

LEFT LIBERTY

“IT IS THE CLASH OF IDEAS THAT CASTS THE LIGHT!”

THE *Gift* *Economy* OF PROPERTY.

**A JOURNAL OF MUTUALIST ANARCHIST
THEORY AND HISTORY.**

**NUMBER 2
AUGUST 2009**

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IT IS THE CLASH OF IDEAS THAT CASTS THE LIGHT!

“The Gift Economy of Property.”

Issue Two.—August, 2009.

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Editor: Shawn P. Wilbur
A CORVUS EDITION

LEFTLIBERTY: THE GIFT ECONOMY OF PROPERTY:

IF SEVERAL PERSONS WANT TO SEE THE WHOLE OF A LANDSCAPE, THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY, AND THAT IS, TO TURN THEIR BACK TO ONE ANOTHER. IF SOLDIERS ARE SENT OUT AS SCOUTS, AND ALL TURN THE SAME WAY, OBSERVING ONLY ONE POINT OF THE HORIZON, THEY WILL MOST LIKELY RETURN WITHOUT HAVING DISCOVERED ANYTHING. TRUTH IS LIKE LIGHT. IT DOES NOT COME TO US FROM ONE POINT; IT IS REFLECTED BY ALL OBJECTS AT THE SAME TIME; IT STRIKES US FROM EVERY DIRECTION, AND IN A THOUSAND WAYS. WE SHOULD WANT A HUNDRED EYES TO CATCH ALL ITS BEAMS.—JEAN-MARIE GUYAU, 1885.

Alligations

LOOKING BACKWARD (TO MOVE FORWARD)

Looking back at the first issue of LEFTLIBERTY, “The Unfinished Business of Liberty,” I’ll admit to being overwhelmingly impressed by just how *unfinished* it all is. But the point was to make a start, and I think that, as a *start*, it has a good deal going for it.

A lot has happened since the first issue came together. I took rough pre-publication editions of that issue, *The Philosophy of Progress*, and a handful of other pamphlets down to the San Francisco Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair, where I was tabling with the Alliance of the Libertarian Left. I came back to a work situation that was rapidly deteriorating, and decided to pursue micropublishing as more than just a sideline, and by the first week of June had made my first appearance, at the Portland Anarchist Bookfair, as Corvus Distribution, with a catalog of roughly thirty titles. On July 1, Corvus went live online with an e-commerce site, and a print catalog has started to circulate. I’m a couple of days overdue updating the website, but the catalog is growing at a rate of at least one title per day.

While Corvus was coming together, the organizational affiliations for LEFTLIBERTY were coming apart, and this second issue appears as a publication and organ of myself alone. It’s not a very juicy breakup story, so I won’t waste much space on it

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here. The *on alliance* section addresses it in the context of a second miscellany of old blog posts. In future issues, *on alliance* will remain an occasional feature, and will continue to focus on the difficult-but-necessary business of organizing across conventional divides within the anarchist and libertarian movements. I remain committed to the left-libertarian current, but am frankly enjoying the freedom to pursue a course for LEFTLIBERTY without any concerns about being representative of any particular organization. In practical terms, I have actually increased my participation with some left-libertarian organizations, such as the Center for a Stateless Society, and developing the distribution side of Corvus has brought me into closer collaboration with a number of my old ALLies. Of those, Brad Spangler, of the Center, Chris Lempa, editor of *ALLiance: A Journal of Left-Libertarian Theory and Strategy*, and James Tuttle, of the Tulsa ALL, deserve special mention.

All told, it's been a bit of a roller-coaster ride, but a productive, clarifying one, and as I sat down to assemble this issue, which had been announced as "A Doctrine of Life and Humanity," I realized that there was a lot more material ready to go than there was room to fit it in comfortably. As I have been hoping to get the journal on a more-or-less monthly schedule, this was not exactly bad news. I had already decided, after rereading the first issue, that 1) future issues needed more contemporary material, and 2) that the whole project needed some clarification. One "grab-bag" issue, as a starter, was tolerable, and there is no escaping the fact that the whole mutualist tradition is going to be alien to many readers, but things could certainly be clarified. Of course, that meant I had to clarify just what I thought I was up to, and it probably comes as no surprise that I found I was really up to THREE THINGS AT ONCE.

A TALE OF THREE APPROXIMATIONS

"Humanity proceeds by approximations"—that has been one of the notions from Proudhon that has really driven my work over the last couple of years. To embrace mutualism as an "anarchism of approximations" has been to look at projects and

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institutions as experiments, specific interventions directed at specific conditions. As someone steeped in contemporary continental philosophy, I had already incorporated some of this approach into my work as a scholar and writer. No one who has wrestled with any success with the poststructuralists is likely to forget that an “essay” is precisely “an attempt.” In grappling with mutualism, I found myself making three distinct sorts of attempts: 1) the attempt to deal with all the specific details of the various mutualist theories and theorists, without subjecting their fairly radical heterogeneity to some reductive dogma or expected form; 2) the simultaneous project, in *THE ANARCHISM OF APPROXIMATIONS*, of demonstrating that the heterodox mutualist traditions did indeed hang together enough to form a rich heritage for contemporary, roughly “Carsonian,” mutualism; and 3) the series of experiments that I have been making towards completing, updating, further synthesizing and revolutionizing the insights of historical mutualism—the development of the “Walt Whitman theory of political economy,” which really began in earnest with my blog post on “The Gift Economy of Property.”

With nobody to embarrass but myself, if I forged ahead with that third project, the last of my good excuses was really gone. And, ultimately, one of the things I learned in the messy last few months, is that I’m not really content to be *just* a historian, or a commentator on history—any more than I am content to *just* watch and commentate as the bloated big-box economy continues to lumber towards Armageddon. Hence *Corvus*, in the second case, and in the first, “A NEW APPROXIMATION,” roughly neo-Proudhonian in inspiration, but ultimately drawing from quite a wide range of sources.

IN THIS ISSUE

I’ll tackle the three projects in order. The historical section begins with the announcement of a new volume in the *NEW PROUDHON LIBRARY*, beginning the translation of Proudhon’s six-volume *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*. I’ve also included a translation of the concluding chapter of Proudhon’s *The Theory of Property*. That notice is followed by a report on the

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Collective Reason project and short translations from Errico Malatesta and Emile Armand. From the Libertarian Labyrinth archive, we have two short essays on cooperation—one among Mormons, and one among plants!—and William M. Van Der Weyde's essay on "Thomas Paine's Anarchism," from Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*.

THE ANARCHISM OF APPROXIMATIONS continues with a section on approximation, and then A NEW APPROXIMATION begins with an annotated, clarified and expanded collection of my preliminary writings on the subject, setting the stage for a new essay in LEFTLIBERTY 4.

The issue then concludes with a selection from "Another World is Possible,"—the first volume of THE DISTRIBUTIVE PASSIONS, and a collection of short essays *on alliance*.

THE NEXT ISSUE will be the previously-announced "A Doctrine of Life and Humanity," which can expand a little to address some new material from Leroux that I'm currently translating, which puts his triadic socialism in dialogue with De la Boetie's "Contr'un" (*Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*.) I expect the issues to follow that will be: 4—"What is Property? A Neo-Proudhonian Approximation;" 5—"The General Idea of Revolution," with material on Proudhon and Bellegarrigue," and 6—"Simplism and the Composite Order," tackling the Fourierist contribution to both historical mutualism and the "new approximation." The material for the previously announced issue on "Individualism and/nor Socialism" will appear in the issue in that sixth issue.

IN FUTURE ISSUES

I will be alternating between historical research and contemporary theory, with the synthetic and speculative projects as a constant. Each issue will build on the previous issues, and on additional primary documents published in Corvus Editions.

— SHAWN.

THE NEW PROUDHON LIBRARY

The second release in the series is a first volume from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's six-volume masterwork, *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*. It's a Collective Reason production, with substantial contributions by Jesse Cohn—but you'll have to blame me for any errors and infelicities in the released version.

Portions of this volume are slated to appear in *Property is Theft!* a collection of Proudhon's writings, edited by Iain McKay and published by AK Press. It looks like a couple of my shorter translations will also be included. The collection will be short on the later work, but will be a very nice first step towards increasing the availability of Proudhon's work.

The next full-sized pamphlet will probably be from the second volume of *The System of Economic Contradictions*, including a chunk of the study on property. I expect to also be releasing a number of shorter sections from *Justice* which relate to upcoming issues of LEFTLIBERTY.



To download or purchase *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church—Program*, go to:

http://corvusdistribution.org/index.php?title=New_Proudhon_Library



As a bonus, and as background to some of the discussion in *The Anarchism of Approximation*, this issue also includes the concluding chapter of Proudhon's *The Theory of Property*. For those familiar with Proudhon's critique of property in *What is Property?* there will be quite a bit in this chapter that looks strange and unfamiliar, but the shift from the early work to the late may not actually be so radical. In a blog post from last summer, I suggested that:

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[T]he transformation of Proudhon's thought involved a *series* of insights and developments. For our purposes, though, the important one is probably the one we see in the "Toast to the Revolution," where Proudhon suggests that individual and collective concerns can't simply be alloyed, that they are not simply opposed, and that a thoroughgoing individualization of interests and pursuits is the road to a legitimate form of non-state centralization.

Leap forward to the formula of *The Theory of Property*, where Proudhon embraces simple property, despite its absolutist, egoistic, despotic tendencies (with limitations of term based on occupancy and use). Is this a major change from the position of 1840?

I want to suggest that it is not. We have essentially the same terms, a centralizing tendency and an individual absolutism. The only thing that has really changed is Proudhon's understanding of the "systems of contradictions." In *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, he came to a realization about "dialectics:"

"L'ANTINOMIE NE SE RÉSOUT PAS: là est le vice fondamental de toute la philosophie hégélienne. Les deux termes dont elle se compose se BALANCENT, soit entre eux, soit avec d'autres termes antinomiques."

That is, "The antinomy does not resolve itself." It is not resolved. "The two terms of which it is composed are balanced, either by one another, or by other antinomic terms."

If Proudhon had approached the question in this way in 1840, wouldn't the logical formula for the "third form of society" be the balance or equilibrium, the counterpoise of property and communism? In 1840 we already have the acknowledgment that "the objects of communism and property are good." Isn't this essentially the acknowledgment that either might be justified according to its "aims"?

It seems to me that very little, other than Proudhon's opinion about whether or not "the antinomy resolves itself," actually changes. And that leaves us with roughly three responses: 1) to prefer the approach of 1840; 2) to prefer the approach of the 1860s; or 3) to feel that the terms are essentially ill-conceived.

THE THEORY OF PROPERTY

BY

PIERRE-JOSEPH PROUDHON

Chapter IX—Summary

The developments that I have given to my theory of property can be summed up in a few pages.

A first thing to observe is that, under the generic name of *property*, the apologists for that institution have confused, either through ignorance or through artifice, all manners of possession: communal system, emphyteusis, usufruct, feudal and allodial systems; they have reasoned about capital as if it was income, of fungible property as if it was immovable property. We have done justice to that confusion.

Possession, indivisible, untransferable, inalienable, pertains to the sovereign, prince, government, or collectivity, of which the tenant is more or less the dependent, feudataire or vassal. The Germans, before the invasion, the barbarians of the Middle Ages, knew only it; it is the principle of all the Slavic race, applied at this moment by the Emperor Alexander to sixty millions peasants. That possession implies in it the various rights of use, habitation, cultivation, pasture, hunting, and fishing—all the natural rights that Brissot called PROPERTY *according to nature*; it is to a possession of that sort, but which I had not defined, that I referred in my first *Memoir* and in my *Contradictions*. That form of possession is a great step in civilization; it is better in practice than the absolute domain of the Romans, reproduced in our anarchic property, which is killing itself with fiscal crises and its own excesses. It is certain that the economist can require nothing more: there the worker is rewarded, his fruits guaranteed; all that belongs legitimately to him is protected. The theory of possession, principle of civilization of the Slavic societies, is the most honorable of that race: it makes up for the tardiness of its development and makes inexpiable the crime of the Polish nobility.

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But is that the last word of civilization, and of right as well? I do not think so; one can conceive something more; the sovereignty of man is not entirely satisfied; liberty and mobility are not great enough.

Simple or allodial property—divisible and alienable—is the absolute domain of the holder over something, “the right of use and of abuse,” known initially as the *quiritaire* law; “within the limits of the law,” the collective consciousness adds later. Property is Roman; I find it clearly articulated only in Italy; and still its formation is slow.

The justification of the domain of property has always been the despair of jurists, economists, and philosophers. The principle of appropriation is that *every product of labor*,—such as a bow, some arrows, a plow, a rake, a house,—*belongs of right to whoever has created it*. Man does not create matter; he only shapes it. Nevertheless, although he did not create the wood from which he fashions a bow, a bed, a table, some chairs, or a bucket, it is the practice that material follows the form, and that property in labor implies property in materials. It is supposed that this material is offered to all, that no one is excluded, and that each may appropriate it.

Does that theory, that “the form carries the content,” apply to cultivated land? It is well-proven that the producer has a right to his product, the settler to the fruits that he has created. It is proven as well that one has a right to limit his consumption, accumulate a capital, and dispose of it at one’s will. But the land question cannot be answered in this manner; it is a new fact which exceeds the limit of the right of the producer. That producer did not create the soil, common to all. It is proven that he who has readied, furnished, cleaned up and cleared the soil has a right to remuneration, to compensation; it will be demonstrated that that compensation must consist, not in a monetary sum, but in the privilege of planting the cleared soil during a given time. Let us go all the way: it will be proven that each year of culture, involving improvement, entails for the cultivator the right to a fresh compensation. Very well! The property is not perpetual. The farm leases of nine, twelve, or thirty years can take into account all of that with regard to the farmer, with respect to whom the proprietor represents the public domain. The land tenure of the Slavic commune also takes into account the *partiaire* peasant; the law is satisfied, labor compensated: there is no property. The Roman law and the Civil Code have perfectly distinguished all of these things: rights of use, usufruct, habitation, exploitation, possession. How do the economists pretend to

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confuse these with the right of property? What are we to make of the bucolic of Mr. Thiers and all the stupid declamations of the coterie?

Social economy, like right, knows no domain, and exists entirely outside of property: concept of value, wages, labor, product, exchange, circulation, rent, sale and purchase, currency, tax, credit, theory of population, monopoly, patents, rights of authors, insurance, public service, association, etc. The relations of family and city have no more need of property; domain may be reserved to the commune, or to the State; rent then becomes tax; the cultivator becomes possessor; it is better than tenant farming, better than metayage; liberty and individuality enjoy the same guarantees.

It must be well understood: humanity even is not proprietor of the earth: how could a nation, how could a private individual say that it is sovereign of the portion which it is due? Humanity has not created the soil: man and the earth have been created for one another and come under a higher authority. We have received the earth in tenancy and usufruct; it has been given to us to be possessed, exploited by us solidarily and individually, under our collective and personal responsibility. We become the cultivator, the possessor, by enjoying, not arbitrarily, but according to *rules* that consciousness and reason discover, and for an end which goes beyond our pleasure: these *rules* and this *end* exclude all absolutism on our part, and refer terrestrial domain to a higher authority than ours. Man, said one of our bishops one day, is the *foreman of the globe*. That speech has been highly praised. Well, it does not express anything but what I have just said, that property is superior to humanity, superhuman, and that every attribution of that sort, to us poor creatures, is usurpation.

All of our arguments in favor of property, that is, of an eminent sovereignty over things, only succeed in demonstrating possession, usufruct, usage, the right to live and to work, nothing more.

We must always come to the conclusion that property is a *true legal fiction*; only it could be that the fiction is grounded in such a way that we must regard it as legitimate. Otherwise, we do not depart from the realm of the possessory, and all of our argumentation is sophistic and in bad faith. It may be possible that this fiction, which appalls us because we do not see the sense of it, is so sublime, so splendid, so lofty in its justice, that none of our most real, most positive, most immanent rights approach it, and they only survive themselves by means of that keystone, a true fiction.

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The principle of property—ultra-legal, extra-juridical, anti-economic, superhuman—is nonetheless a spontaneous product of the collective Being and of society, and it falls to us to search in it for, if not a complete justification, at least an explanation.

The right of property is absolute, *jus utendi et abutendi*, the right of use and abuse. It opposes itself to another absolute, government, which begins by imposing on its antagonist the restriction, *quatenus juris ratio patitur*, “within the limits of the law.” From the reason of the law to the reason of the State is only a step: we are in constant danger of usurpation and despotism. The justification of property, that we have vainly sought in its origins—first occupancy, usucapion, conquest, appropriation by labor,—we find in its *aims*: it is essentially political. Where domain belongs to the collectivity, senate, aristocracy, prince or emperor, there is only feudalism, vassalage, hierarchy and subordination; no liberty, consequently, nor autonomy. It is to break the bonds of COLLECTIVE SOVEREIGNTY, so exorbitant, so formidable, that the domain of property has been raised against it, true sign of the sovereignty of the citizen; it is to break those bonds that this domain has been assigned to the individual, the State only keeping the parts deemed indivisible and common: waterways, lakes, ponds, roads, public places, waste lands, uncultivated mountains, forests, deserts, and all that which cannot be appropriated. It is in order to increase the ease of transport and circulation that the earth has been rendered mobilizable, alienable, divisible, after having rendered it hereditary. Allodial property is a division of sovereignty: on that account it is particularly odious to power and democracy. It is odious first because of its omnipotence; it is the adversary of autocracy, as liberty is the enemy of authority; it does not please the democrats, who are all on fire for unity, centralization, and absolutism. The people are cheerful when they look to make war against the proprietors. And yet *allodium* is the basis of the republic.

The constitution of a republic,—permit me at least to use that word in its high juridical sense,—is the *sine qua non* condition of safety. General Lafayette said one day, in presenting Louis-Philippe, “This is the best of republics;” and the constitutional royalty was defined: “A monarchy surrounded by republican institutions.” The word republic is not then seditious by itself: it responds to the views of science as much as it satisfies desires.

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The immediate consequences of allodial property are: 1) administration of the commune by the proprietors, farmers and workers, gathered in council; starting from communal independence and the arrangement of its properties; 2) administration of the province by the provincials: thus decentralization and the germ of federation. The royal function, defined by the constitutional system, is replaced here by the citizen proprietors, having an open eye on public affairs: nothing is in need of mediation.

Feudal property will never engender a republic; and similarly a republic which would allow allodium to sink into fief, which would return to slavish communism from property, will not remain; it will become an autocracy.

Likewise, true property will not engender a monarchy; a monarchy will not engender true property. If the opposite was achieved, if an agglomeration of proprietors elected a head, by that same they would abdicate their share of sovereignty, and sooner or later the proprietary principle would be altered by their hands; or if a monarchy created proprietors, it would implicitly abdicate, it would demolish itself, unless it transformed itself voluntarily into a constitutional royalty, more nominal than effective, representing the proprietors. We have seen this in France, when, under Louis-Philippe, liberals and republicans made war on parochialism, *l'esprit de clocher*. The cause of royalty was served.

In this way, all of my previous criticisms, all the egalitarian conclusions that I have deduced from them, receive a brilliant confirmation.

The principle of property is ultra-legal, extra-legal, absolutist, and egoist by nature, to the point of iniquity: *it must be this way*.

It has for counter-weight the reason of the State, which is absolutist, ultra-legal, illiberal, and governmental, to the point of oppression: *it must be this way*.

Here is how, in the projections of universal reason, the principle of egoism, usurper by nature, without integrity, becomes an instrument of justice and of order, to the point that property and right are inseparable ideas and nearly synonyms. Property is egoism idealized, consecrated, invested with a political and juridical function.

It must be this way: because right is never better observed than when it finds a defender in egoism and in the coalition of egoisms. Liberty will never be defended against power, if it does not have at its disposal a means of defense, if it does not have its impregnable fortress.

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The reader must take care not to see in this antagonism, these oppositions, these equilibrations, a simple witticism, a *jeu d'esprit*. I know that a simplistic theory, like communism or the absolutism of the State, is easier to comprehend than the study of the antinomies. But the fault is not in me, a simple observer and seeker of series. I hear certain reformers say: Let us suppose all of the complications of authority, liberty, possession, competition, monopoly, tax, balance of trade, public services; let us create a uniform plan of society, and all will be simplified and resolved. They reason like the doctor who said: With its diverse elements,—bone, muscles, tendons, nerves, viscera, arterial and venous blood, gastric and pancreatic fluids, chyle, lachrymal and synovial humors, gas, liquids and solids,—the body is ungovernable. Let us reduce it to a single, solid, resilient matter, bone for example; hygiene and therapy will become child's play.—So be it, only society cannot ossify any more than the human body. Our social system is complicated, much more than one would have thought. If, today, we have acquired all the data, it needs to be coordinated, synthesized according to its own laws. There, a thought exposes itself, an intimate collective life that develops apart from the laws of geometry and mechanics; that is reluctant to assimilate to the rapid, uniform, infallible movement of a crystallization; of which the ordinary, syllogistic, fatalist, unitary logic is incapable of taking account, but which is explained marvelously with the aid of a larger philosophy, admitting in a system the plurality of principles, the struggle of elements, the opposition of contraries and the synthesis of all the indefinables and absolutes.

Now, as we know that there are degrees in intelligence as well as in force; degrees in memory, reflection, idealization, the faculty of invention; degrees in love and in thought; degrees of sensibility; degrees of self or of consciousness; as it is impossible to say where that which we call the soul begins and where it ends, why refuse to admit to us that the social principles,—so well linked, so well thought out, and in which are found so much reason, foresight, feeling, passion, and justice,—are the sign of a true life, of a higher thought, of a reason constituted differently from our own.

Why, if it is thus, won't we see in these facts the achievement of the *direct creation of society by itself*, resulting from the simple connection of the elements and of the play of forces which constitute society?

We have surprised a logic apart, maxims which are not those of our individual reason, although that reason comes, by the study of society, to

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discover them and to make them its own. There is then a difference between *individual reason* and *collective reason*.

We have been able to observe again, thanks to property and its accompaniments, another phenomenon, another law, the one of free forces, going and returning, indefinite approximations, latitude of action and of reaction, elasticity of nature, harmony extended, which is the distinctive character of life, of liberty, and of imagination. Property and government are to spontaneous creations of a law of immanence which denies itself to the idea of an *initiation étrangère*, in which case each human group would need a special initiator

This understood, we will remark that the general laws of history are the same as those of social organization. To assemble the history of property among a people is to tell how it has gone through the crises of its political formation, how it has produced its powers and its organs, equalized its forces, regulated its interests, endowed its citizens; how it has lived, and how it has died. Property is the most fundamental principle by the aid of which one may explain the revolutions of history. It has not yet existed in the conditions where theory places it; no nation has ever been up to that institution, but it positively governs history, although absent, and it hastens the nations to recognize it, punishing the traitor.

The Roman law had recognized it only in an incomplete manner, unilaterally. It had well defined the sovereignty of the citizen on the land due to him; it had not recognized the role and defined the right of the State. Roman property is property independent of the social contract, absolute, without solidarity or reciprocity, prior to and also superior to the public right, egoist, vicious, sinful, and thus justly condemned by the Church. The Republic and the Empire have crumbled, the one atop the other, since the patriciate had only wanted property for itself alone; because the victorious plebe has not known how to acquire it, to put it to work, and to consolidate it; and because slavery and the *colonat* spoiled everything. For the rest, it is by allodial property that all the aristocracies and all despotism have been defeated, from the end of the western empire up to today. Allodial property, abandoned by the nobility to the communes and to roture, stifled the lordly power, and, in 1789, gobbled up the fiefs;—it is the same principle which, after having brought about the usurpation of the Polish nobility, simple usufructaries in the beginning, turned against it and cause it to lose the nation; which, in 1846, has brought about the massacres of Gallacia.

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It is against the allodial principle that England stiffened itself, preferring, following the example of the Roman patricians, to throw the world to its workers¹ than to allow the division and mobilization of the soil, and to equalize property.

The principle of synthetic, allodial or equal property, would have progressively conducted the France of '89 to an egalitarian Republic, without or without dynasty: the dynastic principle having to be subordinated in France as it is in England, but following another system. There was a moment of hope in 1830. Sadly, the minds predisposed to English ideas did not grasp the profound difference which must distinguish the French Constitution, based on allodium, and the English constitution, based on fief. It was Sieyès, one of the most profound of our politicians, who spread the error.

An electoral census was then established, of large and small colleges: these supposed large and small property holdings; imperceptibly, while possession of the soil eroded dramatically among the lower class, it was gathered anew, and large property reformed itself with the aid of industrial capital; feudalism,—financial, manufacturing, transport, mining, Judaic,—followed; so that today France no longer knows itself; some say that the constitutional government, imported from England, was not made for it; a small number, who affirm the Republic and desire only a *Chamber*, do not themselves know the reason for their desire, or the constitutive principles of the government of the Revolution.

Property has undergone numerous eclipses in history, under the Romans, among the barbarians, in modern times and in our own day. We find the causes of those lapses in ignorance, incompetence, and especially in the indignity of the proprietors. In Rome, the avarice of the nobles, their blind resistance to the legitimate complaints of the people, the decline of the plebians, preferring to culture the brigandage of armies, military pillage, and the caesarean grants, made a clean slate, along with property, of law, liberties, and nationality. Feudal oppression, in the Middle Ages, drove all the small proprietors from allodium to fief. Property, eclipsed for more than a thousand years, reappeared with the French Revolution. Its ascendant period stopped at the end of the reign of Louis Philippe; since then, it is in decline: indignity.

¹ “jeter la monde en pâture, as one would throw food to hungry animals.

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The mass of the proprietors are disgraceful, especially in the countryside. The Revolution, in selling the goods of the Church and of émigrés, has created a new class of proprietors; it has believed them to be interested in liberty. Not at all: what has interested this class is that the émigrés and the Bourbons do not return, and that is all. To that end, the beneficiaries have imagined nothing better than to give themselves a master, Napoleon. And when, exercising clemency, he authorized the émigrés to return, they made it a crime: they would never have thought them far enough away.

Property, created by the Revolution, no longer thinks of itself as a political institution, counter-balancing the State, as a guarantee of liberty and good administration; it considers itself, by force of habit, as privilege, enjoyment, as a new aristocracy, allied to the poor by the division of employments, consequently of taxes, and it is interested in that way in the exploitation of the masses. It has only to think of its prey. The chaos is profound and it is not clear which particular system to accuse. The legislature of '89 lacked foresight; the new proprietors, purchasers of national goods, have lacked character and public spirit, in saying to Napoleon I: *Reign and govern, provided that we enjoy*. Under the Restoration, there was an instinct of reform; the bourgeoisie passed into the opposition, which is its place; it made an antithesis to the State; but this was accidental: some saw in the Bourbons the princes of the *ancien régime*; some made war for the maintenance of sales; and when the Revolution of July had changed the dynasty, property devoted itself to power. Their deal was soon concluded: the bourgeoisie, through its deputies, consented to the tax, nine-tenths of which returned to them by employment. It had created corruption in a system, and dishonored property by agiotage; it wanted to join the benefits of the bank to those of rent; it had preferred the stipends of the state, the gains of traffic and of the stock market to production and to commerce; it is the serf of the big companies.

A key point that must not be forgotten is that the citizen, by the federative pact which confers property to him, brings together two contradictory duties: he must follow, on one side, the law of his interests, and, on the other, he must make sure that, as a member of the social body, his property is not detrimental to public affairs. In short, he is constituted police agent and watcher over himself. That double quality is essential to the constitution of liberty; without it all edifices crumble; it is necessary to

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return to the principle of police and authority. Where is public morality in that chapter?

We have had a regulation of the baker's shop. Now, it would have been useless if the social body had been organized in such a manner that the making of bread, the sale of wheat, was made truthful and upright, which has not taken place and will not take place so long as our morals are not renewed. Anyway, regulation has never had any power against the pact of famine, as real today as before '89. We have regulated the butcher's shop, which sells cadavers for fresh meat, and dogs for beef; regulation of the markets: weights and measures, quality and quantity. Vegetables, fruits, poultry, fish, game, butter, dairy,—all is defective, all is over-priced. There is not a remedy in suppression, so long as public consciousness is not renewed, so long as, by that regeneration, the citizen producer does not become his own strict supervisor. Can he do that, yes or no? Can property become holy? Is the condemnation, which the Gospel has placed on it, indelible? In the first case, we can be free; in the second, we have resigned ourselves; we are fatally and always under the double law of the Empire and the Church, and all of our displays of liberalism are pure hypocrisy and increase of misery.

All things considered, it is a question of knowing if the French nation is capable today of supplying true proprietors. What is certain is that property is to be regenerated among us. The element of that regeneration is, along with the moral regeneration of which we have just spoken, equilibration.

Every institution of property supposes either: 1) an equal distribution of land between the holders; or 2) an equivalent in favor of those who possess none of the soil. But this is a pure assumption: the equality of property is not at all an initial fact; it is in the ends of the institution, not in its origins. We have remarked first of all that property, because it is abusive, absolutist, and based in egoism, must inevitably tend to restrict itself, to compete with itself, and, as a consequence, to balance. Its tendency is to equality of conditions and fortunes. Exactly because it is absolute, it dismisses any idea of absorption. Let us weigh this well.

Property is not measured by merit, as it is neither wages, nor reward, nor decoration, nor honorific title; it is not measured by the power of the individual, since labor, production, credit and exchange do not require it at all. It is a free gift, accorded to man, with a view to protecting him against the attacks of poverty and the incursions of his fellows. It is the breastplate

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of his personality and equality, independent of differences in talent, genius, strength, industry, etc.

“Suppose,” I said in 1840, “that this daily social task consists in the ploughing, hoeing, or reaping of two square decameters, and that the average time required to accomplish it is seven hours: one laborer will finish it in six hours, another will require eight; the majority, however, will work seven. But provided each one furnishes the quantity of labor demanded of him, whatever be the time he employs, they are entitled to equal wages. Shall the laborer who is capable of finishing his task in six hours have the right, on the ground of superior strength and activity, to usurp the task of the less skilful laborer, and thus rob him of his labor and bread? Who dares maintain such a proposition? ... If the strong come to the aid of the weak, their kindness deserves praise and love; but their aid must be accepted as a free gift,—not imposed by force, nor offered at a price.”

Under the communist or governmentalist regime, it is necessary for the police and authority to guarantee the weak against the strong; sadly, the police and authority, as long as they have existed, have only ever functioned for the profit of the strong, for whom they have magnified the means of usurpation. Property—absolute, uncontrollable—protects itself. It is the defensive weapon of the citizen, his shield; labor is his sword.

Here is why it is suitable for all: the young ward as much as the mature adult, the black as the white, the straggler as the precocious, the ignorant as the learned, the artisan as the functionary, the worker as the entrepreneur, the farmer as the bourgeois and the noble. Here is why the Church prefers it to wages; and, for the same reason, why the papacy requires, in its turn, sovereignty. All the bishops, in the Middle Ages, were sovereign; all, until 1789, were proprietors; the pope alone remained as a relic.

The equilibrium of property still requires some political and economic guarantees. *Property,—State*, such are the two poles of society. The theory of property is the companion piece to the theory of the justification, by the sacraments, of fallen man.

The guarantees of property against itself are:

Mutual and free credit.

Taxes.

Warehouses, docks, markets. (See my project for the *Palais de l'Exposition universelle*, p. 249.)

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Mutual insurance and balance of commerce.

Public, universal and equal instruction.

Industrial and agricultural association.

Organization of public services: canals, railroads, roads, ports, mail, telegraphs, draining, irrigation.

The guarantees of property against the State are:

Separation and distribution of powers.

Equality before the law.

Jury, judge of fact, and judge of law.

Liberty of the press.

Public monitoring.

Federal organization.

Communal and provincial organization.

The State is composed: 1) of the federation of proprietors, grouped by districts, departments, and provinces; 2) of the industrial associations, small worker republics; 3) of public services (at cost-price); 4) of artisans and free merchants. Normally, the number of industrialists, artisans, and merchants is determined by those of the proprietors of land. Every country must live by its own production; as a consequence, industrial production must be equal to the excess of subsistences not consumed by the proprietors.

There are exceptions to that rule: in England, for example, industrial production exceeded that proportion, thanks to foreign exchange. It is a temporary anomaly; unless certain races should be doomed to an eternal subalternization. Moreover, there exist exceptional products in demand everywhere: those from fishing, for example, and those from mineral exploitation. But, measured over the entire globe, the proportion is as I say: the quota lot of subsistences is the regulator; consequently, agriculture is the essential and predominant industry.

In constituting property in land, the legislator wanted one thing: that the earth would not be in the hands of the State, dangerous communism or governmentalism, but in the hands of all. The tendency is, as a consequence, we are constantly told, toward the balance of property, and subsequently to that of conditions and fortunes.

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It is thus that, by the rules of industrial association, which sooner or later, with the aid of better legislation, will include large industrial bodies, each worker has his hand on a portion of *capital*.

It is thus that, by the law of the diffusion of labor, and the ramification of taxes, everyone must pay his more or less equal part of the public expenses.

It is thus that, by the true organization of universal suffrage, every citizen has a hand in government; and thus also that, by the organization of credit, every citizen has a hand in circulation, and finds himself at once general partner and silent partner, banker and discounteer before the public.

It is thus that, by enlistment, each citizen takes part in the defence; by education, takes part in philosophy and science.

It is thus, finally, that, by the right of free examination and of free publicity each citizen has a hand in all the ideas and all the ideals which can be produced.

Humanity proceeds by approximations:

- 1st. The approximation of the equality of faculties through education, the division of labor, and the development of aptitudes;
- 2nd. The approximation of the equality of fortunes through industrial and commercial freedom.
- 3rd. The approximation of the equality of taxes;
- 4th. The approximation of the equality of property;
- 5th. The approximation of *an-archy*;
- 6th. The approximation of *non-religion*, or non-mysticism;
- 7th. Indefinite progress in the science, law, liberty, honor, justice.

It is proof that FATE does not govern society; that geometry and arithmetic proportions do not regulate its movements, as in minerology or chemistry; that there is a life, a soul, a liberty which escapes from the precise, fixed measures governing matter. *Materialism*, in that which touches society, is absurd.

Thus, on this great question, our critique remains at base the same, and our conclusions are always the same: we want equality, more and more fully approximated, of conditions and fortunes, as we want, more and more, the equalization of responsibilities. We reject, along with governmentalism, communism in all its forms; we want the definition of official functions and individual functions; of public services and of free services. There is only one thing new for us in our thesis: it is that that same property, the

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contradictory and abusive principle of which has raised our disapproval, we today accept entirely, along with its equally contradictory qualification: *Dominium est just utendi et abutendi re suâ, quatenus juris ratio patur.* We have understood finally that the opposition of two absolutes—one of which, alone, would be unpardonably reprehensive, and both of which, together, would be rejected, if they worked separately—is the very cornerstone of social economy and public right: but it falls to us to govern it and to make it act according to the laws of logic.

What would the apologists for property do? The economists of the school of Say and Malthus?

For them, property was a sacrament which remained alone and by itself, prior and superior to the reason of the State, independent of the State, which they would humble beyond all measure.

They would desire then property independent of law, as they want competition independent of law; freedom of import and export independent of law; industrial sponsorship, the Stock Exchange, the Bank, the salariat, tenant farming, independent of law.—That is, in their theories of property, of competition, of concurrence, and of credit, not content to declare an unlimited liberty, a limitless initiative, *which we also desire*, they disregard the interests of the collectivity, which are the law; not understanding that political economy is composed of two fundamental parts: the description of economic forces and phenomena apart from law, and their regularization by law.

They would dare to say that the equilibration of property, as I mean it, is its very destruction. So what! Will it no longer be property, since the farmer will share in the rent and the surplus value; because the rights of the third who have built or planted will be established and recognized; because property in the soil will no longer necessarily mean property in that which is above or beneath it; because the lessor, in case of bankruptcy, will come with the other creditors to a division of the assets, without privilege; because between legitimate holders there will be equality, not hierarchy; because instead of seeing in property only enjoyment and rent, the holder will find in it the guarantee of his independence and dignity; because instead of being a ridiculous character, Mr. Prudhomme or Mr. Jourdain, the proprietor will be a dignified citizen, conscious of his duties as well as his rights, the sentry of liberty against despotism and usurpation?

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I have developed the considerations which make property intelligible, rational, legitimate, and without which it remains usurping and odious.

And yet, even in these conditions, it presents something egoist which is always unpleasant to me. My reason—being egalitarian, anti-governmental, and the enemy of ferocity and the abuse of force—can accept, the dependence on property as a shield, a place of safety for the weak: my heart will never be in it. For myself, I do not need that concession, either to earn my bread, or to fulfill my civic duties, or for my happiness. I do not need to encounter it in others to aid them in their weakness and respect their rights. I feel enough of the energy of conscience, enough intellectual force, to sustain with dignity all of my relations; and if the majority of my fellow citizens resembled me, what would we have to do with that institution? Where would be the risk of tyranny, or the risk of ruin from competition and free exchange? Where would be the peril to the small, the orphan and the worker? Where would be the need for pride, ambition, and avarice, which can satisfy itself only by immense appropriation?

A small, rented house, a garden to use, largely suffices for me: my profession not being the cultivation of the soil, the vine, or the meadow, I have no need to make a park, or a vast inheritance. And when I would be a laborer or vintner, the Slavic possession will suffice for me: the share falling due to each head of household in each commune. I cannot abide the insolence of the man who, his feet on ground he holds only by a free concession, forbids you passage, prevents you from picking a bluet in his field or from passing along the path.

When I see all these fences around Paris, which block the view of the country and the enjoyment of the soil by the poor pedestrian, I feel a violent irritation. I ask myself whether the property which surrounds in this way each house is not instead expropriation, expulsion from the land. *Private Property!* I sometimes meet that phrase written in large letters at the entrance of an open passage, like a sentinel forbidding me to pass. I swear that my dignity as a man bristles with disgust. Oh! In this I remain of the religion of Christ, which recommends detachment, preaches modesty, simplicity of spirit and poverty of heart. Away with the old patrician, merciless and greedy; away with the insolent baron, the avaricious bourgeois, and the hardened peasant, *durus arator*. That world is odious to me. I cannot love it nor look at it. If I ever find myself a proprietor, may God and men, the poor especially, forgive me for it!

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COLLECTIVE REASON NEEDS TRANSLATORS!

Email shawn@corvusdistribution if you would like to get involved.

We've got a handful of us working away at various things—a couple of Proudhon projects, my translations of Pierre Leroux, and a new contributor working on Anselme Bellegarrigue's *Au fait! Au fait!* I've recently completed a translation of Emile Armand's *Mini-Manual of the Individualist Anarchist*, which is included here, and available in a dual-language pamphlet from Corvus Editions. The following essay by Errico Malatesta is also available from Corvus—as a free download, a *free* pamphlet, or in quantities suitable for tabling or distribution at *cost-price*:

A Little Theory.

Errico Malatesta

[*L'Endehors*, August 21, 1892]

Revolt rumbles everywhere. Here it is the expression of an idea, and there the result of a need; most often it is the consequence of the intertwining of needs and ideas which mutually generate and reinforce each other. It fastens itself to the causes of evil or strikes close by; it is conscious or instinctive; it is humane or brutal, generous or narrowly selfish, but it always grows and extends itself.

It is history which advances: it is useless to take time to complain about the routes that it chooses, since these routes have been marked out by all previous evolution.

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But history is made by men; and since we do not want to remain indifferent and passive spectators to the historical tragedy, since we want to contribute all our forces to determine the events which seem to us most favorable to our cause, we must have a criterion to guide us in the evaluation of the facts which are produced, and especially in choosing the place that we will occupy in the combat.

The end justifies the means: we have spoken much ill of that maxim. In reality, it is the universal guide of conduct.

One could say better: *each end contains its means.* It is necessary to seek morality in the end; the means is fatally determined.

The end that one proposes being given, by will or by necessity, the great problem of life is to find the means which, according to the circumstances, lead most certainly and most economically to the coveted end. The manner in which one resolves that problem depends, as much as it can depend on the human will, on whether an individual or a party reaches its own end, whether it will be useful to its cause or serve, without wishing to, the enemy cause. To have found the good means: that is the whole secret of the great men and great parties, who have left their marks on history.

The end of the Jesuits is, for the mystics, the glory of God; for the others, it is the power of the Society. Thus they must try to daze the masses, to terrorize them, to make them submit.

The aim of the Jacobins and of all the authoritarian parties, who believe themselves in possession of the absolute truth, is to impose their ideas on the mass of the people. They must for that attempt to seize power, to subjugate the masses and to fix humanity on the procrustean bed of their conceptions.

As for us, it is another thing: our aim is much different, and thus our means must be very different.

We do not fight to put ourselves in the place of the exploiters and oppressors of today, and do not struggle for the triumph of an abstraction. We are not like that Italian patriot who said: "What

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matter if all Italians faint with hunger, provided that Italy be great and glorious!" Nor are we, like that comrade who admitted that it would be all the same to him to massacre three-quarters of the people, provided that Humanity be free and happy.

We want good fortune for individuals, for everyone, without exception. We desire that each human being be able to develop themselves and live as happily as possible. And we believe that liberty and good fortune cannot be given to men by men or by a party, but that everyone must discover by themselves the conditions of their own freedom and conquer them. We believe that only the most complete application of the principle of solidarity can destroy strife, oppression and exploitation and that solidarity can only be the result of free agreement, the spontaneous and intentional harmonization of interests.

For us, everything that seeks to destroy economic and political oppression, all that which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of human beings, to give them the consciousness of their rights and of their forces and to persuade them to do their business by themselves, all that provokes hatred against oppression and love between people, brings us closer to our aim and as a consequence is good—subject only to a quantitative calculation in order to obtain from the given forces the maximum of useful effect. And on the contrary, all that which tends to sacrifice, against his will, a man to the triumph of a principle, is evil, because it is in contradiction with that aim.

We desire the triumph of liberty and love.

But do we therefore renounce the use of violent means? Not in the least. Our means are those that circumstances allow us and impose on us.

Certainly we don't want to harm a hair on anyone's head; we would like to dry all tears and cause no more be shed. But we must struggle in the world such as it is, or else remain sterile dreamers.

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The day will come, we firmly believe, when it will be possible to produce good for people without making evil for anyone. Today it is not possible. Even the purest and sweetest of the martyrs, those who are dragged to the scaffold for the triumph of good, without resistance, by blessing their persecutors like the Christ of legend, still make good from evil. Apart from the evil that they do to themselves, which must count for something, they cause all those who love them to shed bitter tears.

It is a question then, always, in all the acts of life, of choosing the least evil, of trying to make the least evil for the largest amount of human good.

Humanity drags painfully under the weight of political and economic oppression; it is brutalized, degenerated, killed (and not always slowly) by poverty, slavery, ignorance and their results.

For the defense of that state of things exist powerful military and police organizations, which respond by prison, the scaffold, and the massacre of every serious attempt at change. There are no peaceful, legal means by which to depart from this situation, and that is natural because the law is made expressly by the privileged to defend privileges. Against the physical force which blocks our road, there is only violent revolution.

Obviously, the revolution will produce many misfortunes, many sufferings; but if it produced one hundred times more of them, it would still be a blessing relative to what we endure today.

We know that in a single great battle more people are killed than in the bloodiest of revolutions; we know the millions of children who die at an early age each year from lack of care; we know the millions of proletarians who die prematurely from the evil of poverty; we know the meager life, without joy and without hope, that the immense majority of people lead; we know that even the richest and most powerful are much less happy than they could be in a society of equals; and we know that this state of things has lasted since time immemorial. It will endure indefinitely without

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the revolution, while a single revolution, which resolutely attacked the causes of evil, could put humanity forever on the road to happiness.

Thus, let the revolution come; each day that it is delayed is an enormous mass of sufferings inflicted on us. Let us labor so that it comes quickly and is such as is necessary to put an end to all oppression and all exploitation.

It is from the love of humanity that we are revolutionaries: it is not our fault if history has forced on us this distressing necessity.

Thus for us, the anarchists, or at least (since in the end the words are only conventions) for those among the anarchists who see things like us, every act of propaganda or of achievement, by word or by deed, individual or collective, is good when it serves to approach and facilitate the revolution, when it serves to insure to the revolution the conscious support of the masses and to give it that character of universal liberation, without which one could well have a revolution, but not the revolution that we desire. And it is especially with regard to revolution that we must take account of the principle of the most economical means, since here the expense is summed up in human lives.

We know too well the dreadful material and moral conditions in which the proletariat finds itself to not understand the acts of hate, of vengeance, even of ferocity which can be produced. We understand that there are some oppressed who, having always been treated by the bourgeois with the most shameful hardness, having always seen that everything was permitted to the strongest, one bright day, when they find themselves for a moment the strongest, say: "Let us also do as the bourgeois do." We understand that it can happen that in the fever of battle some natures—originally generous, but not prepared by a long moral exercise, very difficult in present conditions—lose sight of the end to be attained, take violence for the end in itself and allow themselves to be led to savage transports.

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But it is one thing to understand and to pardon these acts, and another to claim them as our own. These are not acts that we can accept, encourage, and imitate. We must be resolute and energetic, but we must try never to pass beyond the limit marked by necessity. We must do as the surgeon who cuts when he must, but avoids inflicting unnecessary suffering: in a word, we must be inspired by the sentiment of love for people, for all people.

It appears to us that the sentiment of love is the moral source, the soul of our program: it appears to us that only by conceiving the revolution as the grand human jubilee, as the liberation and fraternization of all, no matter what class or what party they have belonged to, can our ideal be realized.

Brutal revolt will certainly be produced, and it could even serve to give the great helping hand which must shake the current system; but if it does not find the counterweight in revolutionaries who act for an ideal, it will devour itself.

Hate does not produce love; we will not renew the world by hate. And the revolution of hate will either fail completely, or else result in a new oppression, which could be called anarchist, as one calls the present governments liberal, but which will not be less an oppression and will not fail to produce the effects which produce all oppression.

Translation: Shawn P. Wilbur

MINI-MANUAL OF THE INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHIST

Emile Armand

I

To be an anarchist is to deny authority and reject its economic corollary: exploitation—and that in all the domains where human activity is exerted. The anarchist wishes to live without gods or masters; without patrons or directors; a-legal, without laws as without prejudices; amoral, without obligations as without collective morals. He wants to live freely, to live his own idea of life. In his interior conscience, he is always asocial, a refractory, an outsider, marginal, an exception, a misfit. And obliged as he is to live in a society the constitution of which is repugnant to his temperament, it is in a foreign land that he is camped. If he grants to his environment unavoidable concessions—always with the intention of taking them back—in order to avoid risking or sacrificing his life foolishly or uselessly, it is because he considers them as weapons of personal defense in the struggle for existence. The anarchist wishes to live his life, as much as possible, morally, intellectually, economically, without occupying himself with the rest of the world, exploiters or exploited; without wanting to dominate or to exploit others, but ready to respond by all means against whoever would intervene in his life or would prevent him from expressing his thought by the pen or by speech.

The anarchist is the enemy of the State and all its institutions which tend to maintain or to perpetuate its stranglehold on the individual. There is no possibility of conciliation between the anarchist and any form whatever of society resting on authority, whether it emanates from an autocrat, from an aristocracy, or from a democracy. No common ground between the anarchist and any environment regulated by the decisions of a majority or the wishes of an elite. The anarchist combats for the same reason the teaching furnished by the State and that dispensed by the Church. He is the adversary of monopolies and of privileges, whether they are of the intellectual, moral or economic order. In a word, he is the irreconcilable antagonist of every regime, of every social system, of every state of things that implies the domination of man or the environment over

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the individual and the exploitation of the individual by another or by the group.

The work of the anarchist is above all a work of critique. The anarchist goes, sowing revolt against that which oppresses, obstructs, opposes itself to the free expansion of the individual being. He agrees first to rid brains of preconceived ideas, to put at liberty temperaments enchained by fear, to give rise to mindsets free from popular opinion and social conventions; it is thus that the anarchist will push all comers to make route with him to rebel practically against the determinism of the social environment, to affirm themselves individually, to sculpt his internal statue, to render themselves, as much as possible, independent of the moral, intellectual and economic environment. He will urge the ignorant to instruct himself, the nonchalant to react, the feeble to become strong, the bent to straighten. He will push the poorly endowed and less apt to pull from themselves all the resources possible and not to rely on others.

In these regards, an abyss separates anarchism from socialism, including syndicalism.

The anarchist places at the base of all his conceptions of life: the individual act. And that is why he willingly calls himself anarchist-individualist.

He does not believe that all the evils that men suffer come exclusively from capitalism or from private property. He believes that they are due especially to the defective mentality of men, taken as a bloc. There are not masters because there are slaves and the gods do not subsist because some faithful kneel. The individualist anarchist loses interest in a violent revolution having for aim a transformation of the mode of distribution of products in the collectivist or communist sense, which would hardly bring about a change in the general mentality and which would not provoke at all the emancipation of the individual being. In a communist regime that one would be as subordinated as presently to the good will of the environment: he would find himself as poor, as miserable as now; instead of being under the thumb of the small capitalist minority of the present, he would be dominated by the economic ensemble. Nothing would properly belong to him. He would be a producer, a consumer, put a little or take some from the heap, but he would never be autonomous.

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II

The individualist-anarchist differentiates himself from the anarchist-communist in the sense that he considers (apart from property in some objects of enjoyment extending from the personality) property in the means of production and the free disposition of the product as the essential guarantee of the autonomy of the person. Being understood that that property is limited to the possibility of putting to work (individually, by couples, by familial groups, etc.) the expanse of soil or the engine of production indispensable to the necessities of social unity; under condition, for the possessor, of not renting it to anyone or of not resorting pour its enhancement to someone in his service.

The individualist-anarchist no more intends to live at any price, as individualist, were that as exploiter, than he intends to live under regulation, provided that the bowl of soup is assured, clothing certain and a dwelling guaranteed.

The individualist-anarchist, moreover, does not claim any system which would bind the future. He claims to place himself in a state of legitimate defense with regard to every social atmosphere (State, society, milieu, grouping, etc.) which would allow, accept, perpetuate, sanction or render possible:

a) the subordination to the environment of the individual being, placing that one in a state of obvious inferiority since he cannot treat with the collective ensemble as equal to equal, power to power;

b) the obligation (in whatever domain) of mutual aid, of solidarity, of association;

c) the deprivation of the individual and inalienable possession of the means of production and of the complete and unrestricted disposition of the product;

d) the exploitation of anyone by one of his fellows, who would make him labor on his account and for his profit;

e) monopolization, i.e. the possibility for an individual, a couple, a familial group to possess more than is necessary for its normal upkeep;

f) the monopoly of the State or of every executive form replacing it, that is to say its intervention—in its role as centralizer, administrator, director, organizer—in the relations between individuals, in whatever domain;

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g) the loan at interest, usury, agio, money-changing, inheritance, etc., etc.

III

The individualist-anarchist makes “propaganda” in order to select individualist-anarchist dispositions which he should have, to determine at the very least an intellectual atmosphere favorable to their appearance. Between individualist-anarchists relations are established on the basis of “reciprocity”. “Comradery” is essentially of the individual order, it is never imposed. A “comrade” which pleases him individually to associate with, is one who makes an appreciable effort in order to feel himself to live, who takes part in his propaganda of educational critique and of selection of persons; who respects the mode of existence of each, does not encroach on the development of those who advance with him and of those who touch him the most closely.

The individualist-anarchist is never the slave of a formula-type or of a received text. He admits only opinions. He proposes only theses. He does not impose an end on himself. If he adopts one method of life on one point of detail, it is in order to assure more liberty, more happiness, more well-being, but not at all in order to sacrifice himself. And he modifies it, and transforms it when it appears to him that to continue to remain faithful to it would diminish his autonomy. He does not want to let himself be dominated by principles established a priori; it is a posteriori, on his experiences, that he bases his rule of conduct, nevertheless definitive, always subject to the modifications and to the transformations that the recording of new experiences can register, and the necessity of acquisition of new weapons in his struggle against the environment—without making an absolute of the a priori.

The individualist-anarchist is never accountable to anyone but himself for his acts and gestures.

The individualist-anarchist considers association only as an expedient, a makeshift. Thus, he wants to associate only in cases of urgency but always voluntarily. And he only desires to contract, in general, for the short term, it being always understood that every contract can be voided as soon as it harms one of the contracting parties.

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The individualist-anarchist proscribes no determined sexual morality. It is up to each to determine his sexual, affective or sentimental life, as much for one sex as for the other. What is essential is that in intimate relations between anarchists of differing sexes neither violence nor constraint take place. He thinks that economic independence and the possibility of being a mother as she pleases are the initial conditions for the emancipation of woman.

The individualist-anarchist wants to live, wants to be able to appreciate life individually, life considered in all its manifestations. By remaining master meanwhile of his will, by considering as so many servitors put at the disposition of his "self" his knowledge, his faculties, his senses, the multiple organs of perception of his body. He is not a coward, but he does not want to diminish himself. And he knows well he who allows himself to be led by his passions or dominated by his penchants is a slave. He wants to maintain "the mastery of the self" in order to drive towards the adventures to which independent research and free study lead him. He will recommend willingly a simple life, the renunciation of false, enslaving, useless needs; avoidance of the large cities; a rational diet and bodily hygiene.

The individualist-anarchist will interest himself in the associations formed by certain comrades with an eye to tearing themselves from obsession with a milieu which disgusts them. The refusal of military service, or of paying taxes will have all his sympathy; free unions, single or plural, as a protestation against ordinary morals; illegalism as the violent rupture (and with certain reservations) of an economic contract imposed by force; abstention from every action, from every labor, from every function involving the maintenance or consolidation of the imposed intellectual, ethical or economic regime; the exchange of vital products between individualist-anarchist possessors of the necessary engines of production, apart from every capitalist intermediary; etc., are acts of revolt agreeing essentially with the character of individualist-anarchism.

Translation: Shawn P. Wilbur, 2009

FROM THE LIBERTARIAN LABYRINTH

I've been working hard to expand the communist-anarchist, syndicalist and labor-history selection in the Corvus Editions catalog, and that's meant digging around in some magazines I haven't looked at, or haven't looked at in quite a while. I've been pleased to find that quite a few volumes of Charles H. Kerr's *International Socialist Review* have appeared in digital archives online. Kerr's catalog frequently featured more than a bit of not terribly interesting state socialist material, but it was also a steady source of really interesting fiction, left-marxist and syndicalist theory, and a genuinely odd assortment of philosophy and science. Kerr's "Library of Science for the Workers" remains one of my favorite books series ever—a mix of German monism and more-or-less voluntarist evolutionary thought (heavy on Haeckel and more than a hint of Lamarck), with Nietzsche and a few other elements thrown in for spice. I know I'm not alone in my affection for the series, since by Raoul Heinrich Francé's 1911 *Germes of Mind in Plants* was actually reprinted by the press in the late 20th century.

The *International Socialist Review*, which counted Big Bill Haywood among its editors, was rather like the Kerr catalog in miniature. Emile Pouget and Anton Pannekoek appeared alongside Mary Marcy—and in the same issues you could find Wilhelm Boelshe's meditations of the love life of the tapeworm. I promise to collect some of Boelshe's work at some point, but, in honor of *Germes of Mind in Plants*, I want to include here another examination of radicalism in that neglected natural kingdom:

SOCIALISM IN THE PLANT WORLD

BY ELIZA FRANCES ANDREWS

THESE are probably few people, even among Socialists, who are aware that the principles of cooperation and collectivism have been carried, by certain races of the plant population of the world, to a state of perfection unapproached in human society. Following the guidance of nature, these unconscious Socialist comrades of ours have met the simple requirement of their lives by developing a system of cooperation in which the division of labor is so perfectly adjusted, and the individual is so completely identified with the community that no one but an expert botanist ever thinks of drawing the line between them.

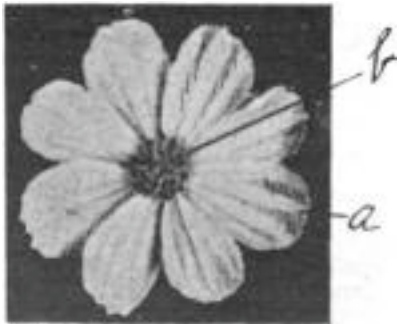


Fig. 1. A single (so-called) flower of cosmos, showing (a) the ring of conspicuous ray flowers that serve to attract the visits of insects, and (b) the obscure cluster of productive flowers in the center.

Take, for instance, a sunflower, an oxeye daisy, or any kind of a flower cluster like that shown here and probably ninety-nine people out of one hundred would unhesitatingly pronounce it a single blossom. But examine it more closely, and you will see that the little button in the center is composed of a number of tiny flowers so closely united that the community and its members could not exist separately. Each individual blossom has all its parts complete—the miniature pouch containing the unripe seed, surrounded by a ring of little stalked bodies bearing the yellow powder called pollen, which is necessary to the maturing of the seed. These are enclosed in the protecting circle of colored leaves or petals called a corolla—here united into a small cup or tube which envelopes them so closely that it may be necessary to slit it open with a pin, in order to see what is inside.

I suppose most people who read this paper know—every farmer certainly ought to know—that unless some of the pollen from the stamens, as the

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little stalked bodies are called, reaches the interior of the seed case, the plant could never set a seed. This, we know, is the most important industry of plant life, and hence these modest little flowers that can hardly be recognized for what they are, without the aid of a magnifying glass, may be regarded as the productive laborers of the community.

Examine now the showy ring of bright petal-like bodies that surround the obscure little group of productive workers, and you will probably find that they have neither seed case nor pollen; or at best, that either the one or the other is wanting, so that as a rule they cannot set seed, but are for show and display only. "Aristocrats and deadbeats" you will say. But no, not a bit of it. They represent the class of workers not engaged in directly productive labor, such as teachers, physicians, authors, editors, lecturers, actors, artists, and the like, whom Comrade Haywood classifies, in a back number of the Review, as "the scum of the proletariat," but who are really just as necessary to the well-being of society as the carpenters, the farmers, the miners, or even Comrade Haywood himself—as the evidence of our Socialist plant friends will clearly show.

Every farmer, every gardener and nurseryman—everybody, in short, who has anything to do with the cultivation and breeding of plants, will tell you that those individuals which are impregnated with pollen from a different flower, or better still, from a different plant of the same species, produce better and more abundant crops of seed and fruit than when closely inbred with their kindred on the same shoot—just as human beings deteriorate by continued intermarriages in the same family. To prevent this interbreeding, various contrivances are provided by nature, the commonest of which is that the seed cases and the pollen sacs are either borne by different flowers on the same plant, as in the oaks and pines, or on different plants, as in the sassafras, the paper mulberry, and the common hop.

Since plants cannot move about from place to place, one of the chief problems they have to solve is how to get the pollen carried from one flower to another. In many cases the transportation is effected by the wind, but this is a very wasteful and uncertain method. Like our own stupid competitive system under capitalism, it compels the plant to expend an unnecessary amount of energy in the manufacture of pollen that is lost in the process of distribution just as a large part of the product of human labor is wasted in profits to the useless middlemen who pluck the consumer at every turn.

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Some of the higher plants have checked this waste by various devices for enlisting the aid of insects, which are much more reliable and economical carriers than the blind forces of nature, such as wind and water. For the purpose of calling the attention of these useful visitors to the sweets prepared for them, the brilliant petals of flowers, like the rose and the lily, have been developed. But the production of these advertising accessories is itself an expensive and exhausting process, and certain of our plant comrades, like the asters, the chrysanthemums, the “black-eyed-Susans,” and others of the great sunflower family, to which they belong, have developed the system of cooperation and division of labor described at the beginning of this paper, by which one set of advertising agents is made to serve the needs of the whole community. By this means the cost of distribution is greatly diminished in comparison with the wasteful process where each individual flower has to do its own advertising. The difference in efficiency of the two systems—individualist and collectivist—is strikingly illustrated by the rarity of such flowers as the rose, the lily, and the orchid, in a state of nature, as compared with the overwhelming abundance of the cooperative brotherhoods of the sunflower family, which constitute one-seventh of all the thousands of species that make up the greater part of the plant population of the globe. Another very significant fact is that this widespread race, which was conveniently associated by the old school of botanists into one group, under the general name of “Composite” on account of the compound or “composite” nature of their flowers, is now, by the unanimous consent of modern botanists, placed at the head of the vegetable kingdom, and is recognized, like man in the animal kingdom, as the highest product of evolution yet attained in the plant world.

SOURCE: *International Socialist Review*. XVII. 18-20.

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The second selection from the archive is also a piece about cooperation, and also about a group of cooperators not frequently cited in anarchist literature. In this case, however, the author is a mutualist anarchist in good standing, Dyer Lum, and the source is Benjamin R. Tucker's *Liberty*. The cooperators in question were the Latter Day Saints, or Mormons, and Lum was very interested in their economic affairs. His 1886 *Social Problems of Today Or The Mormon Question in Its Economic Aspects* (coming in August from Corvus) is a book-length look at Mormon economics, but here's what he had to say in *Liberty*:

Mormon Co-operation.

To the Editor of Liberty:

In the "Investigator" and "Truth Seeker" Mr. S. P. Putnam gives me a slight rap for defending the Mormons as encouraging cooperation. With the not unfamiliar illiberality of alleged "Liberals," he has formed his opinion offhand on a subject which he has not examined. My assertion was based on careful personal investigation and truth seeking. If I desired information regarding the Secular Union and its champions, I would not seek for it from Christian sources; yet Mr. Putnam, on a flying visit through Utah, lending a capacious ear to avowed enemies and bigots on this subject, feels competent to decide without evidence. He says: "(1) The Mormons are money-getters, like the Jews; (2) I see that Dyer Lum, in Liberty, has some praise for the cooperative system of the Mormon church, but there is no genuine cooperation at all: it is only a form of monopoly to put the profits into the hands of a few. If anything is run by the capitalist, it is the Mormon Z. C. M. I., with its 'Holiness to the Lord.' There is not a particle of democracy in Mormonism; (3) it is the most thoroughgoing aristocratic and despotic institution in the world; (4) it makes the few rich and the many poor."

Let us see. 1. If Mr. Putnam's every-day, secular liberality will permit him to look up the "Articles of Association of Zion's Central Board of Trade," covering every county in the territory, he will find the preamble to read as follows:

The objects of this Association are to maintain a Commercial Exchange; to promote uniformity in the customs and usages of producers, manufacturers, and merchants; to

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inculcate principles of equity and justice in trade; to facilitate the speedy adjustment of business disputes; to seek remunerative markets for home products; to foster Capital and protect Labor, uniting them as friends rather than dividing them as enemies; to encourage manufacturing, to aid in placing imported articles in the hands of consumers as cheaply as possible; to acquire and disseminate valuable agricultural, manufacturing, commercial, and economic information; and generally to secure to its members the benefits of cooperation in the furtherance of their legitimate pursuits.

Does he think this was written by “money-getters, like the Jews”?

2. If he will take time to see and ask a Mormon for a copy of the Mormon Encyclical Letter, issued by Brigham Young and others, of July 10, 1875, I think he will learn something of the extent of Mormon cooperation he never dreamed of in his philosophy. The evils of our system are pointed out and general cooperation urged as a remedy, and as a matter of fact the Z. C. M. I. is not the only cooperative mercantile institution in Utah, being only the largest; smaller ones dot the whole territory. If he has no scruples about going to first sources for information, General Eldredge might, if there were room, plant at least one new idea in his head.

3. No officer in the Mormon church holds his office save on the tenure of popular election, repeated every year. Nor even then do any of them receive any salary, not even the president at home or the missionary abroad. They all, high or low, must earn their own living, a fact which may well excite the disgust of apostles of other faiths or no-faiths.

4. If Mr. Putnam should stay in Utah so long that a spirit of truth-seeking could penetrate his armor of prejudice, he would never see a Mormon poor house or a Mormon appealing to him for alms.

If our secular investigating truth-seeker were really seeking information,—other than from avowed enemies,—I would commend to him two facts: 1. To search the court records and see if he can find six cases where a Mormon has sued a Mormon, or can learn of a single case where, in the adjustment of civil disputes between Mormons, either party has had to pay one cent for time and trouble taken or for witness fees. Singular conduct in a non-cooperative people, who thus eliminate the lawyer. 2. If he will look up the criminal records in Salt Lake City for the past year, he will find that his Liberal friends conjointly with the Christians, twin relics of Utah bigotry, have contributed over eleven-twelfths of the city’s criminals, although they only constitute one-fifth of the entire population! Whether the larger portion come from the followers of Ingersoll or of Jesus, I can only

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surmise, but I trust Mr. Putnam's ministrations will tend to lower this liberal and alarming percentage.

From his own reports we see that Mormons attend his lectures; it is they who make his overflowing audiences, and that in Mormon halls in Mormon communities; that he has been treated by them in a liberal manner; and lo! the Liberal return. I once heard a good story out there that I will relate.

A Methodist protracted meeting was once started in Logan City in a small room. One evening a Mormon youth sauntered in late, and, seeing some vacant seats immediately in front, sat down there, unaware that it was reserved for spiritual "mourners." When the sermon was concluded, the dominie came down to wrestle with his one convert in prayer, but was astonished to find him unresponsive to his solicitous inquiries concerning his soul's health. He finally asked him if he was a Mormon. The boy answered: "Well, I reckon I'm what you call a Mormon." "Why!" said the astounded parson, "what did you come in here for?" "Oh!" replied the boy, "father wanted me to come and see what a derved fool he made of himself at my age!"

Whether this accounts in any way for his "overcrowded audiences" I cannot say, but the Mormon looks on the Methodist pulpit-banger and the Secular exhorter as equally fit subjects for curiosity and mirth; and in reading the "News and Notes" written from Mormondom by Mr. Putnam, the same feeling is more or less shared by,

Yours truly,

DYER D. LUM.

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This issue's third selection from the Labyrinth is from *Mother Earth*. It is a very straightforward, if not *entirely* convincing argument for identifying Thomas Paine as an anarchist:

THOMAS PAINE'S ANARCHISM

By WILLIAM M. VAN DER WEYDE.

"Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence."

—Thomas Paine.

BORN with an unquenchable love for liberty, human progress, and the betterment of all mankind, Thomas Paine left an impress on the world that neither time nor the machinations of religious traducers can efface.

That matchless phrase, "The world is my country, to do good my religion," would alone ensure its author imperishable renown. Paine's whole life was a career of self-abnegation. He cared nothing for money and gave to the cause of the struggling colonists in America, suffering from the tyrannical oppressions of Great Britain, the copyrights on his works, then having an enormous sale.

Paine recognized, as did no other writer of his time, the evils of government. Much of his writing is exposure of existing governmental wrong. Paine was perhaps the very earliest apostle of what to-day we call Anarchism.

"Society in every state is a blessing," he wrote in one of the earliest of his books, "Common Sense," "but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one."

Never a believer in government, he wrote, "I am very decided in the opinion that the sum of necessary government is much less than is generally thought, and that we are not yet rid of the habit of excessive government. . . . Excess of government only tends to incite to and create crimes which else had never existed."

Paine realized the reasons government was supported with but few protestants. "Nations suffer so universally," he says, "from the fatal custom

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of being ill-governed, and the human soul 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' through so many centuries, is so unaccustomed to light, that it may be doubted whether the faculty of distinguishing prismatic hues is yet fully developed within it."

Paine hated war and fervently hoped for the day when universal peace would reign. He pleaded for a brotherhood of man, and urged that if government of any sort was insisted upon it should take the form of an universal republic—"the republic of the world," he called it. "I have seen enough of the miseries of war," Paine wrote, "to wish it might never more have existence in the world, and that some other mode might be found out to settle the differences that should occasionally arise in the neighborhood of nations."

"The Rights of Man" by Thomas Paine is extremely Anarchistic in its teachings. He ridicules the idea of men of one generation promulgating, enforcing, and following the laws made by a previous generation. "Under how many subtleties or absurdities has the divine right to govern been imposed on the credulity of mankind?" he asks. "The circumstances of the world are continually changing, and the opinions of men change also; and as government is for the living, and not for the dead, it is the living only that have any right in it. That which may be thought right and found convenient in one age, may be thought wrong and found inconvenient in another. In such cases, who is to decide, the living or the dead?"

"When men are sore with the sense of oppressions," Paine says, "and menaced with the prospects of new ones, is the calmness of philosophy or the palsy of insensibility to be looked for? . . . Teach governments humanity; it is their sanguinary punishments which corrupt mankind."

Again referring to government Paine says: "It is by distortedly exalting some men that others are distortedly debased, till the whole is out of nature. A vast mass of mankind are degradedly thrown into the background of the human picture, to bring forward with greater glare the puppet-show of state and aristocracy. . . . To reason with governments, as they have existed for ages, is to argue with brutes."

Paine says: "If any generation of men ever possessed the right of dictating the mode by which the world should be governed forever, it was the first generation that existed; and if that generation did it not, no succeeding generation can show any authority for doing it, nor can set any up. The illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man (for it

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has its origin from the Maker of men) relates not only to the living individuals, but to generations of men succeeding each other. Every generation is equal in rights to generations which preceded it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporary.”

“When I contemplate the natural dignity of man, when I feel for the honor and happiness of its character, I become irritated at the attempt to govern mankind by force and fraud, as if they were all knaves and fools, and can scarcely avoid disgust at those who are thus imposed upon. . . . Man is not the enemy of man, but through the medium of a false system of government.”

Paine protested against the appropriation by governments of credit for any prosperity that came to a nation. “Almost everything,” he says, “appertaining to the circumstances of a nation, is absorbed and confounded under the general and mysterious word *government*. Though it avoids taking to its account the errors it commits and the mischiefs it occasions, it fails not to arrogate to itself whatever has the appearance of prosperity. It robs industry of its honors by pedantically making itself the cause of its effects; and purloins from the general character of man the merits that appertain to him as a social being.”

“There is a natural aptness in man, and more so in society, because it embraces a greater variety of abilities and resource, to accommodate itself to whatever situation it is in. The instant formal government is abolished, society begins to act; a general association takes place, and common interest produces common security.

“So far is it from being true, as has been pretended, that the abolition of any formal government is the dissolution of society, that it acts as a contrary impulse, and brings the latter the closer together. . . . Formal government makes but a small part of civilized life; and when even the best that human wisdom can devise is established, it is a thing more in name and idea than in fact. It is to the great and fundamental principles of society and civilization—to the common usage universally consented to, and mutually and reciprocally maintained—to the unceasing circulation of interest, which, passing through its million channels, invigorates the whole mass of civilized man—it is to these things, infinitely more than to anything which even the best instituted government can perform, that the safety and prosperity of the individual and of the whole depends.”

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Paine was an ardent believer in civilization and education. Were men but sufficiently civilized, they would have no need for government. "The more perfect civilization is," he says in his "Rights of Man," "the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself. . . . It is but few general laws that civilized life requires, and those of such common usefulness, that whether they are enforced by the forms of government or not, the effect will be nearly the same."

In the same work occur these striking paragraphs:

"When in countries that are called civilized, we see age going to the workhouse and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government. It would seem by the exterior appearance of such countries that all was happiness, but there lies hidden from the eye of common observation a mass of wretchedness that has scarcely any other chance than to expire in poverty or infamy. Its entrance into life is marked with the presage of its fate; and until this is remedied it is in vain to punish. . . . Why is it that scarcely any are executed but the poor? . . . The millions that are superfluously wasted upon governments are more than sufficient to reform evils.

"Government ought to be as much open to improvement as anything which appertains to man, instead of which it has been monopolized from age to age by the most ignorant and vicious of the human race.

"When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am the friend of its happiness; when these things can be said, then may that country boast its constitution and its government."

SOURCE: *Mother Earth*. July, 1910. 163-167.

MUTUALISM: THE ANARCHISM OF APPROXIMATIONS

MUTUALISM IS APPROXIMATE.

MUTUALISM VALUES JUSTICE, IN THE FORM OF RECIPROCITY.

MUTUALISM IS DIALECTICAL. (OR “TRIALECTICAL.” OR SERIAL.)

MUTUALISM IS INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIALISM—OR IT IS NEITHER.

MUTUALISM RECOGNIZES POSITIVE POWER.

MUTUALISM IS PROGRESSIVE AND CONSERVATIVE.

MUTUALISM IS MARKET ANARCHISM.

PHILOSOPHICAL OBSERVATIONS (CONTINUED)

MUTUALISM IS APPROXIMATE. IT REJECTS ABSOLUTISM, FUNDAMENTALISM, AND THE PROMOTION OF SUPPOSEDLY FOOLPROOF BLUEPRINTS FOR SOCIETY. WHAT IT SEEKS TO APPROXIMATE, HOWEVER, IS THE FULLEST SORT OF HUMAN FREEDOM.

In *The Theory of Property*, Proudhon claimed that “humanity proceeds by approximation,” and proceeded to list seven “approximations” that he considered key:

- 1st. The approximation of the equality of faculties through education, the division of labor, and the development of aptitudes;
- 2nd. The approximation of the equality of fortunes through industrial and commercial freedom.
- 3rd. The approximation of the equality of taxes;
- 4th. The approximation of the equality of property;
- 5th. The approximation of *an-archy*;
- 6th. The approximation of *non-religion*, or non-mysticism;
- 7th. Indefinite progress in the science, law, liberty, honor, justice.

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This “indefinite” progress “is proof,” he said:

...that FATE does not govern society; that geometry and arithmetic proportions do not regulate its movements, as in minerology or chemistry; that there is a life, a soul, a liberty which escapes from the precise, fixed measures governing matter.

Materialism, in that which touches society, is absurd.

Thus, on this great question, our critique remains at base the same, and our conclusions are always the same: we want equality, more and more fully approximated, of conditions and fortunes, as we want, more and more, the equalization of responsibilities.

Here is the first of mutualism’s basic principles.

I imagine I can hear the murmurs already. This sounds like “settling for less,” and perhaps *less than anarchism*. It’s too uncertain for much of the natural rights crowd, and probably comes off as downright defeatist to the revolutionaries. But Proudhon was, of course, a partisan of “the Revolution,” as he understood it, every bit as much as he was engaged in the project of grounding *right* in a scientific understanding of the individual and society. And he was the inheritor of notions that were both *anti-utopian* and *perfectionist*. While he rejected the “patent office” schemes of the Fourierist phalanx and of Leroux’s “ternary order,” he embraced the portions of Fourier’s passional analysis and Leroux’s “doctrine of Humanity” which emphasized a constant, restless, progressive movement—the work, as he put it, of “a life, a soul, a liberty which escapes...” So Proudhon declared that he wanted “equality,” but also—and this is at least as important—that he wanted “more and more.”

Following that lead—or, if you prefer, following the “blazing star” of William B. Greene²—mutualism is unafraid of the very *active* pursuit of *practical* approximates. It is experimental. If it has at times made excessive claims for its particular schemes—and it certainly has—it can at least be held accountable for that failing. Meanwhile, arguments that “true anarchy,” “property,” or the conditions under which an individual could safely say “I am just,” are “impossible” (in some absolute sense) shouldn’t leave the mutualist sobbing in the corner. If we can’t reach perfection at a leap, even if we can’t ultimately reach it at all we can always at least try to take another step forward—and then *another* step forward, *always*—and this

² See LeftLiberty #1.

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is the point at which people begin to work things out, as best they can under the circumstances, with the understanding that that current “best” is a step towards the next best, and so on, “indefinitely.”

The acknowledgment that progress is a matter of approximation—or the corollary acknowledgment that “there are degrees in everything,” including justice and right—does not lend itself to an “ah well, anything goes” sort of attitude. Indeed, the best-developed aspect of mutualist philosophy has probably been its analysis of how progress is, in general, not made. In that same passage from *The Theory of Property*, Proudhon continued:

We reject, along with governmentalism, communism in all its forms; we want the definition of official functions and individual functions; of public services and of free services.

Notice that in this case “communism” is not—or rather is not solely—an approach to property. Like Josiah Warren, Proudhon seems to have intended by the term a subordination of individual concerns to the collective, but the thing that seems most objectionable about “communism” in this context is that it leaves important things undefined. Proudhon wanted “definition.” And it’s a thing that any good experimentalist should want—and mutualism is nothing if not essentially experimental. To move on—and on—we need to know what we’ve got going, what we are involved with and connected to, and we need to know all of that in fairly fine detail, and then we need to rearrange things according to our best understanding of the context and the tools at hand. We need to put our understanding of our condition and our options to the test. And then we need to do it again, because we have inevitably left something—more likely someone—out of our calculations. I know... “Calculation” is one of those words likely to press some buttons. But the social problem posed by “calculation” is really most serious where the calculators and experimenters fail to carry the costs of their own experiments. Indeed, developing an *ethic* for mutualist experiment is undoubtedly one of those experimental processes that we will have to take very seriously—and it is there that the *history* of mutualist experiment may really serve us best.

I don’t know if a Warrenite, or Andrusian, labor-dollar is going to be of particular use to contemporary mutualism. And I suspect that mutualists pursued the mutual bank much longer than that pursuit made much sense. But I suspect that the *story* of Josiah Warren’s various experiments—of

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their successes and failures, and of the specific ways that their pursuit developed according to the circumstances—is probably still a gold mine. Similarly, I think the *history* of land-banks, mutual banks, banks of the people, etc., and of the propaganda in support of them, still has practical secrets to offer up to our continued exploration.

Our best tools will probably be a grasp of these specific experimental histories, and a general concern with avoiding what Proudhon called *simplism*. Indeed, that second concern may be the real heart of mutualist method. *Approximation* is incompleteness in the sense of being “not there yet, but on the road,” but *simplism* is incompleteness as a failure to even get a proper start. Proudhon seems to have borrowed the term from Fourier, and a Fourierist, Hippolyte Renaud, defined it in these terms:

One of the inherent characteristics of Civilization is *simplism*. Simplism is the fault of viewing a complex question from only one side, of advancing on one side by retreating on the other, so that the real progress is null or negative.

It should come as no surprise that mutualism, a political philosophy rooted in reciprocity and balance, would find one-sidedness to be a problem. And all of Proudhon’s various philosophical stages—from the early emphasis on synthesis, to the final emphasis on antinomies that “do not resolve”—involved a concern that social problems be addressed from multiple perspectives. For example, Proudhon changed his mind about the precise problem with the various existing understandings of “property,” but he seems to have consistently consider simplism a part of the problem. In *The Theory of Property*—in the passage immediately following the one on “definition”—he wrote:

There is only one thing new for us in our thesis: it is that that same *property*, the contradictory and abusive principle of which has raised our disapproval, we today accept entirely, along with its equally contradictory qualification: *Dominium est just utendi et abutendi re suâ, quatenus juris ratio patitur*. We have understood finally that the opposition of two absolutes—one of which, alone, would be unpardonably reprehensible, and both of which, together, would be rejected, if they worked separately—is the very cornerstone of social economy and public right: but it falls to us to govern it and to make it act according to the laws of logic.

Let’s be clear about Proudhon’s final approach to “property:” alone it was “unpardonably reprehensible,” and it would be the same if it operated

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alongside some alternative or alternatives. It appears as a tool for justice and right only when it enters into a dynamic relation with other principles which would be equally objectionable if alone or acting in parallel. In terms of methodology, the dynamic relation only appears when Proudhon begins to complicate his analysis of property—adding an analysis of “aims” to his analysis of philosophical justifications, and in that adding an analysis of the workings of “collective reason” to his individual analyses.

Proudhon barely began that expanded analysis. “Property” itself never really appears as anything but a simplist, or one-sided, concept. Its incorporation in a non-simplist property-state antinomy is some sort of advance—perhaps a necessary step towards something more useful—but inevitably one which tends to focus us on one part of a complex problem, to the exclusion of other parts. If we take that approach, then we have the option of attempting to focus on some higher-order concept, such as social justice or mutuality, which incorporates property as one of its aspects, or of attempting to rethink property in some other way. Proudhon attempted the first approach, with somewhat mixed results, but he explicitly suggested the possibility of the second. In the “New Approximation” which begins in this issue, I’m pursuing the other course, starting to address individual property in its “collective” aspects, in order to avoid some confusions that seem “built in” with Proudhon’s approach.

In this way, breaking with the founders is an act of fidelity to the tradition. We don’t encounter the originators of the mutualist tradition as masters, but as fellows, and the task put to us is to do the next thing, and advance the tradition in ways which respond at once to the general spirit of the thing we have inherited and to the specific conditions we face. What part or parts of the current mutualist movement will contribute most significantly to increasing liberty and clarifying the task for those who undertake the next set of approximations, is something that we can’t know until we put them to the test.

[to be continued in Issue Three...]

A NEW APPROXIMATION: MUTUALIST MUSINGS ON PROPERTY

WHAT IS PROPERTY?

THE PROBLEM OF PROPERTY IS, AFTER THAT OF HUMAN DESTINY, THE GREATEST THAT COULD SUGGEST ITSELF TO OUR REASON, THE LAST THAT WE WILL SUCCEED IN RESOLVING. INDEED, THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM, THE ENIGMA OF RELIGION, IS EXPLAINED, THE PROBLEM OF PHILOSOPHY, WHICH HAS FOR ITS OBJECT THE VALUE AND THE LEGITIMACY OF KNOWLEDGE, IS RESOLVED: THERE REMAINS THE SOCIAL PROBLEM, . . . OF WHICH THE SOLUTION, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, IS ESSENTIALLY THAT OF PROPERTY.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *THE SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC CONTRADICTIONS*.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

. . .

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman, *SON OF MYSELF*.

In 1846, six years after publishing *What is Property?*, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon presented the “problem of property” as still unresolved. Since publishing that work, and establishing with some authority a number of ways in which that problem *had not been solved*, he had continued to work away a solution.

Proudhon never solved the problem of property, although he spent his entire career wrestling with the issues raised in his earliest works. In February, 1842, in court to defend his third memoir on property, the “Warning to Proprietors,” he said, “I have written in my life only one thing,

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gentlemen jurors, and that thing, I will say at once, in order that there be no question. Property is theft." Arguably, of course, he had also written *a couple of other things* of some importance, and had even suggested the connections between property and liberty. So it was less of a surprise when his court testimony continued:—

"And do you know what I have concluded from that? It is that in order to abolish that species of robbery it is necessary to universalize it. I am, you see, gentlemen jurors, as conservative as you; and whoever says the opposite, proves only that he understands nothing of my books, even more, nothing of the things of this world."

In *The System of Economic Contradictions*, he began to expand his analysis of property to incorporate its contradictory tendencies, and his conclusion was that:

Property is, in fact and in right, essentially contradictory and it is for this very reason that it is anything at all. In fact,

Property is the right of occupancy; and at the same time the right of exclusion.

Property is labor's reward; and the denial of labor.

Property is society's spontaneous work; and society's dissolution.

Property is an institution of justice; and property is theft.

From all this it results that one day *property transformed* will be a positive idea, complete, social and true; a property that will abolish the older one and will become for all equally effective and beneficent. And what proves this is once again the fact that property is a contradiction.

From this moment property started being recognized, its intimate nature was unveiled, its future predicted. And yet, it could be said that the critic had not realized even half of its task, because, to definitely constitute property, to take away its exclusion characteristics and grant its synthetic form, it was not sufficient to have analyzed it in itself, it was also necessary to find the order of the things, of which property was not more than a particular moment, the series that ended it, outside of which it would be impossible either to comprehend or to initiate property.

You can page back in the issue to see where Proudhon ended up, in the "Conclusion" of *The Theory of Property*, and look at some of my reflections on the concept of "property" in this issue's installment of THE ANARCHISM OF APPROXIMATION. From thinking of property as one term of a synthesis, to thinking of property itself as essentially contradictory, to suggesting the existence of a collective reason for which property might have a different character—Proudhon's theoretical ambitions seem to pull in a somewhat

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different direction than his practical proposals, which ended by engaging property precisely in its exclusive and absolutist forms. The possibility of property “transformed” and “positive,” which he affirmed at various points in his career, remained unfulfilled.

The “New Approximation” that I’m attempting in these pages takes its cues from those portions of Proudhon’s theory where he was more successful in that business of positive transformation. And it is likely that he was most successful in his discussions of freedom and free will. The first of the blog posts included here addresses that element of Proudhon’s thought, and is included here as a first introduction to his approach.

One of the concepts that first-time readers will encounter in the material on positive freedom is the definition of an “individual” as already a “group,” a collection of elements organized according to a particular law of development. One of the ways in which I’ll be departing from Proudhon’s own analysis of property is by taking very seriously this approach to the individual, by drawing out some of its similarities to ideas found in the writings of Pierre Leroux, William B. Greene and Walt Whitman, and by exploring the methodological implications of a kind of “collective individualism.” In order to differentiate that approach from any sort of “collectivism,” I intend to pursue the line of thought opened by Proudhon when he distinguished human actors as “free absolutes.”

Hopefully, the brief discussion of Proudhon’s positive “freedom” will prove a sufficient introduction to the remaining three pieces. I am reprinting those posts—“The Gift Economy of Property,” “What Could Justify Property?” and “Unexpected Dangers of the Free Market?”—as a record of my own first approximation in this new project, but also as a potentially more accessible introduction to what may seem like fairly deep waters to those whose knowledge of Proudhon doesn’t reach much beyond the early works.

Indeed, the notion of a “gift economy of property” is the sort of potentially paradoxical construction that Proudhon loved, and it was a formulation that rose directly from my close studies of *What is Property?* The “third form of society” that Proudhon proposed in the last section of his first memoir, a synthesis of communism and property, presumably ought to be of some interest to those anarchists who base their position on property on that work. But I don’t find much treatment of it, beyond a fairly offhand suggestion in *An Anarchist FAQ* that the synthesis is “possession.” I’m not

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entirely opposed to that reading, but, unfortunately, I remain unable to tell precisely what Proudhon means by “possession” in 1840.

The last three posts reprinted here are a different kind of response to the possibility of a “third form of society”—and to Proudhon’s repeated suggestion that there might be a “communist” route to mutuality and liberty, as well as one through the encounter with “property.” In them, Proudhon’s treatment of property as a “free gift” provides an opening to discussions of both the origins of property and the possibility of a “gift economy.” They are imperfect, and perhaps too entangled with various contexts, but I think they make a useful first foray into the territory of the “New Approximation.”

Proudhon on Freedom and Free Will

I'm working away at the translation of Proudhon's chapter (in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*) on "The Nature and Function of Liberty." It's a key piece in his overall work, and includes an explanation of the nature and function of "free will," along with some suggestions about how that explanation would scale up to the realm of social or political liberty. Remember that Proudhon was, from the earliest of his works, concerned with the "collective force" which arises from associated production and exceeds the productive power of the individuals involved outside of association. His early assaults on property rested largely on the fact that much of the "fruits of labor," over and above subsistence, were in fact the product of this collective force of a collective being, rather than the product of individuals, so that private property should be understood as private domain over essentially "public" productions. As was frequently the case, Proudhon's early intuition remained part of his mature system, but he came to understand its consequences differently. Starting from a substantially retooled version of Leibniz' monadology, Proudhon came to think of all beings (very broadly defined) as being *individual* only by virtue of being first a *group*, organized or associated according to a law of being (or perhaps of becoming). Within the group, each element would tend to act according to a particular necessity, but these necessities would not necessarily act in concert. Indeed, the contrary seemed to Proudhon to be something of a law of nature: his antinomies were the constant

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manifestation of counter-principles and counter-necessities, manifestations even of a species of that "immanent justice" which became one of Proudhon's guiding principles (along with individual sovereignty and federalism.) The conflict of forces and necessities was the source of the collective force of the group-as-individual, and the quantity of that force translated into a *quantity of liberty*. Liberty and necessity coexist, and feed one another in various ways. The play of necessities, when forceful and complex, opens spaces of freedom at one level, which manifest themselves as strong forces, driven by a necessity or absolutism of a higher order, which may in turn contribute to a higher-order liberty, and so on. . .

The connection of collective force and its products to liberty obviously changes, and even raises the stakes with regard to issues like property. Proudhon came to defend property for human beings—free absolutes, capable of self-reflection, and thus of self-improvement and progress, by approximation, towards greater and greater justice—because it seemed to provide the space necessary for them to exercise their powers as ethical beings. There are lots of pieces to this puzzle, spread across Proudhon's writings, but here are a few summary paragraphs to help us get our feet wet in this stuff.

Let us summarize this theory:

1. The principle of necessity is not sufficient to explain the universe: it implies contradiction.

2. The concept of the Absolute absolute, which serves as the ground for the spinozist theory, is inadmissible: it reaches conclusions beyond those that the phenomena admit, and can be considered all the more as a metaphysical given awaiting the confirmation of experience, but which must be abandoned for fear that experience is contrary to it, which is precisely the case.

3. The pantheistic conception of the universe, or of a *best possible* world serving as the expression (*natura naturata*) of the Absolute absolute (*natura naturans*), is equally illegitimate: it comes to conclusions contrary to the observed relations, which, as a whole and especially in their details, show us the systems of things under an entirely different aspect.

These three fundamental negations call for a complementary principle, and open the field to a new theory, of which it is now only a question of discovering the terms.

4. Liberty, or free will, is a conception of the mind, formed in opposition to necessity, to the Absolute absolute, and to the notion of a pre-established harmony or best world, with the aim of making sense of facts not explained by the principle of necessity, assisted by the two others, and to render possible the science of nature and of humanity.

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5. Now, like all the conceptions of the mind, like necessity itself, this new principle is countered [*frappé*: struck, afflicted] by antinomy, which means that alone it is no longer sufficient for the explanation of man and nature: it is necessary, according the law of the mind, which is the very law of creation, that this principle be balanced against its opposite, necessity, with which it forms the first antinomy, the polarity of the universe.

Thus necessity and liberty, antithetically united, are given *a priori*, by metaphysics and experience, as the essential condition of all existence, all movement, of every end, starting from every body of knowledge and every morality.

6. What then is liberty or free will? The power of collectivity of the individual. By it, man, who is at once matter, life and mind, frees himself from all fatality, whether physical, emotional or intellectual, subordinates things to himself, raises himself, by the sublime and the beautiful, outside the limits of reality and of thought, makes an instrument of the laws of reason as well as those of nature, sets as the aim of his activity the transformation of the world according to his ideal, and devotes himself to his own glory as an end.

7. According to that definition of liberty, one can say, reasoning by analogy, that in every organized or simply collective being, the resultant force is the liberty of the being; in such a way the more that being—crystal, plant or animal—approaches the human type, the greater the liberty in it will be, the greater the scope of its free will. Among men themselves free will shows itself more energetic as the elements which give rise to it are themselves more developed in power: philosophy, science, industry, economy, law. This is why history, reducible to a system by its fatal side, shows itself progressive, idealistic, and superior to theory, on the side of free will, the philosophy of art and of history having in common that the reason of things which serves as their criterion is nevertheless powerless to explain all of their content.

The gift economy of property

I think most anarchists and libertarians share a faith that it is possible for needs to be met, goods to be distributed and some level of general prosperity achieved, in a way that is voluntary and at least approximately just. But we couldn't differ more, it seems, when we start to ask how to get the work done. Probably most of us aim, in the long run, for a society where there is sufficient prosperity that we could be much less concerned about such things, where generosity would be a logical response to plenty. But we live in the midst of a society and economic system which is very far from that ideal, and dream our dreams of the future and freedom while we deal with a very unfree present. On a day when we've just witnessed the largest US bank failure in history, in the context of a government-brokered market-move by JPMorgan, who also benefited from the Bear Stearns maneuver, talk about "genuinely free markets" seems a bit pipe-dreamy. But if it's going to be a long struggle to whatever freedom we manage to wrest from the corrupt bastards who are currently monkeying with our lives, we can probably take the time to get on something like the same page.

Recently, I've been presenting some of Proudhon's ideas about individuality and free will, as well as reviewing his work on property. I have begun to suggest some of the ways in which the early critique of property as a despotic, absolutist principle, became the basis for Proudhon's later reluctant propertarianism, which he based on his analysis of the human self, the *moi*, which he found was itself naturally absolutist, and despotic when given a chance.

Like Fourier, Proudhon could do away with any notion of original sin, in part because, like Fourier, he associated present errors with a progressive process that led ultimately to closer and closer approximations to justice (the "pact of liberty"), through the equilibration of forces, faculties, projects, parties, federations, etc. Having had done with the divine Absolute, he could only depend on human ethical actors themselves to accomplish the march towards justice, the justification of their institutions, the perfection of their concepts, etc. But it was obvious to him that they would never do it *alone*. Absolutism and despotism, if allowed entirely free play, are unlikely to lead to any pact, let alone a just one. No social atomist, however, and a thinker prone to expect every force to evoke a counterforce, he wasn't

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content to turn that absolutist character into a secular version of innate depravity. What he did do is a bit peculiar, involving a hijacking of Leibniz in directions that anticipate folks like Gilles Deleuze. The psychological and social physics that is at the center of his mature work on liberty and justice reads like poststructuralism in places, and I will have some recourse to the vocabulary of more contemporary continental philosophy as I talk about it.

If the self is not innately depraved, neither is it simple, centered, clean and “proper.” Any body or being, Proudhon says, possesses a quantity of collective force, derived from the organization of its component parts. Though these component parts may be subject to rigid determination, the resultant force exceeds the power of the parts and, to the extent that the collective force is great and the organization that it rises from is complex, it escapes any particular constituent destiny to that degree. The collective force is the “quantity of liberty” possessed by the being. Freedom is thus a product of necessity, and expresses itself, at the next level, as a new sort of necessity. And perhaps at most levels of Proudhon’s analysis (and we can move up and down the scale of “beings” from the simplest levels of organization up to complex societal groupings and perhaps to organization on even larger scales) the quantity of liberty introduced wouldn’t look much like the “individual freedom” that we value. But the human “free absolute,” distinguished by the ability to say “I, me, *moi*” and to reflect on her position in this scheme, has her absolutism tempered by encounters with her fellows, also “free absolutes,” also pursuing a line drawn by the play of liberty and necessity. Out of their encounters, out of mutual recognition, the “pact of liberty” arises (or fails to arise, where lack of recognition or misrecognition take place), and a “collective reason,” possessed (embodied in social organs and institutions, in “common sense,” etc) by a higher-order being, which is to say a higher-order (but latent, rather than free, because it lacks that ability to say “*moi*”) absolute.

In the system that emerges around these notions, individual human beings hold a very special place, as the chief architects and artisans of justice. Again, like Fourier, Proudhon makes a point of not stigmatizing the impulses of individuals, and, far more than Fourier, he actually makes a virtue of individual egoism and absolutism, as long as we are not so self-absorbed that we can’t recognize our fellow egoists and absolutists as fellows. Even the “higher wisdom” that is possessed by the higher-order collective beings, like “society” and “the state” (which takes on a very

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different meaning than anarchists generally give it in his later works), is really in large part in the hands of human individuals.

Necessity gives rise to liberty, which tends to a kind of necessity. “Individualism”, even “complete insolidarity,” tends (as we have seen elsewhere in Proudhon’s work) to centralization, to the dangerous “socialism” that Leroux warned against in 1834, but also, if equilibrium can be maintained, to an expanded space of social freedom (“the liberty of the social being”) for the individual. It’s all a little dizzying; and in the middle of it, star of the show, sits the individual self, the *moi*, which, while off the hook for original sin, still has to deal with something we might think of as “original impropriety.”

What can the man who never backed down about property being robbery say about this self which is, whatever else it is, a kind of by-product of the forces of necessity, that tends, according to him, to see itself as an absolute? What can that self say about its own position? Proudhon suggests that we put off a certain amount of soul-searching by projecting our own absolutism outwards, onto gods and onto governments, but that has kept us from dealing with some important stuff—and we’re not fooling ourselves much anymore. If progress, as Proudhon believed, is “the justification of humanity by itself,” one of the spurs for that progress has to be, for us “free absolutes,” an internal tension, maybe even a suspicion that the absolutism of the individual is not so different from that of the proprietor, and for many of the same reasons. Property might be as “impossible” in the psychological realm as Proudhon believed it was in the economic.

We’re talking about a “decentered” subject that claims more “identity” than might be precisely justified. (I have often joked that Derrida’s claims about identity might be reduced to “property is theft.”) But we’re not talking about “lack.” Instead, we’re talking about the self as a kind of excess, a force or pressure. (It would be very easy to move here from Proudhon to, say, Georges Bataille, and certainly easy to compare either or both to the anarchistic ethics of Guyau.) We are not committing ourselves to some social organism theory; Proudhon is explicit about this. (And, again, we might reach without much straining for points of contact with the thoughts of Deleuze on organ-ization, etc.)

If we switch to the language of libertarianism, we’re likely to find that Proudhon’s vision of overlapping beings, and of human “free absolutes” as the foam at the top of the boiling pot of necessity, at least complicates the

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question of “self-ownership.” Some of my friends and ALLies will naturally object to this claim, and I’m sympathetic to the basic assumptions associated with a presumed right of self-ownership—indeed, as Proudhon said, “My principle, which will appear astonishing to you, citizens, my principle is yours; it is property itself”—but it does seem to me that if the self is characterized by a radical, unresolvable antinomy, then “property” cannot, by itself, express the “natural right” implied by the nature of the individual.

Like Proudhon, I suspect that “property is theft,” and following his thread, I suspect that “self-ownership” is an expression of our absolutism. Still, like Proudhon, in the end, I am for property, or at least the right to it. Which leaves the questions *How?* and *Why?* Aren’t there alternatives?

It seems to me that the search for alternatives to property, the right to control the fruits of one’s labor, is, like the general resistance to the notion of markets in anarchism, based in our quite natural frustration and disgust with so much of what passes for commerce under current conditions. We’re in the middle of far too fine an example of how despotic property can be, when married to governmental power and shielded from any countervailing force, to have many illusions about the risks involved in embracing it. Mutualists, in particular, never quite get off this hook; our “greatest hit,” Proudhon’s *What is Property?* (or its most famous slogan, anyway,) is a constant reminder. It is a commonplace in social anarchist circles, and mutualists are not immune, to want to distance ourselves from the details of “getting and spending” as much as possible, and we have constructed a variety of means of putting off the hard discussions of property relations that will eventually, inevitably come.

One of those means, it seems to me, has been reference to the notion of “gift economies.” Like the proponents of “the right of self-ownership,” the advocates of gift economies have meant quite a variety of things by the term. In general, gift economies are differentiated from exchange economies precisely by the lack of exchanges, expectation of any remuneration or *quid pro quo*. Some institutionalized forms of gift exchange, like the “really, really free markets,” even forbid barter. While it’s clear enough to me what present desires are addressed by this alternative to capitalist commerce, this seems to be one of those practices that could always only operate on the edges of another, more organized and efficient kind of economy. That economy might well be freer in some senses than the enforced “gift

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economy,” and it is not entirely clear to me that what is involved in that economy is “gifting” anyway.

In order to give, it is necessary to be free to give. One needs to be, in some sense at least, an owner of the gift, and the recipient cannot have an equal claim to appropriating the item. Collective property cannot be gifted within the collective, at least without changing rather substantially the meaning of “giving.” Philosophical and anthropological accounts of the gift set all sorts of other conditions. The recipient of a gift may be required by custom, or by the “spirit of the gift,” to some giving of his own. Gifts are notorious for the “poison” elements that they often contain. Some of the “gift economies” we know from anthropology did indeed operate without recompense in goods, but transformed material capital into prestige or cultural capital, sometimes in an extremely competitive manner. The philosophical accounts of the gift suggest that the “pure gift” is almost impossibly tied up in conflicting requirements; if one acknowledges a gift, accepts thanks in exchange for a gift, perhaps even if one knows one is giving and feels some internal compensation, then the pure gift is impossible. Gifts seem, in any event, to matter. Something other than indifference is required from us, and gaining “punk points” may not be it. Disposing of our excess stuff may just not reach the bar.

The gift economy seems to presuppose individual property, as much as it would like to subvert its absolutism, its covetous, tit-for-tat mentality. Is the gift, perhaps, related to the other half of our human antinomy?

What if it was? What, much too quickly (as I’ve gone on much too long), if the gift was indeed the mark of our other half. As our absolutism is necessity expressing itself in us, gratuity might well be the expression of liberty, of freedom. Perhaps “property,” understood, as Proudhon understood it, as a bulwark around the individual, in the face of centralizing, collectivizing forces (which, lest we forget, have their role to play in the march to justice and the expansion of liberty), starting with “self-ownership,” is the right implied by our basic human predicament, our in-progress nature, our need for space in which to experiment, err, advance.

Would such a property be compatible with a gift economy? Or does Proudhon finally leave us in a place where neither property, strictly speaking, nor the gift, *ditto*, can arise?

My intuition, based in part on some language various places in Proudhon’s work and in part on the connections I’ve been making to other

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continental thought, is that a “gift economy,” in the sense of a system in which something, which can be rightfully given, is given, with no specific expectations of return, could only arise in fairly limited circumstances, and perhaps can only have one application within Proudhon’s thought—but that one application may be a bit of a doozy. We know that there is, for Proudhon, some opening for society to emerge as a “pact of liberty” leading towards approximations of equality and finally of justice. We know that freedom rises from the interplay of necessity and liberty, and that property too has its internal contradictions. Proudhon’s *moi* has very little that he can rightfully give, if even his own “property” is theft. But he can, perhaps, give property to the other, through recognition, which steals nothing, robs no one, is perfectly gratuitous, even if,—and this is the character of the gift economy,—he cannot be sure of reciprocation. To the extent, however, that commerce is based in equal recognition, if not necessarily any other sort of equality, then this particular gift economy might be strangely (given all we have said, and some of the names we have invoked) foundational.

My social anarchist friends may object to this yoking of absolutism and gratuity in, of all things, property. My libertarian friends will doubtless wince a bit at the notion that self-ownership is a gift (as opposed to a given.) But I think there is at least food for thought here, and that there will be more as I’m able to provide the Proudhon translations and some additional commentary.

What Could Justify Property?

The shift in Proudhon's work, from critique of property to arguments in favor of it (despite the critiques), is hard to work through, perhaps because Proudhon was himself a little uncomfortable with the whole affair. We know that, to some extent, the defense of property ran counter to his personal desires. *The Theory of Property*, which seems to turn his earlier work on its head, ends with this passage:

A small, rented house, a garden to use, largely suffices for me: my profession not being the cultivation of the soil, the vine, or the meadow, I have no need to make a park, or a vast inheritance. And when I would be a laborer or vintner, Slavic possession will suffice for me: the share falling due to each head of household in each commune. I cannot abide the insolence of the man who, his feet on ground he holds only by a free concession, forbids you passage, prevents you from picking a bluet in his field or from passing along the path.

When I see all these fences around Paris, which block the view of the country and the enjoyment of the soil by the poor pedestrian, I feel a violent irritation. I ask myself whether the property which surrounds in this way each house is not instead expropriation, expulsion from the land. Private Property! I sometimes meet that phrase written in large letters at the entrance of an open passage, like a sentinel forbidding me to pass. I swear that my dignity as a man bristles with disgust. Oh! In this I remain of the religion of Christ, which recommends detachment, preaches modesty, simplicity of spirit and poverty of heart. Away with the old patrician, merciless and greedy; away with the insolent baron, the avaricious bourgeois, and the hardened peasant, durus arator. That world is odious to me. I cannot love it nor look at it. If I ever find myself a proprietor, may God and men, the poor especially, forgive me for it!

Notice that property is described as a "free concession," a "*concession gratuite*." The use of "concession" here may imply something granted as a privilege, but it is a consistent and important aspect of Proudhon's thoughts about property that its materials come to us as something gratuitous. In his debates with Bastiat, and again in *The Theory of Property*, the relation between land that comes as a "free gift" and the rent that is extracted from its possessors by proprietors is an issue. Interestingly, one of the other places where Proudhon talks consistently about "free gifts" is in his

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discussions of voluntary “taxation,” in part because he links voluntary taxes and economic rent in a number of places.

We are, in some ways at least, not far from the Georgist theory of obligation, or from the “gift economy” proposed by some anarchist opponents of private property. If we understand materials as a sort of gift, then perhaps we should feel that strange, disseminative obligation associated with the gift-economy as well. To merely appropriate a gift would be, under those circumstance, bad form, and potentially worse, as gifts (anthropologically speaking) are renowned for the poisons they carry within themselves, the prices they impose on those who fail to respond to their basic “logic.” This is one way to reframe the relationship between Georgist land economics and those of the various anarchist schools, though I don’t expect it is one LVT enthusiasts will rush to embrace. It might also help in rethinking the material on property and the gift economy I posted here awhile back. Just hold that thought. . .

The question I started with today was: What could justify property for Proudhon? One answer is simple: Progress, which Proudhon describes as “the justification of Humanity by itself.” Which makes the next answer easy: Humanity, that is, us, learning, through experimental trial and error, to balance our interests in institutions embodying (hopefully) steadily higher and richer “approximations” of Justice. Remember that Proudhon actually described the origin of property in these terms.³ In Theory of Property, he describes the general process of property’s justification:

³ “Let us consider what occurs in the human multitude, placed under the empire of absolutist reason, so long as the struggle of interests and the controversy of opinions does not bring out the social reason.

“In his capacity as absolute and free absolute, man does not only imagine the absolute in things and name it, which first creates for him, in the exactitude of his thoughts, grave embarrassment. He does more: by the usurpation of things that he believes he has a right to make, that objective absolute becomes internalized; he assimilates it, becomes interdependent (*solidaire*) with it, and pretends to respect it as himself in the use that he makes of it and in the interpretations that it pleases him to make of it. Each, *in petto*, reasoning the same, it results, in the first moment, that the public reason, formed from the sum of particular reasons, differs from those in nothing, neither in basis nor in form; so that the world of nature and of society is nothing more than a deduction of the individual self (*moi*), a belonging of his absolutism.

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All things considered, it is a question of knowing if the French nation is capable today of supplying true proprietors. What is certain is that property is to be regenerated among us. The element of that regeneration is, along with the moral regeneration of which we have just spoken, equilibration.

Every institution of property supposes either: 1) an equal distribution of land between the holders; or 2) an equivalent in favor of those who possess none of the soil. But this is a pure assumption: the equality of property is not at all an initial fact; it is in the aims of the institution, not in its origins. We have remarked first of all that property, because it is abusive, absolutist, and based in egoism, must inevitably tend to restrict itself, to compete with itself, and, as a consequence, to balance. Its tendency is to equality of conditions and fortunes. Exactly because it is absolute, it dismisses any idea of absorption. Let us weigh this well.

Property is not measured by merit, as it is neither wages, nor reward, nor decoration, nor honorific title; it is not measured by the power of the individual, since labor, production, credit and exchange do not require it at all. It is a free gift, accorded to man, with a view to protecting him against the attacks of poverty and the incursions of his fellows. It is the breastplate of his personality and equality, independent of differences in talent, genius, strength, industry, etc.

Here is property as a “free gift,” “accorded to man,” though it is not clear who could make this gift. And this is, ultimately, the weakness of many of the economic approaches that begin with a natural “gift;” they seem to mix up a pre-economic “free” access (itself perhaps a bit confused, for reasons we’ll have to come back to) with an an- or anti-economic “gift beyond exchange.” Generosity and prodigal indifference get balled up together with

“All the constitutions and beliefs of humanity are formed thus; at the very hour that I write, the collective reason hardly exists except in potential, and the absolute holds the high ground.

“Thus, by virtue of his absolute *moi*, secretly posed as center and universal principle, man affirms his domain over things; all the members of the State making the same affirmation, the principle of societary absolutism becomes, by unanimity, the law of the State, and all the theories of the jurists on the possession, acquisition, transmission, and exploitation of goods, are deduced from it. In vain logic demonstrates that this doctrine is incompatible with the data of the social order; in vain, in its turn, experience proves that it is a cause of extermination for persons and ruin for States: nothing knows how to change a practice established on the similarity of egoisms. The concept remains; it is in all minds: all intelligence, every interest, conspire to defend it. The collective reason is dismissed, Justice vanquished, and economic science declared impossible.” (*Justice*, Tome III, pp 99-100)

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magic and protestant guilt about unearned wealth. In Georgism, we seem to have an example of the application of a practical anthropological practice, useful for levelling the economic playing field, to more modern circumstances, but without exercising all the spirits. And the “obligation” requires a kind of conversion, “seeing the cat,” as they say.

Anti-propertarian gift-economy communism probably makes most sense if it is simply stripped of the anthropological trappings. Looked at from the “objective” side, and discounting our “subjective” sense of ourselves as enjoying simple property in our persons and personalities, and as being capable of being proprietors, it’s all a matter of givens, of flows, and it’s hard to justify a basic right to obstruct the flows. But, honestly, I don’t think even the primitivists really look at things that way. Instead, sharing resources is posited as post-economic activity and as a social good. Such sharing seems to try to mix the qualities associated with giving something you own into a relation where the initial ownership never happens, or is never allowed to be acknowledged.

I’ve argued elsewhere, and I still believe, that “gifts” presuppose property. We can only give what is ours to give. Anything else is a confusion or a sham. Does that mean that Proudhon, the notorious skeptic about property, is simply wrapped up in a confusion? There are certainly those who have suggested it. To be fair, though, my definitions of “gift” here are not his, and I am imposing them for presentist purposes. At the same time, I think the imposition raises interesting questions.

Who can give the “gift of property,” not a gift of a particular property, but the gift of a right or an institution, a shield granted “with a view to protecting him against the attacks of poverty and the incursions of his fellows”? The obvious Proudhonian answer seems to be: Humanity, his fellows. But how? What is it that “humanity,” or the individual human beings that compose it, possesses and can give? And in what spirit and under what terms to give?

In *What is Property?*, Proudhon wrote, regarding the participation of each in the “daily social task:

Shall the laborer who is capable of finishing his task in six hours have the right, on the ground of superior strength and activity, to usurp the task of the less skilful laborer, and thus rob him of his labor and bread? Who dares maintain such a proposition? ... If the strong come to the aid of the weak, their kindness deserves

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praise and love; but their aid must be accepted as a free gift,—not imposed by force, nor offered at a price.”

But if we are going to talk about property, rather than the equal wage of 1840, resulting from such labor, how is “humanity” to come to its own aid, if not by granting, through the mediation of its strongest members, concession, privilege, charity, etc? If there a way to think of a reciprocal gifting as a matter for relative equals? Then again, we have still not answered the most troubling question: What, prior to the gift of property, do we have to give to one another?

In “The Gift Economy of Property,” I suggested one possibility. Let me suggest it again, in a different context and a slightly different way. It appears that what we have, in a relationship much like, and also troubling to, anything like “self-ownership,” is each other, the collective being Humanity. Despite their other disagreements, Proudhon and Pierre Leroux (and William B. Greene, who attempted to synthesize their views) seem to have agreed on this. Leroux wrote:

The life of man then, and of every man, by the will of his Creator, is dependent upon an incessant communication with his fellow beings, and with the universe. That which we call his life, does not appertain entirely to him, and does not reside in him alone; it is at once within him and out of him; it resides partially, and jointly, so to speak, in his fellows and the surrounding world. In a certain point of view therefore it may be said, that his fellow beings and the world appertain also to him. For, as his life resides in them, that portion of it which he controls, and which he calls Me, has virtually a right to that other portion, which he cannot so sovereignly dispose of, and which he calls Not Me.

This is, among other things, a discussion of property. Individual human beings have at least two “sides,” Proudhon’s particular and collective, Leroux’s objective and subjective. Both sides are incomplete, absolutist. But the particular is where we live, subjectively, though, objectively, we may live in, or on, one another, in a way that makes Leroux suspect that we belong, in some sense, to one another. Those who try to pursue theories of property as the extent of our projects, the reach of our labors, frequently run up against some sense of this, which is why some sort of sovereign self-ownership sometimes has to be simply assumed. It is, at least, in line with one-half of our experience of life. And, perhaps more importantly, it is in

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line with our sense that individuals are responsible for themselves, for their actions.

Proudhon never talks explicitly about a gift of property in these terms, but what he does say about the gift of a shield, of a space to err and to learn seems to me consistent with the move to found individual property in a generalized “gift” of self-ownership. We may be bound together in various ways, in various collective entities (and I do not want to discount the importance of that element of Proudhon’s thinking, which, odd as it may at first seem, only emphasizes the importance of individual liberty), we may even be “proper one to another” in a descriptive sense; but our sense of our separateness opens up the possibility of a kind of quasi-gift, a relinquishing of our stake in others in the realm (which we thereby create) of property, without thereby denying our connections.

I say we can do this, though, in a sense, it is perhaps what we already do. But it is not, I think, the way we think about “self-ownership” and the basis of property. It’s not necessarily nice for anti-propertarians to think of gifts as dependent on property, or for propertarians to consider an “original gift” as the foundation of self-ownership. But it might be useful, particularly in bringing various schools and discourses into dialogue. I suppose we’ll see...

(For longtime readers and friends, yes, this is the beginnings of the promised “Walt Whitman Theory of Political Economy”...)

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Unexpected dangers of the free market?

We know the standard anti-market concern, that even the truly free relations which mutualists and other market anarchists propose (free-market anti-capitalism, equitable commerce, etc...), will lead inevitably (through a fatal flaw in contract theory, or a fatal flaw in human nature, etc...) to (bad) “capitalism,” rule by the possessors of capital, and the state. Answers to the problem (if it is such) generally involve rejections of “contract” and/or “commerce” *tout court*, along with, of course, “property” conceived on any model that includes exclusive, individual ownership. There seem to be problems with these answers, whether it is the dependence of a “gift economy” on the notion of individual property (though maybe also vice-versa), objections to broad construals of “commerce” and “markets” that seem to be largely aesthetic in character, or vague proposals for how distribution will actually be accomplished (and what sort of participation will be expected) in a non-market society. And one of the things at stake in the debate is validity of the story by which collectivist and communist anarchisms claim to be not only the more popular forms of anarchism, but the true philosophical standard-bearers of the tradition.

We won't settle the debate easily, and certainly not today. There's a lot to clarify before we can move forward much. If you're reading this you probably have a pretty good sense of the importance I place on bringing figures like Proudhon, Fourier, Bellegarrigue, Dejacque, Warren, Greene, Ingalls, Kimball, Molinari, Bastiat, Colins, Emerson, Whitman (etc...) fully into our shared history, so we agree or disagree with them in an informed and intelligent manner. It should also be obvious that I consider the revolutionary period around 1848 to have a particular importance, if only as fertile ground from which to gather ideas of a sort that no longer seem to flourish among us. But even if you don't agree with me on these general points, perhaps you can see the advantages of looking at familiar ideas in a setting which makes them strange for us.

Consider the mutualist critique of the free market: It's one of those well-known, but barely-understood facts of anarchist history that Proudhon, the “property is theft” guy, came around to embrace property, in part because it would serve as a necessary counter-balance to “the State.” In “1848 origins of agro-industrial federation,” I pointed to a couple of apparent oddities in

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Proudhon's "Revolutionary Program:" 1) his embrace of property and "laissez faire," and his proposal of "absolute insolidarity" as a principle of organization; and, 2) his assertion that this absolutely egoistic approach would lead naturally to "a centralization analogous with that of the State, but in which no one obeys, no one is dependent, and everyone is free and sovereign."

Cool. The free market works. Someone like Bellegarrigue could, at roughly the same time, describe "the Revolution" as "purely and simply a matter of business," and describe (in the second issue of *Anarchy: Journal of Order* (translation forthcoming)) the scene after the deposing of Louis-Philippe as if someone had pushed that infamous Libertarian Button that makes government go away in a flash. With the king gone, everyone just had to get on with it, and let the "flux of interests" do its work. But there are some complications, at least from the mutualist point of view, not the least of which is that Proudhon never stopped being the "property is theft" guy. He never stopped thinking of exclusive, individual property as being based in individual "absolutism," as despotic in tendency, and as involving a "right to abuse" potentially more self-refuting with regard to "property" than anything his critics have poked at in his claims. But he also believed, consistently, that "community [of goods] is theft," just another form of absolutism. And by "Theory of Property" he had some hard things to say about possession, which is the half-way form that anarchists have frequently claimed was his choice:

"It is a fact of universal history that land has been no more unequally divided than in places where the system of possession alone has predominated, or where fief has supplanted allodial property; similarly, the states where the most liberty and equality is found are those where property reigns." [p. 142]

Hmmm. Proudhon's antinomies complicate things considerably, if what we're after is a system, of property or of no-property, which simply works, and reduces or eliminates conflict. In a lot of the discussions I'm in these days, as interest in mutualism increases, the concern seems to be to find what sorts of arrangements mutualists would think are justified. But if Proudhon is our guide, justification is our permanent revolution, William B. Greene's "blazing star," which retreats every time we make an advance.

What if we had a "free market," equitable "commerce" in the broadest sense, and a truly just system for dealing with the "mine and thine"? To my

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knowledge, Proudhon never posed the question in this way. For him, the absolutist character of every one-sided element or approach only became more and more prominent, and necessary. In the conclusion of *Theory of Property*, he writes: “The principle of property is ultra-legal, extra-legal, absolutist, and egoist by nature, to the point of iniquity: it must be this way. It has for counter-weight the reason of the State, which is absolutist, ultra-legal, illiberal, and governmental, to the point of oppression: it must be this way.” Add one more wrinkle here: We are not talking about “the State” as we know it, the governmentalist State. Instead, this is an essentially anarchist State, a collective being which does not rule, which has no standing above the individual, but which, if we are to take seriously Proudhon’s descriptions, nevertheless marks a real peril, the loss of all individuality, precisely because it marks the extent to which the “flux of interests” has, through egoistic commerce, resulting in unity of interests, in the elimination of conflict.

It appears, in a strange turn, that the danger inherent in a free market, built on systems which reduce conflict, might well be “communism”—not the communism of goods-in-common, not the systems of Marx or Kropotkin (except to the extent that they fail in non-economic ways), but the “community of interests” that Proudhon and Josiah Warren both warned against. Dejacque suggested anarchist-communism as a logical product of individual egoisms. Indeed, most of the attempts to downplay the individualist element in communist anarchism are ignorant smears. So the suggestion is not so far from ones made by “communists” of one sort or another. But there’s a tough knot to be unraveled here, one that tangles up communism and free markets, pits despotism against anarchism, in the interest, ultimately, of the latter.

If Proudhon could answer back to the criticisms of his successors in the anarchist tradition, I suspect they might have looked a bit like Nietzsche’s attacks on the anarchists and socialists of his own day. In particular, to the tradition of Kropotkin (and to some degree many of us, myself included, get our anarchism in large part from Mutual Aid), I think he might feel the need today to say: Mutual aid, yes, as well as the struggle for life. In Kropotkin’s own ethics, or at least that part drawn from Guyau, there is an understanding that it is neither optimism nor pessimism that drives the anarchist towards better approximations of justice, but elements in play, the pressure of life.

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The Proudhonian question to economic communists seems to be: how, in a human society, in human “commerce,” is that absolutist element that appears to be part of our nature, that may indeed be the hungry thing that (however reluctantly at times) pushes on after the blazing star, how is that kept in play? How does it render aid, and express its ethical fecundity, if it has nothing of its own to give? And how does community-of-property avoid being the narrow, then narrower-still, community of interests that seems to be the death or coma-state of society, or at least of its collective intelligence?

For the market anarchist, perhaps the question is still: What is property? What is its relation to a free market? Is the freedom we are seeking only a lack of impediments to the flux of interests, or is there perhaps something else, supplemental to or even opposed in some sense to that first market freedom, which we require for a free society? If we were able to complete our justification of property, would that get us what we ultimately want? We know how counter-economics works within the given context, in part because the anarchist entrepreneur has more than a whiff of brimstone about hir, but what happens if and when we win?

THE DISTRIBUTIVE PASSIONS: ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

At the Apex

Twenty-eight thousand, four hundred and eighteen years, and change...

KALI smiles, and she hopes that it is a nice smile, painfully aware that, nice or not, the smile is not entirely her own.

Twenty-eight thousand, four hundred and eighteen...

The number threatens to become a memory—and she honestly has enough on her plate. A filter defers processing of that particular train of thought.

“Is there something the matter...?”

Something about the lips, about the way the corners of the mouth hinge...

They have stepped out into the street, strikingly quiet, now that the morning parade has concluded. She allows herself to scan the avenue, and is awash in data. Perfect detail piled on perfect detail, *ad infinitum*, and all ultimately alien. There is no fold of fabric, no leaf blown from a tree, no birdcall or musical note, no texture, not even the texture of her own skin, that does not demand of her a context

Twenty-eight thousand, four hundred and...

that she is still unable to supply.

“It’s all rather much,” she says. “But beautiful...”

Sensors fire belatedly, and everything slows.

VISUAL FILTER ENGAGED. DOWNSAMPLE: 1/1,000,000.

Ease off a little. OK?

Her hosts give off a distinct...—?—?—?—...of relief,

Here we go again. Which sense was that?

giving Kali a chance to play a little catch-up, do a quick redesign on the sensory filters. Backbrain response seems normal—or as close to her notion of “normal” as she’s likely to experience again. *Whatever...* For the moment, she’s functional. Hell, she’s almost enjoying herself. A child skips by, an ornate and unlikely confection in, and all over, his hand, and—for the first time, really—Kali is able to see it.

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The trick is not to see all of it.

A minor creation ripples down the street. From her sensory blind, she catches glimpses of progression and subversion, as they unfold. The whole process feels somehow like autumn, tastes like that soft drink they used to buy at the Mainer stores...

MOXIE.

Yes, Moxie. But...

Channel ID, last msg?

PRIORITY CHANNEL. KRONOS/CENTRAL. LAST ACTIVE...

She cuts off the reply.

Twenty-eight thousand, four hundred...

Still another of the change-waves rolls over the party, much stronger than the one that struck just a few moments before. The little boy is still dancing across the flagstones, still clutching his preposterously perfect and perfectly sweet treat. Still...

“Shall we go?”

If the “wave” were water, they would be standing shoulder-deep in the flood, but her companions seem blissfully unaware.

PROBABLY JUST AS WELL.

She is fairly sure she is drowning.

VERIFY channel ID, last msg?

PRIORITY CHANNEL. KRONOS/CENTRAL. LAST...

She cuts off the reply.

Twenty-eight thousand...

WE'VE GOT TO GET YOU CAUGHT UP SOMEHOW.

“Bastard!”

Oh, gawd, she thinks, and she smiles. Not a nice smile at all.

MISS ME?

You bastard!

...

....

.....

Oh, gawd... Yes, I missed you...

She's surprised when the tears come, when the sobs shake her.

Anything you do for the first time in twenty-eight thousand years is going to be hard.

And the laughter isn't any easier than the tear.

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And then the meltdown—so obviously genuine, so obviously alien to this best of all possible worlds—carries her away, rescues her in a moment of really maximum vulnerability—shields her from the scrutiny of her hosts, from the relentless shimmer and gossamer rustling of this maddeningly beautiful world, from the scattered, shattered memories of (*can it really be?*) two hundred and eighty plus centuries spent so thoroughly *in-between*, and inexplicably alone, subject to everything (*Everything...*) that nature, time and an increasingly restless creation could throw at her.

She comes to in her quarters, wrung out in ways she won't yet confront, and physically weak. And for a while there are good days and there are days when all she can do is batten down all the sensory hatches, while her backbrain plays soothing simulations. The voice

PRIORITY CHA...

Hnn. Nuhn-unn...

does not return. And slowly she begins the work of self-repair, consolidation. She sets a new memory filter.

Her hosts do not seem inclined to rush her, nor, in most instances, to pay her much mind, as long as the vague problem that she represents remains voluntarily confined to quarters. She is a disquieting object for speculation, at a time and place, and among a people who seem, despite their formidable capacities, to have very little talent for disquiet.

They will learn.

She is quite used to be a source of disquiet, and has been such at almost every phase of her varied career. In her time she was a very dangerous woman—a very dangerous weapon. At the moment, however, she feels rather like a spent cartridge, and she knows that her power to disturb, here at the Apex of Harmony, is entirely a matter of her atavistic alienness—her inappropriateness, really. She would be a rude noise, in a world which has forgotten how to fart or burp, was it not for the fact that the promise of decline—the atavism to come—was beginning to teach the people of Harmony how to worry again.

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She spends whole days refining filters and developing interpretive routines, shunting various spectra of sensory data to her backbrain for analysis. Gradually, she develops an experimental methodology for “upgrading” her processing of the input from her much-augmented physical apparatus. The public information networks are open to her, and in them are accounts of the various creations which her body has undergone without precisely *experiencing*. She searches the data on sensory disability and its response to therapy, and models backbrain routines accordingly. And gradually she learns to listen with her new ears, touch with her new fingertips. . .

The functions and enjoyments of the Solarians are of so superior an order to ours, that it is not yet time to give a glimpse of them. It must suffice us to reason about the well-being of the great cardinals, Jupiter, Saturn, and Herschel, whereof we are going to share the lot. I cite Jupiter in preference, because it will be the proximate cardinal, and very visible to us. With the glasses of the fourth creation we shall be able to see, as in a magic picture, its amphibious inhabitants, their industry by land and sea, the numerous docile and superb animals that serve them in the water as on land, the unity and ardor that reign in their public assemblies, without any arm, any policeman being employed to keep them down. We shall there see the relations of the phalanxes carried on for thousands of years, and, arrived at a degree of wealth and wholeness from which ours will be still far removed in a beginning, when they will have but few means, being only aided by the ingrate creations, one and two. The fourth creation, which is going to yield us a new furniture, will not be able to be completed before a century at least. We shall see in that planet, as in Mercury, magnificent plants, whereof each family, each fruit, each flower will be depicted to us in colossal forms. We shall there see the cultivators lodged in immense palaces, each of which will contain in the body of the buildings twenty colonnades and domes more stately than the masterpieces of the Louvre and the Pantheon; we shall see in the heart of these palaces and of the richest landscapes, these giants of a rosy alabaster color, transform into a perpetual festival that labor which is the perpetual punishment of the unhappy civilizees. At the sight of so

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much weal that is about to become our portion during 70,000 years of consecutive resurrections, we shall already have a foretaste of Paradise.

She pulls herself from the stream, an old, old favorite translation from the Secondary Teachings, rendered into English in the mid 19th century. A bit of a curiosity, even in the series of heresies, she treasures it for its rustic charm, its Swedenborgian divergences, its bold, if slightly bewildered approach to the bold, and so often bewildering propositions of the great prophet's thoughts. Here, among the "splendors of the combined order," she often leaves it streaming for her auxiliary "operations brain," which, lacking specific mission duties, has begun an overhaul of her strategic libraries, as a step towards rebuilding long-outdated basic operations protocols. She has no desire to override. Quite frankly, the "Apogee of Happiness" makes her nervous, more nervous than she has ever been in her so-long life. (*Face it. Frightened.*) She will not shy from even that much frankness, if only between herself and her backbrain. It is not a feeling to which she is accustomed, despite all that she has been through,—and, of course, it is not one of the passions.

Wolves and tigers, crocodiles, and swarming vermin are only necessary in the swamps and deserts, barren wilds and rank fermenting jungles of uncultivated regions in the natural world, and damning Words of fear are only necessary in the swamps and deserts, barren wilds and rank fermenting passions of uncultivated regions in the spiritual world, or in the soul of man, and in those texts of Scripture which relate to evil as a perishable thing. . . . There are then perishable truths in the Word as well as in the Works of God, and man has power to co-operate with God in modifying both; not by caprice and idleness and ignorance, but by reason, industry, and science. . . . Man does not destroy the truth of a living animal, which he exterminates; he merely puts an end to its bodily power and presence. The type exists in nature still, and in man's mind, and may perhaps exist in spirit for ever, in certain parts of the universe where its presence is useful and necessary, at different times and in various places.

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The stream—insistent. She recognizes the passage, foregrounded, and not for the first time recently, according to some unconsciously invoked protocol. But she cannot yet put it to use in any way. And again...

To set aside and neutralize a text of Scripture, therefore, as Christ substituted the law of love and meekness for the law of retaliation, is not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil. True love casteth out all fear. To exterminate foul vermin and ferocious animals, is not to destroy their truth, but to fulfil their destiny, which is, to disappear from this globe as fast as man replenishes the earth and substitutes higher truths, more useful breeds of animals, and his own wisdom and activity in lieu of their perishable natures and temporary services. But then we must observe that not one race or family of animals and vermin will pass away from the earth until man has civilized the regions it inhabited: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, until all be fulfilled.” What are heaven and earth in this case? Are they not the present state of man’s mind, and the present state of man-s body and the earth? These will pass away as man progresses in truth and goodness, in obedience with the Christian law of Love, which gradually supercedes the usefulness of the Jewish law of Fear, without impairing the truth of that law which it extinguishes or casts into the shade of death.

Dismiss. Reprocess.

There is nothing else for it, for now.

And so it goes, through days and nights. She keeps her dealings and experiences simple, spending much of her time in her room, entertaining occasional visitors. She spends hundreds of hours, awake and asleep, connected—literally hard-wired at first—to the central Cosmos computer network, her backbrain processing a seemingly endless series of queries in an attempt to find means of adaptation to this sensation-rich environment.

It shouldn't be so hard, she thinks. After all, I was designed to be just what they are now.

“K-as-in Kombat,” Series 51. The pride of the Federal Expeditionary Forces, at least until their existence became know. “Mollies,” they were

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called in the service, after some character in a science fiction novel, if she recalls correctly, the “martial Madonnas” of the Church.

Query: “Conflict Life” + mollies

WORKING...

The Federal Corporation officially divested itself of its Conflict Life Technologies unit in 1984. In practice, this meant the transfer of equipment, staff and intellectual properties to a number of ostensibly competing firms, outside of Federal jurisdiction and beyond the reach of Territorial law. The scandal surrounding the Madonna Project demanded that some heads roll, in order to preserve the cultural and moral capital of the Federals’ chief contractor, and there followed a rather predictable period of enquiry, inquisition, ritual humiliation, castigation, mortification of the flesh, confession of sins, religious reeducation, and, in most cases, resanctification. A few incorrigibles spent the softest sort of prison time, two related suicides were reported, and one technician went mysteriously missing. Congressional and Cardinal Court investigations subsequently confirmed this technician, a Mongolian immigrant by the name of Wang, as the chief architect of the mental modeling project, while they claimed that the project itself was not specifically authorized by either the Federal Government or the oversight committees of the Church. In the popular media, Wang gathered around him a dizzying array of legends. He was an Uyghur separatist, or a spy for the Marxist faction of Chinese syndicalism. The Madonna Project was some kind of Trojan Horse attack on North American interests. Speculation of the wildest sort continued. Cold War-era stories of Chinese brainwashing experiments made the rounds of the tabloids, while a *New York Times* investigation found no record of any employee of that name in any of the heavily redacted project records it could obtain—though it did uncover the still-unexplained murder of one Chesterfield Wing, an employee of a related technology unit, in 1977. The President and Federal Pantarch both seized the opportunity to attack the *Times* for supposed ultra-Paineist leanings, and, in time, records were produced (quite literally produced, some sources claimed) showing Wang to be a participant in a classified technological exchange program. The Chinese Council denied the existence of the program, which meant little under the circumstances. It was generally understood that such programs existed, despite persistent denial on both sides. The President’s admission of the existence of the exchange was followed by his condemnation of it as an unauthorized, black budget affair. A few more heads rolled—mostly laterally or even uphill into cushier positions connected to the Federal Corporation’s various offshore “competitors.” The Russians made threatening noises, but the days of the Russian Union were nearly over, and nearly everyone could see it. Wang appeared periodically in the news, the subject of official intelligence reports, semi-official

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rumors, and tabloid Elvis-sighting style tomfoolery. He was in Dubai, reunited with elements of the old CLT. He was collaborating with rebel techs in breakaway Free Turkmenistan. He had allied himself with the Taliban, or with the ETA. Half Fu Manchu and half *Where's Waldo?*, The Technician, as he came to be called, was a particularly versatile, even whimsical threat. But the White House took every occasion to remind us that it was indeed a grave threat that had been averted (the details of which were, naturally, kept confidential for security reasons) and that the danger, both technological and moral, still “out there” somewhere.

The Madonnas themselves—and all of the various Mollies—posed a severe problem for the administration, as well as for the Corporation. The Church and its Pantarch struggled to find words to condemn the experiments involved, without resorting to those, which might have condemned its victims as well,—abomination chief among them—so common in the Fundamentalist churches, particularly in the Dixie Confederation. The Pantarchal College (Federal) was asked to rule on the question of whether or not Mollies had souls. Those worthies deferred judgment, pending Federal investigations into the nature and origins of the project. Those investigations proved largely fruitless. Crucial documents, it was said, had been lost or destroyed. Apparatus had been allowed to transfer to foreign concerns. National security concerns got their play in the ensuing debates, and were made the pretext for demands to the Territorial governments for the return of Mollies decommissioned and abandoned at the end of the FedEx excursions of '82 and '83. Resentment of FedEx and renewed sense of Territorial pride gave vehemence to refusals based largely on more humanitarian concerns.

The decommissioned Mollies were largely left alone, for good and for ill. “Decommissioning” seems to have been a haphazard process, and one which left those subjected to it unpredictable, restless, prone alternately to impetuous action of various sorts and to an obsessive haunting of old posts, parodic performances of duties no longer required.

The source is a mid-21st-century weblog, some kind of pop-history site. Roughly accurate, but certainly not deep. There seems to be a lot of this sort of material. *The Federal Corporation had a cyborg program. The program was abandoned after the last territorial wars, and blame pushed off on the Chinese.* Not much detail though. And all the sources buried deep, deep in the past.

It's not just her vanity that's hurt by the lack of information on the Conflict Life program. Anonymity may well be a blessing, but she has need of technical information if she is to get on with her life.

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Series 47 had been the “breakthrough batch”—she remembers Chet Wing using just that phrase—the series in which the next group of evolutionary traits, as predicted in the Teachings, had been artificially induced. With the exception of Series 49, all the “40s” were “hurry-up” series, piecemeal developments of the basic combat Molly, intended for short service at best. The goal was to develop all the components of the Series 50 “super-Molly,” and perform any necessary system-integration in the 49s.

Murphy’s Law got a lot of credit—or blame—for the bloodbath that ensued. Better to invoke the Peter Principle or “military intelligence.” Too many suits too eager to “make a point” in New Hampshire, or to bring the Beaver Flag down a notch or three, making too many promises and too many demands—and too many corporations too closely tied to Church and Corporation to know how to say “no.” And something else—something that would explain the death of Chesterfield Wing...

STILL “UNSOLVED”...

Hmmmm. A “cold case” indeed...

A bloodbath—not that the true toll was ever made public. Everything went wrong. Human Duplication, pushed to its limits, provided flawed “blanks,” some so flawed that a “soul” could not be anchored to them. The pneumatologists, perhaps distracted by their specific involvement in the failed longevity experiments of Series 44, pretty well fell apart, leaving it to others, and other technologies, to make the “advances” in duty-life. And, to be fair, it was probably their mistakes which doomed the first implementation of the Combat Supplemental Processor, since that, at least, did not fail in the 48s. Self-repair technologies proved incompatible with existing biomodifications—horribly incompatible—and the Series 40 shop seems to have been in denial, as it burned through blank after blank. Disposal had become an embarrassing problem, and even the starchiest of the suits was starting to wilt a bit, when Chesterfield announced he had solved the problem—and the CSP incompatibility issue—in the 43 shop, where they were working on aquatic adaptation.

All before her time, of course. But the Wings had been happy to share their version of things, particularly after it all came apart.

Much less chance of my return to the bosom of the Church, if I knew what went on...

But none of this information appears to exist in the main public networks. She forms a series of terse queries for the central COSMOS

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engine, and drops them in the queue. She's vaguely aware of a loose filter, shunting off some memory or reflection.

Hold that thought...

She manages a rather serviceable smile, and can't help but be pleased with herself. (*Signs of life.*)

Her queries come back—negative—and again she feels the filter fire.

Give it to me, slowly.

By a preset protocol, the feed begins with an emotion.

PUZZLEMENT.

You're telling me. Now tell me something I don't know.

...

Sorry. Make that something I didn't want to know. Why, specifically, am I surprised at the lack of data on CLT in COSMOS?

BECAUSE YOU KNOW THE DATA SHOULD BE THERE.

And I know because... Hold on. Let me guess. I know because I put it there.

CORRECT.

And if I put it there, that means that...

Another filter. Tight and disorienting, like a momentary faint.

PRIORITY A FILTER ACTIVATED. MEMORY TAGGED AS "DISRUPTIVE;" ASSOCIATED WITH "MELTDOWN." YOUR TAGS. HOW DO YOU WISH TO PROCEED?

She shuffles memories—some of which she has suppressed the old-fashioned ways—and feels herself on the edge of realization. But realization feels like something wide and deep, something she is not yet ready to confront. She's a step closer, but it's the only step she's ready to take—in that direction.

She settles herself down in a comfortable chair, plugs herself physically into the network, and settles down to constructing a new set of queries. She has plenty of keywords, plenty of very specific data, and this sort of intensive data scouring was one of the things the CSP was designed for. She makes some decisions, charts out some rough rules, and sets the processes running.

OK. See what you get with that. Wake me when there's news.

...and not before.

The wake-up routine is gradual, and homey, as she designed it to be. Sensory filters gradually ease off, to the sound of a twentieth-century alarm

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clock, with a morning bird chorus faint in the background. Threat-level: zero. She senses the search process still churning away in the background, so apparently there is other “news.”

YOU HAVE A VISITOR.

She has few visitors. She is not entirely sure why—whether her novelty has worn off, or whether perhaps novelty has considerably less appeal for the Harmonians than it did in previous eras. She gives off, she is aware, quite a range of strange. . . “radiations” or “emanations” is something like the right word. Sensations. She strikes the senses in an unusual and not entirely pleasant manner. In her day, the Fourierists—particularly the Freefors—were renowned for their easy embrace of virtually any form of difference, their talent for incorporating what others considered the most perverse of tastes into the fabric of their society. But it is one thing to perfect tolerance in a very imperfect world, and another to encounter an odd or off note in a world where everything (*Everything?*) else belongs to Harmony.

The Historian is the only one of her acquaintances who does not seem at all perplexed or repelled by her “odd note.” Indeed, he seems rather attracted by it, or her, for reasons which she has not successfully divined. She suspects some of the interest is occupational. She is, after all, a living piece of history. And perhaps she is wrong to concern herself too much with untangling the various passions, here at the height of Harmony.

In truth, she hasn’t concerned herself much, outside the context of some very general observations of Harmonian individuals and attitudes. In a world peopled by the perfect, perhaps John—*John+*, she thinks, with the “+” being one of those sensations to which she cannot quite assign a sense, but which seems to refer to him uniquely and distinctly—perhaps something about John is just a little *flat* or *sharp*. Or perhaps she is failing to see some aspect of Harmony. In any event, though she has no particular desire to see anyone, it is something of a relief that her guest is the Historian John.

“I have heard that you are *improving*.”

He stresses that last word strangely, and she finds herself unwilling to pursue all the ways that “improvement” might play for a historian at the

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ultimate turning point in history. She makes something of a production of not unplugging from the network, entertaining in an impatient way while trailing the data tether behind her. The Historian does not seem to be offended, and she tries not to be disappointed. Cybernetic bio-enhancement is not unknown in Harmony, although it is, as she understands it, uncommon. Neither common or uncommon enough to matter, she thinks. Like running around with her hair up in curlers.

She fires off a quick query.

A PRACTICE GENERALLY LIMITED TO KNOWLEDGE WORKERS. LIBRARIANS. ARCHIVISTS.

Interface.

INTERFACE APPEARS TO BE RELATED TO CSP.

Bingo.

“Are you finding the open network interface unusable? I know that working wired can be cumbersome.”

“Do you...?”

He stretches the collar of his shirt to show what appears to be a datajack.

“Archival researchers nearly all opt for the hardware.”

“I’d like to ask you some questions...”

“Over dinner, perhaps?”

She nods, and tries to improve a bit on that serviceable smile.

“And then a movie?”

Dinner and a movie. It’s certainly been a while...

The film is called “Universal History,” and it is every bit as ambitious as its name, the product of a thousand series, laboring for a thousand years, and it is to play, continuously, for a year and a day. The artistic centerpiece of the Apex Festival Years, the High Work of the Narrative Arts Series, it aims to capture the full sweep of Humanity’s upward climb in its carefully selected episodes and abstract—some say too abstract—connecting montages. It is to provide a sort of closure for this phase of human history, and, perhaps, some glimpse of what is to come in the long epochs of decline. Part history, part dramatic recreation, part visual poem and historical fantasy, it is nothing if not a controversial project; but it has won, through years and then centuries of negotiation and struggle, the consistent, if not

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uniform and unreserved, support of the Historians, as well, it seems, as the general assent of the people.

Kali is not sure if she's really up to this. Her head is full of dinner conversation, and that conversation was full of hints and possibilities. But she has allowed herself to be swept along. John seems quite eager that she should see some part of this epic work. And as they have made their way into the Theater Park, they have gathered first a tail and then a crowd, her "odd note" apparently suitable for a diversion. They make their way into one of the smaller enclosures, and John assumes the role of host and Historian as perhaps a hundred Harmonians settle themselves in for the show.

"Each showing is individualized, within certain limits. For fairly conventional history, you can choose an individual or event, or a year, and then COSMOS will provide you with further options. Multiple and complex queries may spin out other sorts of storylines. Small crowds sometimes "play" the film, like a piano piece for multiple hands or a musical ensemble. But I doubt anyone here would begrudge you a chance to pick on your own this time."

"2005."

"Phrase-choice."

And at the Historian's command a series of phrases appear in the viewing field. Some are familiar, while others seem entirely random. One, however, catches her eye.

"The Distributive Passions."

And the film begins...

ON *alliance*

“EVERYONE HERE DISAGREES.”

A SECOND (BITTERSWEET) MISCELLANY:

“This stuff gets messy, pretty much right out of the gate....
I hope that we are all a little bit wrong....”

**ON ALLIANCE
JULY 17, 2009**

After weeks of increasingly bellicose agreement on the importance of truth, reason and LGBT rights to the left-libertarian movement, I’ve decided to withdraw my formal affiliations with the Alliance of the Libertarian Left. The ALL was launched initially despite considerable diversity of basic assumptions about theory, strategy and tactics—a dangerous strategy, in many ways, but one which grew naturally, it seems to me, out of the network of friendships, political flirtations, and relations of philosophical hospitality that preceded the ALL, on SEK3’s original left-libertarian list and in Tom Knapp’s Blogosphere of the Libertarian Left. The growth and success of the ALLiance has probably spread that network beyond the limits that such an informal agreement could sustain, a circumstance that has certainly been on the minds of some of us more-or-less from the beginning. That’s not a bad thing, and the calls from within the ALLiance for more coherence are not necessarily a bad thing. But, from my purely personal point of view, the way that implicit assumptions about the fine points of the ALLiance have been advanced as if they had been mutually adopted, and the rough handling that a few of us dissenters recieved as a result, was pretty much a bad thing.

I have no interest in stopping any ongoing projects. I’m not dropping any friends. I expect that my affairs will be so bound up with members of the ALLiance that the difference in my explicit affiliations will hardly show. I am, in fact, increasing my participation in some affiliated projects. But for me, as a result of religious and philosophical commitments which were, up

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until recently, simply not issues for the ALLiance per se, the loose bonds of affiliation have started to feel other than mutual, and other than based in the sort of individualistic dynamic I though (perhaps mistakenly) was at the heart of the whole thing. YMMV, and, if so, more power to ya. But I do not want at any point to feel, for instance, that LeftLiberty or Corvus Editions or my posts here, can be taken to represent or misrepresent anything but themselves, and myself.

I look forward to working on concrete and mutually voluntary projects with fellow left-libertarians in the future.

It is, as I said in the introduction, not a terribly spicy breakup story. Those who want the details, such as they are, can dig around at the Forums of the Libertarian Left. Personally, though, I'm much more interested in moving forward with the left-libertarian project.

I was in on the beginnings of the Alliance of the Libertarian Left, was in fact one of those who specifically argued for a banner with a little broader appeal than that of the Agorist Action Alliance, which was launched at nearly the same time as the ALL, as a result of the same conflicts. I believe I am responsible for the somewhat less-than-mellifluous phrase "more-than-agorist alliance" which appears in one of the ALL's founding documents.

That was in March, 2007, and by May of that year I was beginning to have questions about how to develop and sustain an alliance which took as one of its mottos Samuel Konkin III's phrase "everyone here disagrees"—not, I should add, because I had (or have) any doubt about the possibility of such an alliance, but because I had seem such opportunities missed before. I launched the blog "On ALLiance" as a platform from which to speak specifically about the issues and difficulties involved.

The blog never developed any sort of following, to my knowledge. Traffic flows were always just this side of nonexistent, and nearly all the comments and responses (and there weren't many) were to posts about the possibility of launching an ALLiance zine. As it happens, Chris Lempa eventually launched *ALLiance*, which resembles the project discussed, and my own proposal eventually became *LeftLiberty*,

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which doubtless counts as a bit eccentric even by mutualist standards.

Despite its obscurity, even in ALLiance circles, it seems to me that it has featured some good stuff, some of which is well worth pursuing, despite my secession from the ALLiance. "The Lesson of the Pear-Growers' Series," which was reprinted in the first issue of LeftLiberty, marks a very important step in the evolution of my thinking about mutualism. But the various keyword-related posts, which I am reprinting here, still seem useful, both in terms of the work they get done and the additional work that they point to.

I intend to continue the "on alliance" section in future issues of LeftLiberty, and address some of the organizational issues that seem to need some attention in left-libertarian circles. For the present, however, here are the posts from the old "On ALLiance" blog that I think still speak to the problems faced by all anarchists and libertarians concerned with maintaining broad, active coalitions.

ON BEGINNINGS MAY 30, 2007

On March 19, 2007, the Alliance of the Libertarian Left (ALL) made its public debut, in a flurry of activity fueled by schism and in-fighting among partisans and allies of the agorist Movement of the Libertarian Left (MLL). From the main website:

The Alliance of the Libertarian Left is a multi-tendency coalition of mutualists, agorists, voluntaryists, geolibertarians, left-Rothbardians, green libertarians, dialectical anarchists, radical minarchists, and others on the libertarian left, united by an opposition to statism, militarism, and the prevailing corporatist capitalism falsely called a free market, as well as by an emphasis on education, direct action, and building alternative institutions, rather than on electoral politics, as our chief strategy for achieving liberation.

The particular family feud that started the ALL rolling isn't of much importance now. Radicals of all stripes experience more than their fair share of that sort of thing. And it is perhaps not unforgivably trite to want

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to build an alliance around, well, alliance, and not schism. Proclaiming the ALL was, after all, little more than naming something which had been building for some time, a “more-than-agorist coalition that has grown out of the original MLL listserv (now succeeded by LeftLibertarian2), and broadened further in the Blogosphere of the Libertarian Left (BLL).” Samuel Konkin III had been a gracious host to quite an odd assortment of other-than-agorists, and particularly to mutualists and geolibertarians. He had, in any event, insisted that a key point of MLL “orthodoxy” was that “everyone here disagrees.” After his death, Knappster’s BLL marked a new stage of left-libertarian hospitality, and it was this, actually, that really cemented my move into the blogosphere. (I’ve talked a bit about my online history and my late-adoption of the blogform elsewhere.) Graciousness and hospitality may not necessarily be the first words that come to mind when one thinks of anarchists, and particularly of market anarchists, anarcho-”capitalists,” etc. But the crisis that led to the formal announcement of the ALL was, in many ways, a crisis of hospitality, provoked in large part by the presence of us pesky other-than-agorist mutualists and such. And no “multi-tendency coalition” can long escape the difficulties of maintaining a space of hospitality and of tolerance, within which differences in beliefs, assumptions, vocabulary and such, can be explored.

Anyway, on to the matter of this “periodical letter” (with apologies to Josiah Warren.) I can probably claim to have done my share of work in preparing the space into which something like the ALL could emerge. Since March 19, however, I have to confess a certain lack of effective action in support of the alliance which I helped to bring about. I come armed with all the best excuses, not the least of which is that I have been engrossed in work—research, writing, archiving—which I hope will serve, in the long run, to support and sustain this still largely virtual, in some senses merely nominal, coalition. But there’s no point in looking to the past and the future, while neglecting the present. And I believe, quite strongly, that the Alliance of the Libertarian Left is the sort of thing that the present needs rather badly. That belief may be a little hard to fathom, particularly for my old friends and allies in the broader anarchist movement, outside of mutualist or market-anarchist circles. Thus the need to explain myself, to attempt to articulate my thoughts specifically on the subject of alliance, and to make those explanations both to allies already under the ALL banner and to others who “hate the state more than the market” and who might make

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common cause. Because I am me, the anarchist historian, there will undoubtedly be some history here, and some exploration of the precedents for the coalition, but there will be more as well, much of it in a voice not so familiar even to old friends and allies. I don't pretend to speak for the ALL, or for anyone but myself. I welcome comments and contributions.

ON AN-ARCHY
MAY 31, 2007

What are we fightin' for? Well, it's not a word in a dictionary, and it's not any very specific, single political project. We're not utopians, with blueprints for the perfect society, which we would be happy to show you, if you would just clear off that table over there. . . . None of the usual anarchist slogans are really adequate. We're "against all authority," except, of course, all those sorts of authority that are derived from individual talents and qualities, and are a natural expression of human group dynamics. Rulers are unwelcome, as are states. Maybe anarchy is the absence of government, or maybe it's just a fairly pure form of self-government. Maybe we're primarily after liberty, or maybe it's ownness. Or maybe its justice. A good deal—everything, really—depends on what we mean by those various terms, and it's not always obvious. To the extent that we're all citizens of states, products of a state-system, on the road to something that we have only ever experienced piecemeal, it's not just that it isn't necessarily clear what we mean when we speak to one another. There is undoubtedly a good deal about full-blown anarchy, if such a thing is possible, that we've hardly even begun to anticipate. That's OK. We know the state-system all too well, and we know it rubs us in all the wrong ways. We can see enough of what might be down the road to know there's something else out there, something worth working towards. We have a couple of centuries' worth of work in that general direction to draw on as well, though the traditional heroes of our alliance are a rather varied bunch, drawn from diverse traditions.

Let me invoke one of those heroes—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—one of the first folks to use that term anarchy in a positive sense, in an attempt to open up a little space for discussion. Proudhon thought of anarchy as a sort

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of political ideal type, a limit-case unlikely to be seen in actual societies, but one towards which modern political society seemed to be tending.

Anarchy is, if I can express it in this way, the form of government, or constitution, in which public and private conscience, formed by the development of science and the right, suffices alone for the maintenance of law and order and the guarantee to all freedoms, where consequently the principle of authority, the institutions of police force, the means of prevention or repression, officialism, taxes, etc, are reduced to their simplest expression; in its strongest sense, where the monarchical and highly centralized forms, replaced by the federative institutions and communal mores, disappear.

This explanation, from an 1864 letter, is classic Proudhon, in that it refuses to simply discard or demonize existing institutions, while it calls for, or predicts, their radical transformation. In his 1846 *System of Economic Contradictions*, he had expressed his faith that collective human intelligence made very few missteps, though he understood progress as a movement through series of antinomies, or productive contradictions. This understanding made him a rather generous, if also relentless, critic of existing institutions, and kept him, when he was most consistent, from at least one class of blueprint utopias.

I'm working my way through the *System of Economic Contradictions* these days, plugging away at the still untranslated second volume now. There are so many of Proudhon's major works still untranslated that it is hard to discover to what extent he brought these notions of anarchy and antinomy into play with one another. They seem, in some ways, to be nearly synonymous, though derived from slightly different roots. Antinomy as counter-law (really the play of counter-laws) may, in fact, describe the "engine" of Proudhon's anarchy as well as anything. Almost from the beginning, Proudhon understood liberty as resulting from a balance of forces. We might be tempted to attempt a deconstructive hyphenation of anarchy, to roughly signify the antinomic forces at work within. What does that gain us, in terms of our understanding of our goals? Mileage is bound to vary. But maybe, for right now, it gets us a sense that our goal is not something simple, self-evident, easily understood, clearly separate from existing institutions, etc. Maybe it gives us something to talk about. . . .

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ON ANARCHISM

JUNE 6, 2007

Anarchy is the goal, and anarchism the movement. Or movements. Or something. It's hard to say anything too definitive without ending up looking like a bit of a buffoon, which doesn't stop most of us from getting downright dogmatic from time to time about this anti/political whatchamacallit whose flag we fly. Anarchism is a "pretty big tent," and it probably has been for nearly as long as there has been something worth calling by the name. And, as I suggested in an early post, it hasn't always been crystal clear about its core goals and demands. My journey through some of the contemporary currents, roughly from anarcho-syndicalism to mutualism, was largely precipitated by the Usenet border skirmishes between "social anarchists" and "anarcho-capitalists" in the 1990s. Studying the 19th-century individualists, I "went native" in what has turned out to be a pretty big way. I've learned a lot about what "anarchism" can mean, and has meant at various times, as I've dedicated a good deal of the last decade to historical research and activist experiments. I suspect (with necessarily mixed feelings) that my labors have muddied present-day definitional waters a bit, hopefully "in a good way," by teasing out forgotten and half-forgotten possibilities, clarifying productive contradictions in properly Proudhonist fashion. I don't know that anarchists are necessarily any better at dealing with complexity, or "surfing" contradiction, than anyone else in our increasingly fundamentalist cultures. But if "we mean it, man," if we're not just poseurs, and particularly, with regard to those of us who identify with the Alliance of the Libertarian Left, if we are taking this question of alliance seriously, we probably need to be.

Anarchism is high-risk politics. The people who dismiss us as nuts or dreamers probably feel that aspect of it at least as well as we do most of the time. We're asking to take our share of the world and its work and drape it squarely across our own shoulders, and we have the audacity to ask our neighbors to do the same thing. Anarchists who don't, at least once in awhile, feel the enormity of their desires and demands, are probably insufficiently reflective, and might just be dangerous. There's nothing simple about the tasks we set ourselves, or light about the burdens we're asking to shoulder. That's a big part of what makes the anarchist demand worthwhile—beautiful, really, or perhaps sublime—it's audacious,

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thoroughgoing, enormity. If nothing else, we provide a counterpoint to the crushing, seemingly omnipresent, indifference that seems to characterize modern politics—but only if we don't ape its smugness and self-satisfaction.

As is perhaps obvious, these first few posts are a sort of wind-up, a first dip into the pool of key-terms and concepts around which any viable left-libertarian coalition will have to crystalize. For my own purposes, I wanted to revisit familiar terrain, under the new conditions of our declared alliance, and with the concern that, in the past, we have been prone—and too often content—to “talk past one another” fixed firmly in my mind. I have some dubious intuition that such a personal, public exploration of the territory of alliance may be on some use. (Either that, or my intellectual exhibitionism is once again confirmed.)

ON ALLIANCE JUNE 17, 2007

This stuff gets messy, pretty much right out of the gate. As if we expected anything else. There are plenty of sincere comrades of various persuasions, not to mention our share of out-and-out trolls, ready to point out the dangers, difficulties and obvious follies of an Alliance of the Libertarian Left. Any common language or agreement on more than very basic principles, upon which some more practical form of alliance might be solidly grounded, is strictly something to come. We've bet on a shared intuition that the obviousness of our folly is somewhat illusory. The leap of faith represented by the ALL is not to be taken any more lightly than that marked by our identification with anarchism. We come armed with some tools, not least of which is the SEK3-inspired affirmation of diversity: Everyone here disagrees. It's not the surest foundation for an alliance, and it leaves open possibilities, not least of them that we could be wrong.

I hope that we are all a little bit wrong, particularly in those areas where we are most married to the particular dogmas of our own libertarian sects. And hopefully we will all learn to divorce ourselves a bit from those dogmatic beliefs, not in the interest of agreement, necessarily, but in the interest of working usefully with our differences, with our own relations to

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the traditions from which we draw inspiration, etc. It should be a very interesting project, in any event.

A DOCUMENT FOR DISCUSSION JULY 2, 2009

Some thoughts on the nature and function of the ALLiance, stemming from our recent internal conflicts:

The ALLiance should be welcoming to women, men, trans-women and trans-men, of whatever sexual preference, people of all nationalities and ethnicities, all faiths or lack thereof, transhumanists and survivalists, etc., that is, to all people seriously struggling for anarchism, along whatever economic or philosophical path, using whatever language or lingo. Members of the ALLiance should be expected to pursue this vision diligently, on their own responsibility, using their own best judgment, and respecting, as much as possible, the judgment of their ALLies. Strategic and tactical differences ought to be aired and discussed as precisely as differences within the ALLiance, differences between persons. Vague talk of “tendencies” and non-intention sub-alliances probably ought to be avoided as simply unhelpful, and likely incorrect, given the fairly low level of specific agreement between individual ALLies on any given issue, beyond the general pursuit of liberty and our policy of general welcome and support for the like-minded. Any attempt to treat individuals, within the ALLiance or without, as other than individuals—as mere instances of some social grouping, trend or pathology—ought to be opposed as destructive of the hospitality which alone can make the ALLiance into something more than a collection of more-or-less similar, more-or-less isolated individuals. By its nature and composition, the ALLiance has to embrace viewpoints of a conflicting nature—and sometimes the conflicts will be of more than trivial significance to the ALLies. Most of us are committed to philosophical, political, economic and/or ethical paths, to which we have invested often considerable energy, time, ideological struggle (and the pains that come with it). ALLies, present from the beginning, work from foundations as disparate as amoralist egoism and spiritual revelation, and pursue means of libertarian social change that run the gamut of revolutionary and evolutionary approaches. The ALLiance of

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the Libertarian Left, as such, cannot endorse any or all of these positions without compromising the philosophy of hospitality which is at the core of our current disputes. Nor can the ALLiance, as such, be expected to present any particular approach any more prominently, or negatively, than it is presented by the actions and expressions of the individual ALLies— hopefully magnified, clarified, criticized, and put into creative, productive play with other such actions and expressions by other ALLies, motivated and guided by that spirit of hospitality.

LOSE THIS SKIN...

JULY 14, 2009

As of this afternoon, I've struck the ALL flag, seceded and moved my yurt to more open left-libertarian territory. It won't make a lick of difference to my friends and those with whom I am engaged in actual projects, but it feels necessary to me. My "document for discussion" on hospitality and the ALLiance can be taken as my thoughts on how small-a alliance might be conducted. I've actually been contemplating the change for some time, as a means of avoiding any sort of mis/representation issues, as my own theoretical work is likely to be increasingly controversial in some ALLiance circles. The second issue of "LeftLiberty" will contain a statement on the sense in which the work there is "left-libertarian," a term which for me is increasingly simply a tribute to SEK3, whose hospitality was such an important part of drawing together the friends who will always for me be the most important part of any left-libertarian alliance. I'll be happy to pursue further alliances on a strictly individual and mutual basis.

To be continued...

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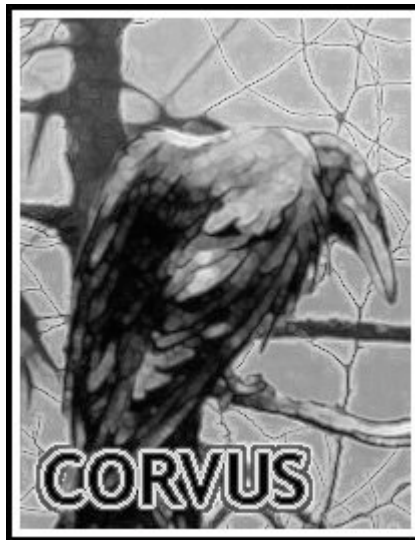
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