responsibility for the actions that they take in the name of anarchy or anarchism.

Anarchists have argued that society has no right to punish and that, in a sense, the consequences of our social arrangements will be our reward, or punishment, for solving, or not solving, basic social problems in a just manner. That means in instances where drastic defense is necessary, we will at least have to take on our share of responsibility for the actions taken to defend our communities, with no recourse to fall back on the authority of the law. That share of responsibility may at times be pretty heavy. In 1892, during the era of the *attentats*, Louise Michel wrote: "Let each, like Ravachol, act according to his conscience, deploring the unwitting victims without letting themselves be diminished by hesitation...." To be clear, sometimes that means we ourselves pay a high price for attempting to set things right, whether or not that seems fair. Presumably, as we become more successful at teaching and living anarchism, then the individual risks and costs should diminish.

WHO DOES ANARCHISM THINK SHOULD BE THE PROPRIETOR OF CURRENCY? I.E. WHO WILL PRINT AND CONTROL THE MONEY-SUPPLY?

Hopefully, anarchists will take a "right tool for the job" approach to the circulating medium, where it is determine that one is necessary. There's no need for a hard currency for the mass of small, day-to-day transactions, and I suspect there will be a healthy resistance among anarchists to making that sort of trade much more than a loose, conventional affair. No anarchist currency can really be "backed by nothing," since at minimum it will have to be backed by confidence and some degree of solidarity, but something much like a fiat currency, without the government backing, might well exist. Mortgage-backed currencies may exist where property conventions allow them, and will likely exist primarily under those circumstances for property improvements. Specie currencies would rise or fall on whether we continue to care about "precious" metals. Outside of communist communities I expect quite a bit of variation and experimentation with circulating media.

Didn't I just say that I expect variation and experimentation, with a heavy emphasis on soft currencies and informal trade relations? As I said, I have no faith that "precious" metals are going to inspire much confidence, and I certainly don't believe that any currency which can be easily monopolized will persist without competing currencies emerging. As for you questions about mortgage security for currency, I'm assuming you're unfamiliar with the "mutual banking" model, within which the the institution issuing the currency is simply a non-hierarchical, voluntary association of those seeking to use the particular currency.

It's fairly fundamental to anarchist economics that there is no right to profit from the mere possession of capital, so "usury" has always been off the table.

Loans at interest are frequently negative because they are unnecessary, or would be unnecessary apart from some legal tender privilege or currency which is already monopolized to a great extent. Without a State to dictate and support legal tender privilege, currency will naturally work rather differently. Issuers and adopters will have pretty strong incentives to see that their currencies are not monopolized, and that they circulate, with the cost of providing them and maintaining their circulation as low as possible. Because non-State currencies will be something of a hassle in general, it is likely that a fair number of ordinary transactions will simply not warrant the hassle. It will simply be a lot more efficient to keep small items and minor services in circulation than to expend labor or savings on maintaining the circulating medium. The tendency of anarchists who accept market exchange to also lean towards some kind of cost-pricing means that prices will tend to drop, margins will become paper-thin, and carrying along the burden of a for-profit banking industry is unlikely to make any sort of sense. Where issuers of currency can't provide a sufficiently cheap circulating medium, the incentive will be to do without, and rely on the much looser accounting of a gift economy, or on some sort of loose credit-clearing system. We don't need "hard" currency to trade cups of coffee, pints of beer, minor services, etc. We just need steady circulation of goods and services, and some token form of circulating medium with wide acceptance. We could run a lot of the economy on wooden nickles, without even worrying

too much about counterfeiters, if we ditched the capitalist mentality.

For more serious sorts of investments, a more elaborate currency makes sense, but it's still going to have to be provided cheaply and efficiently. In the old "mutual banking" tradition, property owners associated with one another in order to agree on a form of local currency that they would all accept, with their some fraction of their property as security. The goal was to circumvent costly or already-monopolized currencies. The members of the association, essentially issuing currency to themselves, and sharing the costs of issuing and maintaining the currency in proportion to their use of it, have no incentive to drive up the cost of issue, since they'll ultimately have to bear those costs, either directly or through the poor performance of the currency.

In general, if a currency is not back by a State, and does not serve the needs of the mass of people, then there is no reason for the people to honor it or attempt to use it themselves. If they determine that currency is simply too expensive, then they will find other means of regulating trade. If not, then less expensive means will have to be found, and the incentives will be there to find them.



ARE THE CONCEPTS OF "POSSESSION" AND HOMESTEADING REALLY THAT DIFFERENT?

"Possession" is not really a single, coherent theory on the left. In Proudhon's *What is Property?*, the "possession" vs. "property" distinction was explicitly presented as one between matters of fact and matters of right, specifically in the realm of land and natural resource ownership, but more recently, the term has been used most often to indicated an opposition to absentee ownership, ownership in perpetuity and/or a *droit d'aubaine*/"right of increase" associated with ownership (opposition to rent-seeking, more or less.)

Of course, "homesteading" has been used to apply to both traditional Lockean and non-proviso Lockean forms of property, which have fundamentally different bases and consequences, so there are uncertainties all around.

So the similarities and/or differences differ, sometimes dramatically, depending on specific details about just appropriation, abandonment, attendant rights, etc. In general,

some “possession” theory looks quite a bit like Locke, with the provisos intact and strict attention paid to possible forms of unmixing, but you always have to clarify things to be sure.

- A) WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF THE RIGHT OF INCREASE?
- B) DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE THE ARGUMENTS PEOPLE INFLUENCED BY PROUDHON (OR TUCKER) MAKE THAT FOCUS ON THE RIGHT OF INCREASE AS VALID?
- C) DO YOU ACCEPT OR REJECT THE EXISTENCE OF THE RIGHT OF INCREASE?
- D) DO YOU JUSTIFY THE RIGHT OF INCREASE IF YOU BELIEVE IT EXISTS? HOW?

A) The *droit d'aubaine*/"right of increase" is the literally the right to "windfalls" or "godsend." It probably has two aspects, both of which relate to something fairly close to *residual claimancy*. One aspect relates to the products of associated labor. As Proudhon put it, "when you have paid all the individual forces, the collective force still remains to be paid." In any sort of complex production, there will be products and outcomes not easily attributed to any of the individuals involved. These products of "collective force" are one of the *windfalls* conventionally claimed by the capitalist. And since complex forms of capital are more likely to be the products of "collective" labor, the justice of treating the capitalist as residual claimant, after individual laborers have been paid a purely individual wage, is particularly suspect. The other sort of windfall comes from advantages based on previous *aubaines*, "economic rent," etc. When individuals associate to produce, the preexisting advantages tend to profit the capitalist.

B) The focus on "rights of increase" is a real improvement over the old quarrels over specific transaction forms. It correctly emphasizes that the problems emphasized by "classical" anarchists were questions of rights, and questions arising from the specific conditions of modern production. A focus on "usury," for example, or attempts to "abolish" particular practices, *without a clear sense of the basic objection*, generated a lot of unnecessary misunderstandings, I think.

C) The right of increase seems to be conventional.

D) And while I think most of us would like to see a society in which *increase* itself was general, the specific norms that make

the capitalist the residual claimant seem like holdovers of authoritarian rights systems and/or insufficiently clear understandings of modern production.

WHAT IS THE OCCUPANCY AND USE THEORY OF PROPERTY?

“Occupancy and use” seems to be used by anarchists in two rather different ways, which roughly correspond to the “possession” of Proudhon’s earliest works and the “property” of his later works. Proudhon treated “possession” as “matter of fact,” as opposed to *right*, and so in a regime where “the fact of possession” takes the place of “property rights,” the work of drawing lines and dealing with conflict tends to get passed off to some other principle, such as *reciprocity*, *equality*, *justice* or *respect*. Conventions and norms are likely to be established, which do work which I suspect most propertarians would recognize as pertaining to property relations, but the shift of theoretical ground presumably gives them some oppositional edge against the sorts of systematic privilege that has built up around “property.”

Proudhon began to construct an anarchist theory of property while still in the midst of his initial critique. When, in 1840, in the same work where he declared that “property is theft,” he described *liberty* in terms of a “synthesis of community and property” he laid out the basic principle on which his own theory of property would be based. And he very quickly started exploring the ways in which individual property could be a tool for anarchistic liberty. By 1861, he was convinced that “possession” alone was not sufficient, and he had his *Theory of Property* completed, except for a historical review of his own work, at the time of his death in 1865. (You can read much of *The Theory of Property*, as well as some debate on its significance online.) Ultimately, Proudhon justified occupancy and use *property* as part of his theory that the tendencies of human institutions must be brought into balance in order to assure justice, with property coming in on the side of the individual as a countervailing force to all of the social institutions that are bound to emerge even in an anarchic society. (Check out “Self-Government and the Citizen-State” for an overview of the larger theory.)

The usual objections to occupancy and use property focus on the difficulty of establishing any standards for “occupancy” and

“use” which are not literal and obviously unworkable. We get a lot of questions about the possible immorality of hotels and lots of people claim to believe that mutualists in particular will feel justified in invading their homes when they go out for a quart of milk, which simply suggests that they don’t have much sense of what “mutuality” means in that context, *and* that “property” is perhaps doing a lot of ethical work which might be better handled by other principles. There aren’t any particularly well elaborated systems of occupancy and use property, but some of us have worked a bit to at least make the underlying principles intelligible to those with more traditional *propertarian* assumptions. For example, I’ve talked about it in comparison to the proviso-Lockean position, as in these recent posts about incorporating ecological thinking into anarchist property theory.

CAN SOMEONE ELI5 PROUDHON’S IDEAS OF PROPERTY?

Proudhon’s writings on property cover pretty much his whole career as a writer, from 1839 until his death in 1864. The notion that “property is theft” is constant, but the contexts and implications of that judgment vary in small, but important ways.

Proudhon was not even the first radical to claim that “property is theft.” In 1838, Jules Leroux claimed that property without active occupation was theft. It isn’t clear if Proudhon was aware of that claim or not.

Proudhon first discussed the connection between property and theft in “The Celebration of Sunday,” where he was discussing Mosaic law. There, he observed that what the Ten Commandments referred in “thou shalt not steal” was *not* the theft of property as we understand it, but actually what we would call private property itself, “holding, turning or putting aside.”

The phrase “property is theft” appears in “What is Property?” in 1840. There, Proudhon distinguishes between “simple possession,” which he (almost always) treats as a matter of *fact* alone, and “simple property,” modeled on Roman law and defined as “the right of use and abuse.” The work contains quite a number of separate, but related critiques of existing property theories. The argument that “property is theft” is simply that when we examine the results of applying those property theories, the results are clearly the opposite of

what is intended. Then the long section about property's "impossibility" shows a variety of ways in which existing property conventions are "mathematically" incoherent, mostly in the sense that capitalists seem to create something from nothing when they operate. In the 1840 work, there is the possibility that there might be a property which was not theft or an impossibility, but Proudhon doesn't get any closer to it than suggesting, in the final section, that liberty will be achieved by a "synthesis of community and property."

In a series of subsequent works, Proudhon both strengthened his critique of existing property conventions and began to explore the ways in which property might also be useful to liberty. By the time of the French revolution of 1848, he had embraced the notion that property was both "theft" and "liberty," without yet having built up a theory which could reconcile the two positions.

After the coup d'état of 1851, Proudhon's attention was not split between radical theory and the need for immediate reform, and he was able to shift from what he called his "critical" period to a "constructive" one. What developed, particularly in the last decade of his life, was a complex anarchist federalism, where liberty was dependent on the counter-balancing of potentially



WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF HIERARCHY? WHY IS IT NO LONGER NECESSARY?

Many hierarchies are indeed oppressive and backed by coercion, but what all hierarchies seem to have in common is that they are *archies*, the sort of things that *anarchy* does really mix with. And where they are not simply an excuse for aggressive behavior, they're usually a product of faulty logic.

The family is a fine example of how achieving anarchism will mean letting go of some sacred cows in the realm of hierarchy. There's absolutely no reason to consider children as *beneath* parents in any way. They possess different abilities, and it is generally possible for adults to successfully exercise force, even overt violence against them, but the best excuses for that we hear are of the "for their own good" variety, and anarchists can't really take those too seriously. Infants require *care* and children certainly benefit from a basic education in surviving common threats and in the rudiments necessary to begin to direct their own education. But anarchist children are not the property of parents, nor subservient to them, any more than one spouse is

owned by or subservient to the other. In an anarchist society, either parents will provide the *care* called for by the initial disadvantages of children or other arrangements will almost certainly have to be made, as there's no anarchistic justification for harnessing children to their parents' projects.

The current family is certainly a hierarchical structure, but the current family is also a product of a particular history, within which its structures have varied. And we can expect they will continue to vary, and probably more dramatically, should we ever get a shot at reach anarchistic freedom.

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FOR THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS I'VE CONSIDERED MYSELF AN ANARCHO-CAPITALIST BUT I'M CONSIDERING THE MOVE TO MUTUALISM. HOWEVER, I FIND MYSELF CONFLICTED OVER THE ISSUE OF PROPERTY. I'M HOPING THAT YOU CAN ANSWER SOME OF MY QUESTIONS.

1. ANARCHISTS TREAT PERSONAL POSSESSIONS AS PRIVATE PROPERTY. IS THERE A PRINCIPLE TO JUSTIFY PERSONAL (PRIVATE) PROPERTY? I'M SPEAKING OF PERSONAL PROPERTY SUCH AS PERSONAL LAND, HOME, TOOTHBRUSH.
2. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE FIRST APPROPRIATION PRINCIPLE? IF SOMEONE IS THE FIRST TO APPROPRIATE SOMETHING WHY SHOULDN'T THAT PERSON BE ABLE TO OWN IT, TRADE IT, DESTROY IT? AND WHY CAN'T THE PERSON HIRE WORKERS TO CLEAR IT?
3. WHY IS LAND TREATED THE SAME WAY AS CAPITAL. IF I CLEAR LAND AND PLANT CORN AND THEN SELL THAT CORN TO BUY A MACHINE TO MAKE THE JOB EASIER, WHY SHOULD THE WORKER BE AN OWNER OF THE LAND AND THE MACHINE?
4. I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF ABANDONMENT. I'VE SEEN SOME LEFT ANARCHISTS CLAIMING THAT AN ENTREPRENEUR ABANDONS HIS OWN FACTORY WHEN HE HIRES WORKERS EVEN IF HE WORKS AT THE PLANT AND MANAGES HIS EMPLOYEES. SECONDLY, WHAT'S WRONG WITH ABANDONMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The questions are difficult, since there is no consensus on property questions, even among those who call themselves "mutualists." Folks like Kevin Carson seem to believe that *some* sort of property conventions, roughly corresponding to "occupancy and use," will emerge locally, according to the needs and circumstances of communities. How those conventions will fit into categories like "possession," "personal property," "private property," etc. is a bit hard to say, because we only

have a general sense of what those terms mean to one another anyway.

For many anarchists who oppose “private property,” the concern is primarily to be certain that the exploitative aspects of capitalism are not reproduced in anarchist property relations. As a result, there’s a tendency to distinguish between types of property (“private” vs. “personal,” for example) based on the uses to which they are put. The more “proudhonian” anarchists, including more self-proclaimed mutualists, are likely to approach this problem by denying that whatever rights of property emerge can include a *droit d’aubaine* (“right of increase,” by which property owners are determined to be residual claimants and/or the beneficiaries of windfalls, solely on the basis of their ownership. Without that right, they can’t unilaterally claim the fruits of associated labor, and their advantages in negotiations with labor are largely annulled.

So, some anarchists will expect respect for personal possession because they expect mutual respect (as a “principle of reciprocity,” etc.) to act as a substitute for property rights in establishing anarchist societies. Others will have a property theory, often much like proviso lockean theory, but without any right of increase included. Some others, among the anti-capitalist market anarchists, will be less opposed to “private property,” but believe that its outcome will necessarily look a lot like “occupancy and use” or “possession,” um, *because... markets*.

First appropriation first needs to be modified to include *just appropriation*, or else first comers simply become a privileged class. The same is true of questions of abandonment and destruction of property. Modern proprietarians have largely abandoned the lockean provisos, and fundamentally transformed the power and function of property within society. At the very least, anarchist property theory has to restore the social aspects of liberal property theory, as well as updating their application to take into account advances in scientific knowledge and technological reach.

Abandonment is simply when someone no longer claims property rights, either by relinquishing property or simply by neglecting it beyond the limits of tolerance within the community. Without a right of increase, what a factory “owner” would likely abandon was *sole* ownership of the plant, although any number of non-hierarchical arrangement might be made to allow the owner to be compensated for actual labor performed,

including coordinating tasks, or maintenance to the facility. But when you hear someone talk in those terms, they're simply enunciating a particular set of local tolerances with regard to abandonment.

With regard to both appropriation and abandonment, the chief concerns regarding justice are 1) to make sure we don't establish, or reestablish, a system which inevitably creates unequal classes of individuals, as is arguably the case with existing property norms, which include that "right of increase," 2) to make sure that what we establish is sustainable, so that we're not just creating class divisions between early-comers and late-comers, and 3) to make sure that what we establish takes into account both our complex ecological interconnectedness and the present technological amplification of individual's ability to "mix their labor" well beyond anything like unamplified human scale.

If we look at Locke's theory, with the provisos intact, we find that unilateral rights of appropriation apply (because of the "enough and as good" proviso) to resources which are fundamentally *non-rivalrous*. Propertarians have, of course, often come to argue that property only really pertains to *rivalrous* goods, but that's a significant revision of the classical approach. The notion that we might consider ourselves free to appropriate renewable resources at human scale without needing to ask permission of anyone or negotiate conflicting claims seems reasonable. The fact that every appropriation changes the disposition of resources, even if it doesn't necessarily permanently reduce the amount of resources available is pretty much just a fact of existence, which any theory of just use (with or without a "property" scheme) will have to engage with. The "gleaning proviso" in Locke is, among other things, a means of avoiding waste.

If we update those two provisos, with a bit of modern ecological sophistication, we can at least begin to sketch out a modern equivalent. We know that virtually all appropriation has some invasive characteristics, and our knowledge of "downstream effects" of various sorts is sufficient that we should probably acknowledge that ignoring those effects is something between negligence and outright aggression. Our equivalent to "enough" has to be a focus on use of renewable or reusable resources, along with a concern for preserving biodiversity and biocapacity. We couldn't prevent *changes* in the

ecosystems of which we are a part if we wanted to, and we shouldn't logically want to, since their capacity for complex adaptation is a big part of why they constitute a *good* for human beings. But we can certainly avoid the transformation of complex systems into monocultures (whether we're talking about ecology, economy, culture, etc.) and we can engage in efforts to restore biocapacity where we have previously reduced it. And we can be much, much more intelligent about waste, whether it's a question of encouraging the reuse economy, employing more intelligent approaches to sanitation engineering, or outright mining the landfills.

I think I linked these earlier, but I spent some time looking at some of these questions in three posts on "Appropriation and Ecology," where I was attempting to apply Proudhon's basic "social system" to this question.

Anarchist alternatives to "private property" generally rely on some other principle (which may range from *mutual respect* to *might*) to deal with questions about "personal property." Those that remain within close to traditional property theory generally treat all justly acquired property as an extension of the person, and *often for that very reason*, reject some of the rights commonly associated with property under capitalism (the "right of increase" primarily.)

When it is a question of determining the duration of use-rights, the classical sources give us some useful guidelines, based around conventional use-cycles. If you plow and plant, you should expect to be able to reap. Etc.

The anarchist approach is that interactions need to be *anarchist*, and the standards for that designation can be pretty demanding. Proudhon's distillation of the whole "social system" of anarchism to *equality + collective power* is one of the most straightforward, and most demanding, formulations. "Freedom" from material constraint really isn't the issue. The issue is whether or not individuals will essentially *weaponize* those constraints for use against one another.

Everybody seems to understand that just because there is a gun in the room, nobody is obliged or authorized to use it. And nobody seems to think that if one of us just happens to find a gun in their hand our use of it will make the interaction any less coercive. However, when we happen to find some other

potentially *weaponizable* advantage in someone's hand, anarchists and voluntaryists almost always seem to part ways. The consequence of the argument that nobody can be free from restraint, and the unequal force of restraints in any given situation, mean that there is always, in one sense or another, a gun in the room. Voluntaryists just refuse to see that *their own choice* with regard to wielding those other advantages against others is the very same sort of choice they rightly reject when the weapon is obviously a weapon.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HIERARCHIES

OK. Let's walk through it. Anarchy is about social relations. We do or do not engage with others as social equals. We seem to agree that if we are free to place our own interests above those of the other by means of a gun, then taking advantage of those means is inappropriate. Presumably, if I don't need a gun to have my way with someone else, perhaps because I can just beat the crap out of them, that is not substantially different, as social relations go, than picking up the gun. Now, if I am just damn clever, and don't need to beat anyone up to have my way with them, is that somehow less *archic*, assuming I take advantage of the means at my disposal? Arguably not. And if the advantage that I have doesn't even require that I be smart, if I am just the beneficiary of an existing social relation, custom, law, etc., how is it different when I pick up that means to impose my will? In each case, the question for anarchists is whether or not the person with access to an advantage which allows them to disregard, to one extent or another, another person, does or does not make use of that means -- *pick up that weapon*. Anarchists have to constantly make choices not to be *archist* in their interactions. Our ideological competitors and suitors don't even seem to recognize that there is a choice unless there is quite literally a gun in the room.

The answer is all in the specific definitions. The anarchist baseline in this is an opposition to *archy*, and if we are really serious then we probably have to take it *all the way*. We started by taking it *pretty darn far*, as you can see, for example, in Proudhon's distillation of anarchism's "social system" to nothing but individual *equality* + some attention to the effects of

collective force. Anarchists should naturally acknowledge all the specific *differences* in the world, but *never* allow them to be naturalized as social *archies*. Ultimately, that probably means that anarchists should be opposed to *more than just hierarchy*, also combating forms of social authority which simply seem to put everyone “in their place,” even if those places seem to be on a horizontal plane.

The question is not really whether existing inequalities are somehow themselves coercive, but whether the *use* of existing inequalities by some social actors against others is coercive. And by the anarchist standard, the landlord seems, as often as not, to be using existing property conventions as a weapon against tenants. We can imagine instances where a rental agreement might be mutually beneficial by the strict anarchist standard, but it would be a rather different affair than anything renters face now.

Whether the use of force is appropriate to oppose all kinds of coercion is a thorny question, made thornier by the fact that so often there is ultimately some real gun in the room, even if it is not wielded by the landlord. For forms of coercion that are really systematic (property conventions, social norms, accumulated wealth, etc.) there is a limited amount that can be done to combat them by individual means, so some form of counter-association is required to shift the balance in the system. That might, in some cases, involved violent revolution, while in others, widespread attempts at moral suasion might be sufficient.