

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS:

A WORKSHOP

Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur

Suggested Readings:

[Some readings are available in audio format at immediatism.com]

Prior to December 1, 2020:

- [\[Introductory Readings \(pdf\)\]](#)
- [Participation](#)
- [Philosophy](#)
- Voline, “[On Synthesis](#)” (1924) [Audio: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)]

Week 1 (December 1-12):

- [\[Week 1 Readings \(pdf\)\]](#)
- [Thoughts on Constructing Anarchisms](#)
- [Anarchy: Into the Maelstrom](#) [audio]
- [Positive Anarchy and Collective Force](#) [audio]
- [Anarchy: Lawless and Unprincipled](#) [audio]
- [Anarchy, Harmony and the Maelstrom of Desire](#) [audio]
- [Anarchy: Action in the Face of Uncertainty](#) [audio]
- [Introductory Notes](#)

Week 2 (December 13-19):

- [\[Week 2 Readings \(pdf\)\]](#)
- [Constructing an Anarchism: Approaching An-Archy](#)
- [Proudhon’s Barbaric Yawp](#) [audio]
- [Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses](#) [audio]
- [Anarchy: Historical, Abstract and Resultant](#) [audio]
- Ricardo Mella, “[The Bankruptcy of Beliefs](#)” and “[The Rising Anarchism](#)” (1902-03) [audio]
- [Notes on the Approach](#)

Week 3 (December 20-January 2, 2021):

- [\[Week 3 Readings \(pdf\)\]](#)
- [Constructing an Anarchism: An-Archy](#)
- [Toward a General Theory of Archy](#) [audio]
- [Escheat and Anarchy](#) [audio]
- [Archy vs. Anarchy](#)
- René Furth, “[The Anarchist Question](#)” (1972) [pdf] [Audio: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)]

Week 4 (January 3-9, 2021):

- [\[Week 4 Readings \(pdf\)\]](#)
- [Constructing an Anarchism: Tradition](#)
- Gérard Lacaze-Duthiers, “[The True Revolutionaries](#)” [audio]
- Charles-Auguste Bontemps, “[Synthesis of an Evolving Anarchism](#)” (1952) [audio]

- Voline, “[On Synthesis](#)” (1924) [Audio: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)]
- **[Constructing Anarchisms: Clarifications and Additional Tools](#)**

Week 5 (January 10-16, 2021):

- [[Week 5 Readings](#) (pdf)]
- **[Constructing an Anarchism: Synthesis](#)**
- [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: Self-Government and the Citizen-State](#) [Audio: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)]
- [Legal Order](#)
- [Authority and Authority-Effects](#)
- [But What About the Children?](#)
- Bakunin, “[What is Authority?](#)“
- **[Constructing Anarchisms: Vital Things](#)**

Week 6 (January 11-23, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Governmentalism**
- Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “[Principles of the Philosophy of Progress](#)” [selections]

Week 7 (January 24-30, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Collective Force**
- [review “[Escheat and Anarchy](#)“]
- [Collective Force: Notes on Contribution and Disposition](#)
- Frédéric Tufferd, “[Unity in Socialism](#)” (1887)

Week 8 (January 31-February 6, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Aubaine**
- E. Armand, *Anarchist Individualist Initiation* [selections]

Week 9 (February 7-13, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Individualism**

Week 10 (February 14-20, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Guarantism**
- “[Who is the Contr'un?](#)” (Rambles...)

Week 11 (February 21-27, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Contr'un**

Week 12 (February 28-March 6, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Encounter**

Week 13 (March 7-13, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Entente**

Week 14 (March 14-20, 2021):

- **Constructing an Anarchism: Anarchism**

[I expect to take a 2-week break between the end of this “quarter” and the beginning of our historical review.]



Related Readings:

- Alfredo M. Bonanno, “[The Anarchist Tension](#)” [Audio: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)]
- P.-J. Proudhon, “[The Philosophy of Progress](#)” (1853)

Introductory Materials

This online workshop combines elements of a traditionally structured survey course and a vehicle for self-study. In some ways, it will resemble a year's worth of office hours as much as a yearlong seminar. The goal is to make the basic experience—an extended practical crash-course in thinking about anarchist theory and history—available to as many potential participants as possible. It has been constructed with busy people in mind and should be able to carry on despite some ebb and flow in participation.

This a *practical* course, aimed at providing individuals with the knowledge—or opportunities to gain the knowledge—to accomplish the construction of a *personal theory of anarchism*.

It is divide into four *quarters*:

In the first (December 2020-March 2021), I'll present a series of twelve basic concepts that I have identified as key to understanding my own approach to anarchism, summarizing and extending the work done in the last decade or so. That exposition can serve as an example of one way of approaching this project of constructing an anarchism. But I am also offering the work-in-progress for questioning and critique, in the hope that we can begin by identifying key terms and concepts that we believe should be addressed in our constructive projects. I expect to return to my own construction in the final phase, reorganizing and revising as seems necessary, along with the other participants in the workshop.

The second and third quarters will be dedicated to a rapid historical survey of the period of anarchist history that I have called “our lost continent.” In this course, we'll probably begin in 1834 (with the publication of Pierre Leroux's essay on “Individualism and Socialism”) and end in 1934 (with the publication of the dictionary portion of the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*.) Half of that time will be spent focused on the period of *anarchists without anarchism*, prior to the emergence of anarchism as a movement in the wake of the final split in the International, with considerable attention paid to the variety of anarchist theories in that period. The remainder will focus on the attempts to address the diversity of anarchist positions in the early decades of “modern anarchism.” My weekly posts, prompts and potential readings throughout this survey will be as much suggestive as representative—and they will be shaped, at least to some degree, by the interests demonstrated in earlier phases of the workshop.

The fourth quarter will then turn more distinctly in the direction of self-study, with participants beginning to choose and explain the concepts around which they are building a basic theory of *anarchism*. I will respond as seems appropriate. I expect that I will be sharing material from the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste* and similar sources, as time allows and as it seems likely to be of general use to the participants. I expect that at this point, if not before, there will be conversations to be had about the uses of *systems* and of *ideologies*, neither of which are necessarily subject to much enthusiasm among anarchists. But we can say from the outset that the intention here is not to frame any new orthodoxy. This is a skill-building exercise—and if some of us manage to square away our uncertainties about anarchist history and theory in a year's time, so much the better, but, ultimately, we probably can't expect so much from a *crash-course*.



One of the advantages of an online workshop is that we can be flexible about the *where* and *when*. I'll be providing a rough syllabus, but if discussions lead in unexpected directions or extend on beyond the given week, we can adapt. Similarly, while we will certainly designate a few forums where discussion can be expected to take place, there is no requirement that we all

meet in any one of them. I am on Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, Mastodon and Diaspora. I am not on Discord—but there’s no particular reason why some groups of participants might not meet there or somewhere else, in addition to the interactions I will take part in. I will make some efforts to post useful material that emerges in various conversations to this site (the Libertarian Labyrinth) and share links elsewhere. But the degree of centralization or decentralization, synchronous or asynchronous interaction will be largely up to the various participants.

What I can offer, barring unforeseen circumstances, is a steady stream of material likely to inspire thought about the basic elements of anarchist theory, together with availability to discuss that material and the questions it raises. My available time is certainly not endless, and there are projects that will require considerable continued attention, but experience suggests that we are more likely to lose steam early on than to create intellectual demands that can’t be met. And, to be honest, I wouldn’t mind stretching myself a bit, if it was in serious discussion, rather than as an ineffectual cheerleader.



For the first quarter discussion, I will be presenting material relating to the following concepts:

- Anarchy
- Tradition
- Synthesis
- Governmentalism
- Collective Force
- Aubaine
- Individualism
- Guarantism
- Contr’un
- Encounter
- Entente
- Anarchism



Announcements on the forums where discussion is definitely taking place will appear as those decisions are made, in the same places I am posting this general invitation.

I hope that folks will consider participating.

Constructing Anarchisms: How to Participate

In announcing *Constructing Anarchisms* as a yearlong workshop, rather than simply as the focus of my activity for the coming year, I wanted to commit myself to a very general sort of availability for a fairly specific kind of educational activity. At the same time, I wanted to encourage others to encourage others to commit to a similar sort of sustained engagement with both the fundamentals anarchist theory and the kind of anarchist history that is the *raison d’être* for the Libertarian Labyrinth. For all concerned, I think that both the commitment and the specific goal in question are likely to produce useful results, whether it is a question of improving our skills as propagandists for anarchism or of grounding our practice in at least a clearer personal conception of what is at stake.

So, if you can, please consider coming along for the full journey.

There are, of course, no *requirements* in this sort of workshop. If folks want to be prepared to share their vision of anarchism, starting next October, they have the better part of a year to prepare, by whatever means seem best. But for those who want to take advantage of the workshop as an organized event, drawing on whatever expertise other participants can bring, the basic minimum level of participation probably involves reading and considering one blog post each week from me and engaging in whatever level of related discussion is both possible and helpful to their own development. Individuals may take on considerably more than that in any given week—and many of us no doubt regularly already invest more time and effort than that in less focused online discussion. But my goal in hosting the workshop is to provide enough in the weekly posts to allow participants to tackle the final project of elaborating a basic *anarchism* that they can say is really their own.



That said, we're all busy folks—and nothing about our general situation is necessarily conducive to sustained efforts. And the final project may not be the bit with the greatest appeal for all potential participants. There may be folks who want to know what I've been babbling on about this past decade or so, but who are comfortable with their own formulation of anarchism. There may be those interested in the odd bits of history, but not in theory or ideology. And so on...

I would like those folks to feel welcome to drop in and out of the conversation as individual interest and resources dictate, simply asking them to be mindful of the larger project in process and the varying investments of the various participants.

And I probably shouldn't have to say it, but I doubt any of the participants will have much time or energy for trolls...



I'll be posting all updates to [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Reddit](#), [Diaspora](#) and [Mastodon](#). Additionally, there will be some discussion in the following forums:

- [Constructing Anarchism](#) group on Facebook
- [r/mutualism](#) on Reddit

And this list may, of course, grow as we get underway.



There is no charge for the course, but those who wish to support the effort will find *Donate* links at the top and bottom of pages in the Libertarian Labyrinth archive. Donations will be applied to ongoing research and generally result in new digitized materials available to all.

Constructing Anarchisms: What It Is & What It Is Not

Survey courses are peculiar things, particularly when they address subjects of more than just passing interest. The construction of a survey always seems to involve at least some claim regarding the *exemplary* nature of the materials chosen. And if we were more certain about the character and extent of the *anarchist tradition*, we would expect a historical survey to take us, rather neatly, from milepost to milepost along the path of growing ideological clarity. But it's hard to spend any time discussing history and theory with other anarchists—and I spend hours nearly every day—without recognizing that *anarchy*, *anarchism* and the *anarchist tradition* are all things that we struggle with, constantly, without necessarily making much headway in the process.

It is likely that *anarchism*—as a general, *shareable* project, not built from the elevation of certain consistently anarchistic concerns above others—still eludes all of us, to one extent or another. It is even *possible* that it always will, that *anarchy* is, as William Batchelder Greene put it, a *blazing star* that constantly retreats as we pursue it. In “The Anarchist Tension,” Alfred Bonanno argued something similar about “being an anarchist.”

So anarchists keep asking themselves the same question: What is anarchism? What does it mean to be an anarchist? Why? Because it is not a definition that can be made once and for all, put in a safe and considered a heritage to be tapped little by little. Being an anarchist does not mean one has reached a certainty or said once and for all, “There, from now on I hold the truth and as such, at least from the point of view of the idea, I am a privileged person.”

And if there is any truth to this idea that, at least for the foreseeable future, some of the details of a general, shareable anarchism will continue to elude us, then various aspects of *anarchist practice*—if they are to be truly *practical*—will have to reflect that fact.

Those interested in an early look at my own developing *theory of anarchist development* can read through the series of “Extrications” posted here in 2018, starting with “[History, Tradition, Theory](#)” (and linked in the sidebar there.) For those without the time and specific interest, I will be summarizing elements from those posts, along with some that were ultimately left unwritten at the time, as we move into the exposition of my neo-Proudhonian synthesis. And I would encourage all participants to find some time fairly soon to read the essay by Voline, “[On Synthesis](#)” (1924), as the vision there—which is considerably broader and, I think, more interesting than the proposals for organizational fusion usually associated with *anarchist synthesis*—provides a rationale for much of what we’ll be doing throughout the workshop.

But we were talking about *surveys* and *exemplary elements*...

If the *anarchist tradition* is not, in fact, intelligible as the advance toward an *anarchism* that is now clearly and fully known to us, if *anarchism* remains something with which we routinely struggle, then we can naturally expect that the most useful examples for us to focus on are those that accomplish two basic tasks: *bringing certain aspects of anarchist theory into clear focus*, while also *allowing us to focus on what remains clearly unresolved and in need of resolution*.

I’m an old interdisciplinary studies scholar, with a background that has confronted me with all the difficulties of *canon construction* in various contexts and from various sides (popular culture studies, “Great Ideas,” etc.) I want, at the outset, to make it clear that the peculiar collection of texts and incidents we will be exploring is hardly *representative* in the ways that we usually associate with even a purely pedagogical canon. At times, our course will be obviously and defiantly idiosyncratic. That is, in part, because the goal here is to prepare participants to come to grips with the anarchist tradition in all of its daunting breadth and diversity and, in part, because educators should almost certainly find ways to lean on their strengths—and my particular strengths are perhaps most evident in the context of the *margins* of anarchist history. There are also obviously considerations that emerge from the loose, largely informal nature of the project and the diverse backgrounds of the participants. Many of you are well-read, but often in different areas of the anarchist literature. Some of you will be engaging in self-study, while others have already formed organized study groups. And there is really no telling, at this early stage, how effective I’m going to be determining and addressing the needs of such a diverse group. I’m making some effort to focus, in my choice of readings, on those that will hopefully present important ideas in some *new light* for the largest number of people.

When it is time for you to construct your own theory of *anarchism*, I naturally expect that many of you will do so from sources quite different from those we are examining together—and

perhaps with rather different ideas about how to think about *anarchy*, *anarchism*, *anarchist history*, the *anarchist tradition*, etc. I have no interest in dictating the material you choose to work with. However, in the interest of keeping us more or less on the same page though what is a long commitment, and in order to discourage certain kinds of distractions from or subversions of the shared project, I would like to make two basic suggestions or challenges to participants:

First, as you begin to think about constructing your own *anarchism*, commit to treating *anarchy* and *anarchism* as the first and last of the concepts you will define—and pay some close attention to the degree to which our shared commitment to addressing the first of these concepts does or does not contribute to conceptions of the second that are *shareable* among anarchists generally, however provisionally. I'm not asking participants to embrace the sort of *anarchy-centered anarchism* or the model of *synthesis as anarchist development* that I'll be exploring in my own work—but it might be useful for you to be clear about if and how your own conceptions might be incompatible with that approach.

Second, I would encourage participants to consider the gap between the emergence of *anarchy* and *anarchist* in 1840 and that of *anarchism*, which was probably not a widely used label until almost 1880—and the extent to which the specific emergence of anarchism, *as a particular kind of movement and ideology*, was the condition that made talk about *anarchist history* and the *anarchist tradition* meaningful.

One way of looking at our historical survey would be to break it down into a decade in which anarchist thought was first emerging, another four decades in which there were *anarchists* of quite a wide variety of types, but no *anarchism*, and then fifty years or so in which there were *anarchists* and *anarchism*, movements and ideologies, but perhaps never much shared clarity about what that all meant. That lack of shared understanding was, we know, widely perceived among anarchists, essentially all through the period after the split in the International, driving various internal movements in favor or synthesis or division, and eventually led to monumental, but ultimately unfinished efforts like the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*. There are a variety of ways to position our own thoughts and efforts relative to that kind of historical framing—but I would like to encourage participants to at least try to find one of their own.



I will probably post just one more introductory text before December 1, an explanation of the final project and introduction to the first phase of the workshop. I've added the beginnings of a schedule to the main page, with the understanding that the holidays will be a period of busy activity for some of us and probably one of isolation for others. We'll be extra flexible through the early weeks, as there will undoubtedly be wrinkles of various kinds to smooth.

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
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WEEK ONE READINGS

Thoughts on Constructing Anarchisms

1.—Making Anarchism « Our Own »

Let's begin with a couple of questions that we are committed, at this point to answering to the best of our ability:

What is *anarchy*?

What is *anarchism*?

No pressure... But if you want to get up and take those questions out for a walk before continuing, I wouldn't consider it a bad opening strategy. After all, these are old questions, which have proven rather resistant to definitive answers. Of course, those committed to an engagement with *anarchy* may put a bit less stock in the *definitive* than others. Proudhon, whose philosophy was all about "progress"—by which he meant never-ending *change*—declared that "Humanity proceeds by approximations" and advocated an experimental practice, against all of the utopian blueprints that might be drawn up. And that means that, despite the importance of the questions, we probably have to be a bit gentle with ourselves. Proudhon, who was not famously relaxed about things, ended the first letter in his *Philosophy of Progress* with this charming bit:

The idea of progress is so universal, so flexible, so fecund, that he who has taken it for a compass almost no longer needs to know if his propositions form a body of doctrine or not: the agreement between them, the system, exists by the mere fact that they are in progress. Show me a philosophy where a similar security is to be found!... I never reread my works, and those that I wrote first I have forgotten. What does it matter, if I have *moved* for twelve years, and if today I still advance? What could a few lapses, or some false steps, detract from the rectitude of my faith, the goodness of my cause?... You will please me, sir, to learn for yourself what road I have traveled, and how many times I have fallen along the way. Far from blushing at so many spills, I would be tempted to boast of them and to measure my valor by the number of my contusions.

Expect contusions. It would be some combination of foolhardy and self-defeating to approach our task of "constructing anarchisms" with any other expectation. But *forewarned is forearmed* and, expecting to stumble from time to time, we don't have to treat it as a big deal. We are embarking on a voyage of exploration—through the parts of anarchist history and theory that I have described as « Our Lost Continent »—and ending with an experiment.

This is a work *on the margins* of what we generally think of as the anarchist milieu. So, in some important senses, *it doesn't have to matter*. For a variety of practical reasons, I try to treat our shared anarchist inheritance with a great deal of care. But I also live with a growing understanding of just how disconnected the facts of the anarchist past *can be* from our present understanding of "the anarchist tradition" or "anarchist history," without that being a particular problem for anarchism as we experience it generally.

Try to imagine the historical *cataclysm* that would be necessary to transform modern anarchist theory by itself. Was Bakunin perhaps actually an agent of the czar, as was claimed? *So much for Bakunin!* We are arguably better at walking away from *problematic* aspects of our shared heritage than we are at embracing the new problems it might pose.

The one thing you can probably be certain of, at the end of a year of exploring the margins of anarchist tradition, is that—at least as far as the *milieus* are concerned—you *can go home again*.

So *expect contusions*—but perhaps, depending on your own agendas and commitments, not of any very lasting sort.



To talk about making anarchism « our own » involves a kind of double allusion to anarchist thinkers who will be known by at least some of those involved in our joint exploration. On the one hand, it seems useful to raise—and from the outset—a set of questions about on what terms an individual might “construct an anarchism.” Is *anarchism* the sort of thing of which there might be multiple, varied instances? Is it the sort of thing that might be constructed by individuals? Are individuals equal to the task involved? Do individuals have the “right” to undertake it—assuming we can make any sense, as anarchists, of the notion of *right*?

☞ At this point, the answers to the questions are of considerably less importance than the task of grappling with *anarchism* effectively enough to frame them. What follows in the rest of this post is an attempt to propose at least some of the questions we can expect to deal with in the coming months.

But that reference to « our own »—*en guillemets*, a French form of scare-quoting—is also a tip of the hat to the anarchist individualist E. Armand, who had the habit of wrapping up possessive pronouns in this way in his writings, generally at moments where there was some question whether they might involve some kind of overreach for a conscious egoist and serious student of Stirner. In my *Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism* (linked in the sidebar, for those with too much time on their hands), I have appropriated the guillemets for instances where it seems important to underline questions of the *shareability* of concepts—a practice I will continue in this context.

To make *anarchism* « our own » in simple egoist sense might simply be to appropriate those elements of anarchist thought and tradition that are of use to us. In this task, we can perhaps take our cues from that conscious egoist Humpty Dumpty:

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

But even the egoist is likely to be troubled, eventually, by that question of shareability. And, despite considerable interest in Stirner and those who made wholesale appropriations of his thought, I’m not an egoist.

☞ Anyway, let’s say for the moment that the very existence of this collective endeavor, our proposed exploration of a shared anarchist heritage and our recognition of those existing anarchist *milieus* makes the question of sharing « our » anarchisms one that will be hard to avoid. So when you see a term bracketed *en guillemets* in one of *my* texts, treat it as a kind of *offering*—something I have constructed for my own personal use which might be of use in your own projects.

2.—The Anarchy in Anarchism(s)

There are arguably two constant concerns to address as we begin to ask our questions about anarchism. We should always hold ourselves to a relatively high standard when it comes to the matter of *asking the right questions*. A lot of wasted effort can be avoided by picking our battles and continuing to ask ourselves if the questions we have been asking in one phase of our exploration continue to be of use to us in those that follow. But we must also be concerned about something a bit more basic, trying our best to make sure that we really know *what question we are asking*—clarifying our concerns sufficiently that we can be fairly certain we are not just reacting to words or being guided by our preconceptions. And we may find that some of the more obvious questions actually break down into multiple questions before we are done with them.

For example, this might be the right time to backtrack just a bit and ask: *Is anarchism the kind of thing that we can construct or “make « our own »”*? But it is a hard question to answer at this stage, when defining *anarchism* is itself the task to which we expect to dedicate the next year. So we might instead ask: *What sort of “anarchism” might we construct—individually, in the context of this collective investigation, by defining a set of related concepts, etc.?* And we might also ask: *Is there any alternative to constructing an anarchism?*

Our answers to all of these questions can and probably will vary considerably. And different ideas about the kind of thing that anarchism is will necessarily lead, in the end, to different kinds of *construction*. If you understand anarchism as fundamentally a *genre of thought* about social relations, then there is considerable latitude in constructing and reconstructing that thought, with potential projects bounded by little more than the need to make new constructions intelligible as instances of this particular genre. That requires some reference to the anarchist tradition, but perhaps only as a point of departure. If, on the other hand, you think of anarchism as fundamentally a historical movement, bought into being under particular conditions in the past and perpetuated through some kind of continuous action and development, your elaboration of concepts is going to be constrained by the particular history you want to describe.

Neither approach is “correct” or “incorrect,” at least for the purposes of our shared exploration. Nor is there any particular reason to approve or disapprove in advance of any of the varied philosophical perspectives that we are likely to bring to the project. The specific structure of the course and its final project should pose challenges for most approaches. With any luck, those structural challenges will be insuperable for any bad-faith actors or would-be entryists, while they serve as spurs for the rest of us to further clarify our positions. The aim is to present material that can be of use to the full range of even marginally consistent anarchists, communists and individualists, platformists and nihilists, etc.—but the actual use of the material is obviously up to individuals. In order to make the most of things, you might keep these two basic points in mind:

☞ My contributions will all come from an ongoing project to sketch out a “plain,” *shareable* anarchism, suitable for a kind of active, ongoing *anarchist synthesis*. If you’re having trouble making sense of what I’m saying or how to put it into use, the first step is probably to return to that premise and to see if perhaps that helps to clarify the sometimes idiosyncratic ways that I am defining and articulating concepts.

☞ But also recognize from the outset that an important part of the process we will be pursuing is an exposure of our existing anarchist thought to the kinds of uncertainty and conflict that the anarchist tradition can and usually does provide when we really allow ourselves to *explore*. If the particular materials with which we will be engaging don’t throw you a curve on a

fairly regular basis, maybe you should consider with what degree of openness you are confronting them.

An experimental practice isn't worth much if there is not a real question to be asked, a real uncertainty to be addressed. And that's just as true when it comes to experiments regarding our identities and associations. The passage I've already quoted from Bonnano's "The Anarchist Tension" is followed by this striking bit:

...the anarchist is someone who really puts themselves in doubt as such, as a person, and asks themselves: What is my life according to what I do and in relation to what I think? What connection do I manage to make each day in everything I do, a way of being an anarchist continually and not come to agreements, make little daily compromises, etc? Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, whether we are old people or children, is not something final: it is a stake we must play day after day.

And I think we have to take that as one of the challenges to be accepted moving forward.

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It should be clear, at this point, that one of the assumptions driving the project is that there is a sort of *anarchy within anarchism*, an *anarchy of anarchisms*, which prevents us from simply adopting a coherent and useful anarchism passed down to us from any particular set of pioneers. I have looked—and looked—for the fabled *anarchism as such*—in the historical record, in the secondary literatures and in daily interactions with anarchists of various tendencies—and come away convinced that it simply does not exist, except as a certain kind of avoidance of the problems we're going to go out of our way to confront.

So, when we are asking ourselves a fairly basic question like "What is the relationship between *anarchy* and *anarchism*?" we might well break that question down into a question about *principles and manifestations* and another question about *the organization of relations within anarchism* (however we have defined that term.) And we, judging from conversations within the milieu about "unity," respond very differently to *anarchy* in the different contexts.

Our search is for clarity, so that we can take up whatever practical projects *anarchism* suggests to us more effectively. But the material for our experiments is overwhelming and, in its way, *anarchic*—so one of the ways that we'll achieve clarity is likely to be in our preparation for each new encounter and experiment.

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The remainder of what follows addresses a few more key issues that have shaped the course.

3.—The Distinctiveness of Anarchist Thought

☞ Another premise: Our use of the language of *anarchy* and *anarchism* should matter in some substantive way. If some less extreme, contentious and unruly concept better describes the core of our projects, then perhaps we should run with that.

In exploring the anarchist tradition, we'll certainly encounter a wide range of related concepts, aspects of *an-archy* and *archy*, constituent struggles, etc., which will perhaps provide us with some of the elements we use to construct our own anarchisms. Some of those elements

will have been treated as synonyms for anarchy or anarchism in some expressions of anarchist thought, with some degree of sense and justice, perhaps, but without, I think, really illuminating what is distinct about the idea of *anarchy* or an *-ism* organized around it.

I would like to encourage participants to focus on what is really distinct about anarchy—what separates it from “good government” in the form of *pure democracy*, from *voluntary association* (with no consideration of the structures for which one volunteers), from *anti-statism* or *anti-monopolism*, from *socialism*, *individualism* and *communism* in their various forms, etc., etc. It seems clear that such distinction is possible. And, honestly, if this work of distinction and clarification convinces a few would-be anarchists that perhaps their particular interests and investments are elsewhere, that doesn’t seem like the worst of outcomes.

4.—The Scope of Application

While we are emphasizing the importance of *anarchy* in the construction of *anarchism*, paying close attention to both what anarchy is and what it is not, we’ll also have to learn in what circumstances the body of thought we are constructing is specifically relevant. Anarchy is not the answer to every question, even if, for anarchists, it may never be far from our thoughts. Anarchy doesn’t build bridges or bind books, although it may be a related concern. We tend to joke in social media circles about the constant questions about “anarchist methods” or “anarchist opinions” regarding subjects that seem very far removed from the subject of anarchy, but maybe there’s room for us to be clearer about the connections of anarchist thought to the details of “everyday life.”

We probably also need to be aware that different constructions of anarchism, drawing elements from different spheres of social relations, will almost certainly apply more or less easily to relations in other spheres. When we struggle over whether the etymology of *anarchy* is *an-arche* or *an-archos*, part of what is at stake is a question regarding the scope of application appropriate to the term. A commitment to opposing *rulers* (*an-archos*) is potentially quite different, in both theory and practice, from the broad form of opposition that might be implied by *an-arche*. In “The Pantarchy Defined—The Word and the Thing,” Stephen Pearl Andrews captured the potential scope of *arche* quite nicely:

Arche is a Greek word (occurring in *mon-archy*, *olig-archy*, *hier-archy*, etc.), which curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of *elementary principle*, with that of *government* or *rule*.

Without some clarification about the scope of anarchism’s application—without a clear designation of its targets—we’re left without any very clear way to choose between the anarchism of those who champion the “no rulers, but not no rules” formula and that of those, like myself, who are inclined to think of anarchism as “lawless and unprincipled” (at least in some important senses.)

5.—Relations with the Non-Anarchist World

Related to the question of anarchism’s possible scope of application, there are questions regarding its practical scope in a world that remains surprisingly full of people who have resisted all the charms of *anarchy*. With debates about various kinds of political “unity” a constant feature of so many anarchist milieus, it probably makes sense, as we are working to distinguish anarchism from other tendencies, to also pay at least some attention to the ways in which

clarifying anarchism might also clarify its possible relations with other tendencies, whether radical or not.

6.—Conceptualizing and Constructing an Anarchism

When it finally comes time to try to “construct an anarchism,” all of these preliminary concerns ought to help guide us in the choice of building materials. And different general concerns may suggest a mix of different kinds of concepts, with the definitions doing different kinds of work. For example, in my own preliminary exposition:

Anarchy, together with the related notion of *archy*, provides a focus around which both my conception of anarchism and my critique of the anarchist tradition can be organized. *Tradition* is an occasion to address longstanding conflicts among anarchists, explore the power of “origin stories” and make a distinction between the stories we tell and the raw events of the anarchist past. *Synthesis*, with a nod to Voline’s 1924 essay, is an opportunity to talk about individual method and theories of anarchist development. *Governmentalism*, the political target of anarchists prior to the emergence of anti-statism as an ideology, is one of those historical keywords that requires reintroduction for modern readers—and that reintroduction provides an opportunity to discuss a range of more familiar concepts (*authority*, *hierarchy*, etc.) as well as some specifically Proudhonian notions (“external constitution,” etc.) *Collective Force* was the concept at the heart of Proudhon’s sociology and it is perhaps one of the keys to working through an analysis of anarchy as a positive concept. *Contr’un*, *Encounter* and *Entente* are the heart of a three-part analysis including a theory of the anarchist subject, a theory of relations among anarchists and a theory of relations between anarchists and non-anarchists. And so, on to *Anarchism*...

I’m still working some of the ways in which all of those interconnecting elements really come together as a kind of theoretical *edifice*, but I don’t think that it’s hard to see that, as they do come together, the resulting *anarchism* will be something we can view from a variety of different sides and easily place within a variety of different contexts. The goal is ultimately not just the construction of “an anarchism,” but of at least the beginnings of a worldview in the context of which that anarchism might be fairly directly put to the work for which it is well suited.

7.—Moving Forward

We’re opening with a period of twelve days, set aside for settling into our studies, discussing whatever seems to call for discussion in Voline’s essay on “Synthesis” and beginning to engage with the notion of *anarchy*, which will be the first of the building-blocks I introduce as I begin to summarize *my own anarchism*. For that last task, I’m going to recommend a series of writings originally produced as part of *Our Lost Continent: Episodes from an Alternate History of the Anarchist Idea*, a work-in-progress covering roughly the same period as our joint exploration, although eventually in considerably greater detail. The title I originally gave them, “Defining Anarchy,” may be a bit of a false promise, but I think folks will find enough questions in the series to tide them over until I can try again to make good on the promise in a little over a week.

Defining Anarchy

I.—ANARCHY: INTO THE MAELSTROM

First, we scuttle the ship of state, with all hands, if need be—ourselves included—if, for the moment, only in the realm of the imagination...

After all the preliminaries, all the hesitations, it is time to *take the plunge*, to do our best to *define anarchy* in such a way that it can serve us as a guide and instrument in the exploration we have undertaken. And we have told ourselves that the anarchist conception of anarchy became more radical as time went on, as *anarchism* emerged as a more coherent project, so we should expect that the earliest figures have *set the bar low* in various ways—and we should prepare ourselves to outdo them.

In “[Proudhon’s Barbaric Yawp](#),” I tried to indicate what was truly radical in Proudhon’s anarchist declaration—“je suis, dans toute la force du terme, anarchiste”—concluding that:

We have still not even come close to exhausting the radical possibilities of that inaugural moment. “Je suis anarchiste” remains, despite all of our efforts, nearly as untamed and untranslatable as it did in 1840.

There, the emphasis was largely on all that was possible as a *next step* from that first one, including possibilities that the anarchist tradition has never explored. The case for a viable anarchist synthesis begins with a demonstration that *anarchiste* was, from the beginning, capable of embracing a range of expressions without losing its most basic sense. But that argument almost certainly depends on an account of *anarchie* that displays a similar unity-in-diversity. Ultimately, this will require a return to the problem of “l’Anarchie, entendue dans tous les sens” (“[Anarchy, understood in all its senses](#)”), but perhaps we could start by simply attempting to bridge the first great anarchist schism that we generally recognize. If we are to talk about an *anarchy* simple and clear enough for the full range of anarchists and anarchist tendencies in our diverse history, finding some common ground between Proudhon and Joseph Déjacque is almost certainly a useful and necessary first step.

And there is no need to be coy about where I think we are headed. As I argued in “[Anarchy and Democracy: Examining the Divide](#)” and the responses that followed it, it seems both possible and ultimately necessary to make a clear distinction between the various forms of governmentalism and the anarchist alternative.

“...archy or anarchy, no middle ground.”

The problem, as I’ve suggested in the glossary entry on “[legal order](#),” is that government tends to be pervasive. The existence of a single law tends to divide the social world up into the *prohibited* and the *permitted*, so that there is not really a question of “small” or “big” government, but instead only various differences in the manner in which we are ruled.

In order to be a real alternative to the regime of authority, anarchy would then have to involve a very complete break with legal and governmental order.

And there are certainly times when Proudhon seems to be pointing us in that direction. Consider this famous passage from the essay on “Democracy” in *Solution du problème social*:

The ideal republic is an organization that leaves all opinions and all activities free. In this republic, every citizen, by doing what he wishes and only what he wishes, participates directly in legislation and in government, as he participates in the production and the circulation of wealth. Here, every citizen is king; for he has plenitude of power, he reigns and governs. The ideal republic is a positive anarchy. It is neither liberty subordinated to order, as in a constitutional monarchy, nor liberty imprisoned in order. It is liberty free from all its shackles, superstitions, prejudices, sophistries, usury, authority; it is reciprocal liberty and not limited liberty; liberty not the daughter but the mother of order.

An organization in which individuals *do what they wish and only what they wish* certainly sounds *anarchic* in a rather strong sense. If we're looking for ways to improve and radicalize this particular account of anarchy, then it is almost certainly a matter of making the break with government and authority as explicit in the rhetoric as it seems to be in Proudhon's mind—so, no more talk of “kings,” or “citizens” for that matter, and no more recourse to the language of *self-government* in order to describe “an organization that leaves all opinions and all activities free.” Unless we are to believe that Mother Liberty engenders Order once and only once—that *anarchy* is a precondition, but *not an ideal* for a free society—then we are probably better off with the much stronger, clearer rhetoric of the Napoléon III manuscripts. Again:

“...archy or *anarchy*, no middle ground.”

But have we doomed our project from the outset? Is this strong sense of anarchy too strong to unite even the earliest anarchists? Perhaps not. In a variety of tones and vocabularies, the early advocates of anarchy seem to have fairly consistently seen it as a radical break with the governmental status quo. For example:

Anselme Bellegarrigue: “Anarchy is the annihilation of governments.”

Ernest Cœurderoy: “No master, or nothing but a master.”

Félix Pignal: “Down with governments, down with tyranny, and long live independence! Long live love and friendship.”

Elisée Reclus: “Our destiny is to arrive at that state of ideal perfection where the nations will no longer need to be under the tutelage of a government or of another nation; it is the absence of government, it is anarchy, the highest expression of order.”

But what about Déjacque, who is so often held up as an early alternative to Proudhon and who seems to have been the first anarchist to attach himself to the notion of [*anarchisme*](#)? He seems to have been, if anything, even more extreme than Proudhon.

So—men of great liberties or small, the lukewarm and the hot—rally, all of you, to Liberty, to complete, unlimited liberty, for apart from it there is no salvation: Liberty or death!... Rally to the only true principle. Together let us oppose radicalism to radicalism, anarchism to jesuitism, so that what the cross-bearers and sword-bearers, the bravos of the autocratic and theocratic Authority provoke as a Riot (which they strive to drown in blood and drag around in irons) responds to them by growing to the level of the circumstances, by declaring Revolution!!!

We must always, of course, ask ourselves to what extent the extremism in these expressions is also rhetorical. Déjacque was explicit in embracing [Scandal](#) as at least one of his muses and Proudhon, if less open about the matter, certainly didn't shy away from provocation. But I think our interpretive choices are fairly simple. To the extent that the more extreme invocations of anarchy are simply rhetorical, the project that they presumably serve seems reducible to some form of "good government"—but without any very clear standard by which to judge the *goodness*. This is the problem faced by all those who are presently attempting to embrace "legitimate authority" or "justified hierarchy," but without, it seems, any means of knowing how authority could be deemed legitimate or hierarchy justified—and certainly without any clearly *anarchistic* means. If, on the other hand, we take the strong distinctions seriously—"...*archy* or *anarchy*, no middle ground"—we may find our project thwarted by various difficulties, but we can at least say that we clearly have a project distinct from the project of government and legislation, from the organization of society into hierarchies governed by various presumed authorities.



So what does that project look like? What are the most basic organizational consequences of embracing anarchy—since questions of organization are bound to dominate debates about anarchist synthesis—?

In "[Archy vs. Anarchy](#)," I tried to sketch out some of those consequences, starting with the abandonment of the polity-form in favor of more thoroughly federative forms of social organization. *Decentralization* is perhaps an inadequate term for that transformation, but the abandonment of schemes that privilege any particular center was certainly a key move in early anarchist strategy. So, for example, we find Proudhon invoking a perennial *decentering* notion early on, in *The Celebration of Sunday*:

In the sphere of pure ideas, everything is connected, supported and demonstrated, not according to the order of filiation, or the principle of consequences, but according to the order of coexistence or coordination of relations. Here, as in the universe, the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere; that is, everything is at once principle and consequence, axis and radius.

And then returning to it in *The General Idea of the Revolution*, this time specifically as it relates to social relations:

Let us recall the principle. The reason for the institution of government, as we have said, is the economic chaos. When the Revolution has regulated this chaos, and organized the industrial forces, there is no further pretext for political centralization; it is absorbed in industrial solidarity, a solidarity which is based upon general reason, and of which we may say, as Pascal said of the universe, that *its centre is everywhere, its circumference nowhere*.

And what Proudhon found in Pascal—and we might be familiar with in Nietzsche—Déjacque pulled from the works of Pierre Leroux, as in *The Humanisphere* he connected the *circulus* and anarchy:

Since the ages of antiquity, the sciences have constantly gained ground. The Earth is no longer a solid and immobile surface, as we formerly believed in the days of a creator-God, ante- or ultra-diluvian monster. No: the earth is a globe always in motion. The heavens are no longer a ceiling, the floor of a paradise or an Olympus, a sort of vault painted in blue and festooned with golden corbels; it is an ocean of fluid of which neither the eyes nor the thoughts can plumb the depths. The stars, like the suns roll in that azure wave, and are worlds gravitating, like our own, in their vast orbits, and with an animated pupil under their luminous lashes. This definition of the *Circulus*: “Life is a circle in which we can find neither beginning nor end, for, in a circle, all the points of the circumference are the beginning or end;” that definition, taking some more universal proportions, will receive an application closer to the truth, and thus become more understandable to the common. All these globes circulating freely in the ether, attracted tenderly by these, repulsed gently by those, all obeying only their passion, and finding in their passion the law of their mobile and perpetual harmony; all these globes turning first by themselves, then grouping together with other globes, and forming what is called, I believe, a planetary system, a colossal circumference of globes voyaging in concert with more gigantic planetary systems, from circumference to circumference, always extending, and always finding new worlds to increase their volume and always unlimited spaces in which to execute their progressive evolutions; in the end, all these globes of globes and their continuous movement can only give a spherical idea of the infinite, and demonstrate by irrefutable arguments, — arguments that one can touch with the eye and the thought, — that anarchic order is universal order. For a sphere that always turns, and in every sense, a sphere which has neither beginning nor end, can have neither high nor low, and consequently neither a god at the summit nor a devil at the base. The *Circulus* in universality dethrones divine authority and proves its negation by proving the movement, as the *circulus* in humanity dethrones the governmental authority of man over man and proves it absurd by proving movement. Just as the globes circulate anarchically in universality, so men should circulate anarchically in humanity, under the sole impetus of sympathies and antipathies, reciprocal attractions and repulsions. Harmony can only exist through anarchy. That is the whole solution of the social problem. To desire to resolve it otherwise, is to want deny Galileo eternally, to say that the earth is not a sphere, and that this sphere does not revolve. And yet it turns, I will repeat with that poor old man who was condemned to perjure himself, and accepted the humiliation of life in order, no doubt, to save his idea. With this great authoricide, I forgive his apparent cowardice in favor of his science: it is not only the Jesuits who believe that the end justifies the means. The idea of the *Circulus* in universality is in my eyes a subject of too great scope to devote to it only these few lines; I will return to it. While awaiting more complete developments, I call on revolutionaries to meditate on this passage.

And this invocation of the *circulus* ought to recall Proudhon’s emphasis on *progress*—understood as constant movement, circulation. Indeed, in *Justice in the Revolution and the Church*, Proudhon encouraged his readers to “admire this *circulus*, which antiquity represented by the symbol of the snake which eats its tail”—relating it there to the “universal conflict” and “balancing of forces” that he considered “[the fundamental laws of the universe](#).”

And from here we might dive straight into the various attempts at a science of society—by Déjacque and Proudhon, by Leroux and Charles Fourier, etc.—by means of which the complex

dynamics of a decentered, endlessly circulating universe might be adequately described. After all, this sociology based on the analysis of collective force, which occupied so much of Proudhon's career, is the basis for the [neo-Proudhonian anarchism](#) that I have proposed as a *plain*, potentially shareable framework for anarchist synthesis.

But I think it is appropriate to pause here once more to examine just how anarchists like Proudhon and Déjacque—who were, as we have noted, no strangers to the muse Scandal—took that particular plunge. Proudhon had his “je suis anarchiste” and “propriété, c'est le vol.” Bellegarrigue insisted that “Anarchy is order, for government is civil war.” Cœurderoy invited the Cossacks to invade. And Déjacque, insisting that “Harmony can only exist through anarchy,” started *The Humanisphere*—his anarchistic reimagining of Fourier's *phalanstère* by declaring:

This book is not a literary work, it is an infernal labor, the cry of a rebel slave.

And then again:

This is a book of hatred, a book of love!....

But perhaps it is what comes between those two statements that is most interesting.

In the context of the present, there's no avoiding the fact that talk of *decentering*, invocations of Proudhonian *anti-absolutism* and the more extreme presentations of *anarchy* all tend to provoke certain kinds of moral panics, whether it is a matter of the campaign against “lifestylism” (bolstered in part by a reading of anarchist history that placed Proudhon among the “individualists”), the wild talk about “postmodernism” or “cultural marxism” (which seems to unite traditionalist entryists and the proponents of various kinds of scientism in truly bizarre ways) or just the widely-expressed concern (both within and outside the anarchist milieus) that anarchists won't be able to “make decisions” and “get things done” if they don't rein in their more radical impulses. No one will be surprised when I say that I am equally unperturbed by all of those concerns. The premise driving this work—and really all of my work—remains this:

☞ A distinct, anarchy-centered anarchism is not just *possible*, but *necessary*, if we are to confront the systemic challenges facing us, and that anarchism seems likely, if seriously pursued, to be *adequate* to the task.

But, if I am unperturbed, it is because I have already embraced the difficulties of an anarchy-centered anarchism and recognized the real difficulties posed by the threats of “[uncertainty and profusion](#)” that seem inextricable from the approach. And I don't have the slightest interest in downplaying those threats. As I said in the post “[On the Anarchist Culture Wars](#),”

When it comes right down to it, the only people I have much faith in when it comes to a lasting commitment to anarchist thought and practice are those who are both serious about ideas (although I recognize a lot of ways this seriousness might manifest itself) — and specifically serious about *anarchist* ideas and anarchistic ways of thinking — and ready to acknowledge that the particular ideas that separate anarchism from the rest of the political or social philosophies out there, *anarchy* chief among them, are not “safe.”

I don't think I am wrong to imagine that most of the early anarchist pioneers I have been studying were in that category of individuals who both valued ideas and understood their dangers. And when the course I've chosen feels more than a bit like folly, one somewhat ironic touchstone has been the opening sections of *The Humanisphere*. There, between the two

declarations about the character and spirit of the work, is one of the more peculiar opening sequences I can think of:

Being, like the cabin boy of the Salamander, unable, in my individual weakness, to strike down all those who, on the ship of the legal order, dominate and mistreat me, when my day is done at the workshop, when my watch is finished on the bridge, I descend by night to the bottom of the hold, I take possession of my solitary corner and, there, with teeth and claws, like a rat in the shadows, I scratch and gnaw at the worm-eaten walls of the old society. By day, as well, I use my hours of unemployment, I arm myself with a pen like a borer, I dip it in bile for grease, and, little by little, I open a way, each day larger, to the flood of the new; I relentlessly perforate the hull of Civilization. I, a puny proletarian, on whom the crew, the horde of exploiters, daily inflict the torment of the aggravated misery of the brutalities of exile or prison, I open up the abyss beneath the feet of my murderers, and I spread the balm of vengeance on my always-bloody scars. I have my eye on my Masters. I know that each day brings me closer to the goal; that a formidable cry—the sinister every man for himself!—will soon resound at the height of their joyous intoxication. A bilge-rat, I prepare their shipwreck; that shipwreck alone can put an end to my troubles and to those of my fellows. Come the revolution, will not the suffering have, for biscuit, ideas in reserve, and, for a life-line, socialism!

This section ends with a call to insurrection, at which point the work turns to a rather conventional preface, followed by the various descriptions of the Humanisphere and its underlying rationales. It is a bit like a section from another work, prepended so we don't forget that this is the same Déjacque condemned for participation in the June days, for publication of incendiary verse and for possession of unlawful munitions—who was then condemned by his fellow exiles for promoting “antisocial thought, criminal means.” But even if we take it separately, on its own terms, I think it is remarkable. Stuck in the hold of the ship of state, a “bilge-rat,” Déjacque sees the way forward toward freedom in terms of *scuttling the ship*.

I relentlessly perforate the hull of Civilization.

And we have to wonder, if this is not indeed a strategy of self-destruction, what bit of magic or science, what sort of *sea-change*, is likely to transform this desperate attempt into some kind of victory. Talking about the rationale for publishing *The Humanisphere* together with the much more obviously insurrectionary pamphlet, *The Revolutionary Question*, I suggested a few years back that perhaps we needed to address a number of utopias in Déjacque's work:

I've been thinking about Déjacque's “Humanisphere” in terms of a tension between two kinds of “utopia:” a space of harmony, the Humanisphere, and a space of resistance, occupied by the servants who loot or poison their masters, etc. But I suspect what many of us actually find most compelling about some of Déjacque's writing is the thing we find in Coeurderoy, a sort of apocalyptic openness to whatever floods in when (to pick up the metaphor early in the book) he manages to drill a hole in the hull of the ship of civilization. Fourier arguably manages to mix up these three utopias fairly successfully, with his half-mad illustrations, but in the early anarchists we get them carved up in various ways.

And perhaps I have just been waiting for that final reference back to the works of Fourier to sink in.

I don't think that it is hard, particularly given all that has already been said about anarchy, to understand that part of what has to change in order for the scuttling of the ship of state—or of “civilization”—to lead to anarchistic victory is a refusal of the framing narrative, which makes the ship a place of safety, despite all the horrors of life within it, and the waters that might rush in, the vortex created by the sinking vessel, conditions of certain doom. If the ship is indeed the *ship of state*, then what it keeps out is probably anarchy—so perhaps the metaphor fairly quickly loses its utility for anarchists. Perhaps there is little to be lost in abandoning this particular line of thinking provided we can maintain our sense of the stakes and dangers involved.

But things keep circling back, cycling by, whirling around...

We have already identified anarchy with the circulus, the circulus with the Humanisphere, which is the anarchistic version of the phalanstery, otherwise known—and here that half-remembered bit of Fourier finally sinks in—as the *tourbillon*, which is, in turn, the whirlwind or whirlpool.

Everything seems to conspire to bring us back to the maelstrom. And we know what the maelstrom can do. We think of Poe's mountain guide: “...the six hours of deadly terror which I then endured have broken me up body and soul. And, still lingering in the middle of the nineteenth century, we can hardly help but think of Ahab:

“The ship? Great God, where is the ship?” Soon they through dim, bewildering mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous Fata Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of water; while fixed by infatuation, or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking lookouts on the sea. And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight.

But there are, perhaps, reasons to cling to this particular metaphor for just a bit longer, provided we can maintain our distance from the foundering ship of state. So let's take one last look at the wreck of the Pequod, not just to consider the kinder fate of Ishmael, but to wonder just a moment longer about how “everything is connected, supported and demonstrated,” in the presence of “unharming sharks” that might have been lifted straight from *The Theory of Universal Unity*.

The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?—Because one did survive the wreck.

It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out of the rocking boat, was dropped astern. So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the halfspent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre,

the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirgelike main. The unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.

II.—POSITIVE ANARCHY AND COLLECTIVE FORCE

A distinct, anarchy-centered anarchism is not just *possible*, but *necessary*, if we are to confront the systemic challenges facing us, and that anarchism seems likely, if seriously pursued, to be *adequate* to the task.

We're off to a good start, having defined *anarchy* in terms of a complete break with legal and governmental order. Any *anarchism* taking this concept of anarchy as a focus or ideal is certainly likely to be distinct from the full range of governmentalisms.

This is clearly not the only lesson that could have been drawn from the writings of the anarchist pioneers. The complexities of those early works and their largely non-ideological nature—their existence in a context without any concept of *anarchism* or with emerging conceptions significantly different from our own—have left them available for all kinds of piecemeal appropriation by subsequent ideological tendencies. I feel confident that the approach I have taken is at least as representative of the general tendencies of those early anarchist theories as any of the alternatives—and probably more so—but there's no point in downplaying the extent to which the present project will necessarily strike out into un- or under-explored territory.

It is a *choice* to seek synthesis and it is a choice to emphasize those elements of the tradition that are likely to ground that synthesis in a distinct, anarchy-centered anarchism. Perhaps some other anarchist synthesis is possible. But the choice made here is certainly not a random or whimsical one. The difficult task of proposing a *shareable* anarchism probably has to stick fairly close to issues with more-or-less self-evident relevance, even if it then addresses those issues in unexpected ways. There needs to be some intelligible connection between the proposed synthesis and a range of anarchisms, from the simplest sorts of Wikipedia knowledge to the more complex adaptations of established anarchist schools. So focusing on anarchy as the focus or ideal of anarchism and anarchists, and further focusing on what is genuinely distinct about anarchy, seems among the most obviously practical approaches—particularly as a first, foundational step in an exploration that is certain to move quickly in directions that can make few claims to self-evidence.

The fact that not every self-proclaimed anarchist has any real interest in sharing anarchism, in focusing their anarchism on anarchy or in making the anarchist project distinct from that of various kinds of “good government” simply can't figure too much in what follows—even if, as may be the case, this rather “obvious” approach seems bizarre, heretical, even anti-anarchist to some large percentage of those to whom it might be addressed. That too is a matter of choice, supported by certain obviously traditional contexts—even if it seems like it might qualify as bizarre, heretical, even anti-anarchist...

In any event, having committed to this path forward and having proposed an anarchy that is at least conceptually distinct from all forms of authority and hierarchy, the next step is to see what remains to be done to render our concept useful in practical terms.

One obvious difficulty facing an anarchy-centered anarchism is the fact—or the perception—that anarchy is a fundamentally *negative* conception. There is no escaping the fact that modern anarchism frequently amounts to *anti-statism* + various other oppositions, or that even the broad anti-absolutism of someone like Proudhon still requires that we keep returning to the thing we oppose in order to define our position. To embrace this problem, to embrace that sort of “apocalyptic openness to whatever floods in when we manage to drill a hole in the hull of the ship of civilization,” is perhaps a necessary part of being an anarchist in the sense that I’m sketching out here.

“I am an individualist because I am an anarchist; and I am an anarchist because I am a nihilist. But I also understand nihilism in my own way...” — Renzo Novatore

But it is almost certainly not the only part. Most of us, I think, whatever our feelings about “revolution” and “the future society,” look forward to circumstances under which our activities are not simply defensive.

So we need some kind of *positive* conception of anarchy.

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We’ve opposed *anarchy* and *authority*, *anarchy* and *hierarchy*, *anarchism* and *governmentalism*. And if we sometimes have trouble giving [authority](#) a clear definition, we know that in authoritarian systems someone sooner or later *lays down the law*—and we can describe in considerable detail the various norms and institutions that go with the establishment of legal and governmental order. If we don’t naturalize legal order, then presumably the fact that, in anarchy, nobody ever lays down the law is not really “positive” or “negative,” any more than that single observation tells us much about the desirability or undesirability of the non-governmental arrangements that might emerge. So the first step is obviously to resist the naturalization, to consider the possibility that the water rushing into the ship of state is not disaster and certain death, but instead some manifestation of *positive anarchy*, “liberty free from all its shackles, superstitions, prejudices, sophistries, usury, authority; ... reciprocal liberty and not limited liberty; liberty not the daughter but the mother of order.”

If we can do that—if we can recognize that authority and governmentalism are indeed absent from relations based in anarchy, but that this single absence is perhaps much less interesting than the wide range of (uncertain and profuse) possibilities that might exist in its stead—then our problem is a bit different. We have the first element of a more obviously positive description of anarchy. The question then becomes: What’s next? What will help to complete our picture? And are the elements, or at least some of the elements, already close at hand?

As we move forward toward an anarchist synthesis, we obviously understand that the additional elements of our description will have to pertain very directly to the qualities of anarchy itself. In “[Anarchy as a Beacon and as a Focus for Synthesis](#),” I suggested that anarchy is likely to be a demanding ideal, not simply a state to be instituted once and for all, and in the work on “[Theories of Anarchist Development](#)” I’ve appealed to Voline’s notion that anarchist practice will probably involve a kind of division of labor among anarchist tendencies. But, as useful as these observations are, they are still mostly peripheral observations and still largely tied to expectations we bring from contexts in which authority is naturalized.

We can say with some confidence, I think, that the broad anarchist tradition has prepared us to think fairly clearly about the contexts in which anarchy remains *contextually negative*, but in what context would it be *contextually positive*? We know the general qualities of authoritarian systems, so, even if authority itself is a bit slippery as a concept, we have no trouble pointing to its effects. But in what mechanisms would we as readily recognize the effects of anarchy?

The “small-a” emphasis on anarchy in everyday life, the attempt to create *milieux libres* in the midst of authoritarian society and similar approaches take us some of the way toward identifying social mechanisms and relations with a distinctly anarchistic character, but it is still probably the case that we recognize them primarily by the absence of other mechanisms and relations. Again, however, this is clearly a step in the right direction.

The post on “[Archy vs. Anarchy](#)” was an attempt, having laid out some of a “general theory of archy” (most fully, so far, in “Escheat and Anarchy”), simply to pose alternatives to various prominent elements of authoritarian society, in the hope of bringing them together in some kind of preliminary sketch of anarchic society. We could certainly do with other anarchist proposals what I did with elements drawn largely from the Proudhonian sociology—and, indeed, that will be one of the tasks in *Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back*—but as I have already proposed the [neo-Proudhonian anarchism](#) as a candidate for a shareable, *plain* anarchism, I want to try to complete that thought here, at the beginning of the “journey back,” and then test it out as part of that other labor of surveying alternatives.

What I want to suggest here—and what I cannot perhaps quite demonstrate until I’ve done more of the work of situating readers within the world as Proudhon described it—is that the sociology of *collective force* is a lens through which the workings even of our present, authoritarian relations seem to exhibit at least some of the qualities of *anarchy*. Taking up that lens in that context is, once again, just one more step toward the account we arguably need, but perhaps it is a fairly significant one.

III.—ANARCHY: LAWLESS AND UNPRINCIPLED

The ideal republic is an organization that leaves all opinions and all activities free. In this republic, every citizen, by doing what he wishes and only what he wishes, participates directly in legislation and in government, as he participates in the production and the circulation of wealth. Here, every citizen is king; for he has plenitude of power, he reigns and governs. The ideal republic is a positive anarchy. It is neither liberty subordinated to order, as in a constitutional monarchy, nor liberty imprisoned in order. It is liberty free from all its shackles, superstitions, prejudices, sophistries, usury, authority; it is reciprocal liberty and not limited liberty; liberty not the daughter but the mother of order. — Proudhon, “Democracy” (1848)

This is the description of positive anarchy that we are trying to come to terms with—and, as promised, that means we’ll be taking a look at the role of *desire* in anarchy, addressing the debts of the early anarchists to figures like Charles Fourier. But there’s a lot here to unpack and before we can really concentrate on the possibility of anarchic *Harmony*, perhaps we have to spend just a bit more time with Déjacque’s bilge-rat.

He’s stuck, you will recall, in the hold of the *ship of state* and he wants to get out, so he’s surreptitiously drilling a hole in the hull. And we have every reason to think that what threatens

to come rushing in, should he manage to breach the hull, is some variety of *anarchy*—but there is a lot about this method of “escape” that is less than comforting.

We know that part of the problem is that we’re not just stuck in that “ship of state,” but also in the metaphor, the belief system that grants it legitimacy. And because we are indeed stuck within governmental institutions and mindsets—and, if you doubt it, go check out any of the ongoing debates about anarchy and democracy, “justified hierarchy,” “legitimate authority,” etc.—a concern that *escaping* will be hard to distinguish, in practical terms, from *going down with the ship* seems as much a product of foresight as, say, false consciousness.

There always seems to be some thorny *problem of the transition* to be solved.

But I would be lying if I said I didn’t relish the opportunity to “say the worst” about anarchy. After all, how else are we going to determine which of the new conditions that seem dangerous to us really are new dangers and which are simply opportunities that authoritarian, absolutist ways of thinking tend to distort?

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We’ve set ourselves the task of coming up with an anarchism more consistent, radical and shareable than that which we have previously recognized in the “classical” anarchist pioneers. We are exploring the extent to which that increased consistency and more radical character can arise from the focus on a more consistent and radical account of *anarchy*. And we are very specifically looking to what is most radical in the work of Proudhon for inspiration, which means our *anarchism* is likely to be an *anti-absolutism*, as our *anarchy* is likely to be an *an-arche* of a potentially very radical character.

To reframe the description of “positive anarchy,” which will be the focus of the next post, more consistently in these terms undoubtedly requires a number of steps. First, we can dispense with the rhetorical confusions. It doesn’t help us to know that “every citizen is king” if we are imagining a context in which the polity-form itself has been rejected, as citizens and kings alike are simply part of the narrative we wish to move beyond. Second, there are some lingering attachments to real instances of the polity-form to discard as well. That includes a rejection of the worn-out remnants of patriarchal government that persist, in however contested a form, in Proudhon’s writings on gender and marriage, as well as at least a temporary step back from the proposals in works like *Theory of Property* that attempt to achieve a kind of *resultant anarchy* from the counterbalancing of fundamentally political forms. The state conceived as “a kind of citizen” and the citizen reimagined on the model of the state are almost certainly salvageable in some more thoroughly mutualist form, but that project has to occupy some more advanced stage of our analysis. And, although the question has not really been raised yet, we should probably be on the lookout for other instances where the polity-form persists in modified forms. If “the commune,” “the people” or even “the individual” ends up functioning as a divided or naturalized polity, then our work is clearly not done.

Those preliminaries accomplished, we can turn to Proudhon’s *Philosophy of Progress*, where he lays out his anti-absolutist program:

That which dominates all my studies, its principle and aim, its summit and base, in a word, its reason; that which gives the key to all my controversies, all my disquisitions, all my lapses; that which constitutes, finally, my originality as a thinker, if I may claim such, is that I affirm, resolutely and irrevocably, in all and everywhere, Progress, and that I deny, no less resolutely, the Absolute.

and then explains what he means by *progress*:

Progress, in the *purest* sense of the word, which is the least empirical, is the movement of the idea, *processus*; it is innate, spontaneous and essential movement, uncontrollable and indestructible, which is to the mind what gravity is to matter, (and I suppose with the vulgar that mind and matter, leaving aside movement, are something), and which manifests itself principally in the march of societies, in history.

From this it follows that, the essence of mind being movement, truth,—which is to say *reality*, as much in nature as in civilization,—is essentially *historical*, subject to progressions, conversions, evolutions and metamorphoses. There is nothing fixed and eternal but the very laws of movement, the study of which forms the object of logic and mathematics.

The *absolute*, then, is everything that makes a claim to being fixed and unchanging.

Everything.

It's not just a question of rejecting attempts to lay down statute laws on the basis of some presumed authority, whether divine or earthly, but also—and in some ways more particularly—a matter of rejecting the attempts to assert that a law has always already been laid down *in the nature of things*.

Regarding *arche*, Stephen Pearl Andrews observed that:

Arche is a Greek word (occurring in mon-*archy*, olig-*archy*, hier-*archy*, etc.), which curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of *elementary principle*, with that of *government* or *rule*. *En arche en ho logos*, “in the beginning was the word” (John i: 1), means the *logical* beginning in *elementary principles*, as a language begins in its alphabet, which then governs the development of speech or the word.

And it may indeed seem a “curious combination,” at least while we are still partially in the grip of the authoritarian narrative that has played a shell-game with statute law and naturalized quasi-legal principle in order to suggest that there is no alternative. But it is hardly any more curious than a range of combinations that we take quite seriously: conflations of *authority* and *expertise*, conflations of *authority* and various kinds of *power* (or even mere *capacity*), confusions of *hierarchy* and *interdependence*, real association and political grouping in abstract polities, etc.

We're still drilling away at the hull of the ship of state, trying to figure out if we'll drown when the work is done. But there is pretty clearly no answer until we figure out which unities of meaning are subtle and which are ideologically imposed nonsense. So let's attempt one more clarification regarding anti-absolutism and hopefully set up our previously scheduled discussion of desire.



Most of the confusions and conflations I have noted, as well as the reluctance to clearly distinguish *anarchy* from *democracy*, are defended on the grounds that there are indeed instances where the order of things imposes practices on us that seem to have a hierarchical or authoritarian character. If we reject those practices, along with the authoritarian premises that still cling to them, we presumably cannot “get things done.” Anarchists seldom resort to calling each other idealists, but there are a lot of less formal (and often more colorful) ways that we

suggest others are perhaps a little too fond of “theory.” So the pertinent question here becomes, I suppose, precisely what sorts of practical problems we might be prevented from addressing if we reject the *absolute* tout court. And part of the answer is in one last clarification of Proudhon’s vocabulary.

Allow me one long quotation from *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, where, in the study on ideas, Proudhon introduces the notion of the free absolute:

Man is a free absolute. I use the word *free* here in same manner as the physician distinguishing the free from the latent caloric. It is thus that I have already said free spirit and latent spirit, in order to distinguish the intelligence that knows itself and that moves in man, from that of which we recognize the imprint, but which seems asleep in nature.

In short, the free absolute is that which says “I;” the non-free absolute is that which cannot say “I”

As a free absolute, man tends to subordinate all that surrounds him, things and persons, beings and their laws, theoretical truth and empirical truth, though as inertia, conscience and love as stupidity and egoism.

Hence the character of individual reason, in which the absolute, the very law of individuality, comes to occupy an ever greater place, unlike that of the collective reason, in which the absolute tends to occupy an ever-smaller space. It is in the collective reason, indeed, that relations, sustained by one another, according to the expression which M. Lenoir attributes to me, are at once the law and the social reality.

That difference of character between the particular reason and the collective reason will become sensible at once by the facts; but it is necessary to explain first how the second rises from the contradictions of the first.

From the side of nature, the tendency of particular reason to absolutism meets neither resistance nor control; and one could doubt that science existed, that it was even possible, if the truth and reason of things, as the sole object of philosophy, had only that individual reason for an interpreter.

Before his fellow, an absolute like himself, the absolutism of man stops short; or, to put it better, these two absolutisms destroy one another, allowing to remain of their respective reasons only the relations of things, about which they struggle.

As only a diamond can cut a diamond, only a free absolute is capable of balancing a free absolute, to neutralize it, eliminate it, such that, by the fact of their reciprocal cancellation, there remains of the debate only the objective reality that each tended to denature for his profit, or to make disappear.

It is the sparks from clashing ideas that cast light, says the proverb. Let us correct this slightly metaphysical proverb: it is by mutual contradiction that minds purify themselves of all ultra-phenomenal elements; it is the negation that the free absolute makes of his antagonist which produces, in the moral sciences, adequate ideas, pure of all egoist and transcendental dross, in conformity, in short, with reality and social reason.

If we go to work on this passage in the way we have the other, distinguishing between the real appeals to governmentalist institutions and the rhetorical uses of a governmentalist vocabulary, we have an odd commentary on social psychology, wrapped up in a metaphor drawn from outdated theories of thermodynamics, with *absolutism* being essentially the tendency of forces to progress in an orderly manner until stopped or deflected. The “laws” in question are

“laws of nature.” And if we recall Proudhon’s remarks on *liberty*, *anarchy* and *law* from *What is Property?* —

Liberty is anarchy, because it does not admit the government of the will, but only the authority of the law; that is, of necessity.

— we might be tempted to reduce all the natural “laws”—and human absolutism as well—to that single law of necessity, by which he seems to mean simply material determination, in the context of complex, ongoing relations of cause and effect. And “law” here really only designates an observation about the general tendencies of forces and relations.

Behind all of the metaphors and borrowings from the language of governmentalism—and perhaps more than a little lost behind all of that—we have an analysis of forces and their interactions. And that seems to be what is necessary to “get things done.” Perhaps it is a little bit confusing for us, in the midst of trying to clarify the nature of anti-absolutism, to find one focus of a non-governmental, anti-absolutist analysis of relations described in terms of “human absolutism” and our anarchic social actor dubbed a “free absolute,” but we can probably get over it. Once we pick our way through the rhetorical distractions, we’re once again confronted with that *sociology of collective force* I talked about at the end of the last post.

There, I suggested, a bit cryptically, that “the sociology of *collective force* is a lens through which the workings even of our present, authoritarian relations seem to exhibit at least some of the qualities of *anarchy*.” What I want to suggest here is that it is in the absence of the narratives that dominate our current, authoritarian, absolutist societies that the sociology of collective force really comes into its own. When, instead of always attempting to find “the law” and figure out who had or claimed the right to lay it down, we turn our attention directly to the play of forces, the dynamics of progressive change, etc., then, at a certain scale, all anarchy is really likely to mean is something like *the evolving dynamics of collective force in the absence of authority and hierarchy*. That definition and that scale of analysis are not all that we will need to ground our *plain anarchism*, but they are certainly one of the things that we are likely to need.

What we perhaps do not need—at least at the scale where we usually talk about *arche*—is an understanding of things based in laws or fixed principles. And if we can learn to think of ourselves as *lawless* and *unprincipled* in this respect, then it almost certainly becomes easier to dispense with governmentalist norms and institutions at other levels of analysis.

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Anyway, where were we...?

Ah, yes, thinking about desire and contemplating the maelstrom...

IV.—ANARCHY, HARMONY AND THE MAELSTROM OF DESIRE

What a difference a few days can make. A gentle, playful provocation regarding “lawless, unprincipled” anarchy certainly looks different when “professional anarchists” are one of the potential scapegoats for widespread civil unrest. Certainly, nothing about the present moment suggests a need to temper language or moderate projects. But the long, deep breath afforded by pandemic-related measures seems to have given way to something else—and it may be necessary to adjust the exposition of this stage of the project accordingly. Anyway, back to work...

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We've taken some time to talk about *anarchy* in its most general and perhaps abstract form, where it appears as what happens in the world when we don't fall back on the dominant apparatus of authority, hierarchy, exploitation, etc. We've started to look at the role of *collective force* in the creation of anarchic freedom. And we have suggested some of the ways in which the description of *positive anarchy* that we have inherited from Proudhon might be clarified. But we're still trying to come to grips with the fundamental dynamic. How is it possible that everyone does what they please and only what they please?

For Proudhon and Déjacque, writing in mid-19th-century France, the obvious place to look for descriptions of this sort of society would have been in the *harmonian* writings of Charles Fourier. Fourier made a sort of end-run around moralist objections to the free play of desire, claiming that it would be an affront to the creator if, in a perfected creation, there was not a natural outlet for every basic impulse. And some of that approach arguably remains in Déjacque's work, where there is still a good deal of emphasis on a kind of natural *circulus*, by means of which *harmony* and *anarchy* are brought together as one. It is obviously important to ask ourselves how much of our failure to reach real harmony is simply a matter of poor social organization and to explore the relation between harmony, anarchy and desire. But speculation about "the nature of things" or judgments about what is or is not fair to a creator probably aren't the most fruitful avenues to pursue.

Let's instead focus for a moment on what it would mean for everyone to "do what they wish and only what they wish." Lifting that formula from a more-or-less "utopian" context means placing all that *wishing* back into ordinary social contexts, which inevitably involve constraints on desire. To "do what we wish" is not, in a practical context, to *do by wishing*, with no considerations of material limitations, but to choose from among the things that it is possible to do, given our own limitations and the constraints presented by our various contexts. Even the *onliest* egoist operates within a zone of influence determined by some mix of *milieu* and *might*. And when we consider things in those terms, we are, I think, forced to acknowledge that we might achieve a kind of *voluntary* society that was still very, very far from the harmonian and utopian visions of a Fourier or a Déjacque. But that hardly seems to be the only possibility, provided we do not settle on some approach that excludes *association* and the harnessing of *collective force*.

There is, after all, another vision, very different from that of the associationists and communists, emphasizing the voluntary association of autonomous individuals, which has some currency in anarchist circles and which, in its more extreme forms, really does resemble a kind of social *atomism*. I want to tackle the question of *individualism*, including those more atomistic extremes, in another set of posts. I'm inclined to think of some kind of anarchist individualism as fundamentally necessary to the synthetic approach that I'm pursuing, but much more as a *practice* imposed by our individual organization than as an ideology. There is no downplaying the importance of the self—the *unique* self—as a site of agency and responsibility, but also no avoiding the recognition that this *site* is elusive and unstable in a variety of ways.

My own conception of individuality, already a sort of synthesis of anarchistic influences, begins with the figure I've have described as the [Contr'un](#):

...the Whitmanesque subject who contains multitudes and is not contained between hat and boots, who spills out over all the property lines we might draw, at the same time drawing the world in without attempting to claim exclusive domain. It is the subject understood in its general economy. It is an individual characterized by an *antinomic*

relationship with its own individuality, a counter-self, the one against the (absolutist) One. It is frustrating, messy (at least in the context of our attempts to draw clean boundaries, *improper* (in senses that draw out all the various connotations of the *proper*), and perhaps rather more *feminine* (in familiar, probably important, but also rightly contested terms) than we are accustomed to assume—and where the conventionally *masculine* elements don't seem in harmony with a *phallic* sort of identity. It is the form of the actors in a world where *solidarity means attack* (if I may be forgiven for that appropriation) at a more or less metaphysical level, where Universal Antagonism is the first fundamental law of the universe, but where the second is a kind of reciprocity that justifies that antagonism without seeking to destroy it.

But, for now, perhaps we can simply skip past any very precise description of the individual and focus on the most basic forms of *society*, as Proudhon understood and described them. Consider this summary of the “social system,” from *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*:

Two men meet, recognize one another's dignity, state the additional benefit that would result for both from the concert of their industries, and consequently guarantee equality, which means economy. There is the whole social system: an equation, and then a power of collectivity.

Two families, two cities, two provinces, contract on the same footing: there is always only these two things, an equation and a collective power. It would involve a contradiction, a violation of Justice, if there were anything else.

And then let's remember that, for Proudhon, all of these parties are contracting at their various levels, that each of them is at once an *individual* and a *group*, and that *reciprocity*—“the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements”—always involves some degree of interconnection among the contracting parties. All of that means that the individual human subject has a variety of interests, has some claim to a variety of capacities and is always already involved in associations that themselves either limit or expand the range of possibilities when it comes time to “do what they please and only what they please.”

Collective force is inescapably a part of any approach based on Proudhon's works. We simply never meet the isolated individual who then *makes connections* in the hope of extending their power to satisfy desire. Instead, even the simplest transaction, if undertaken with a consciousness of the complex interconnections Proudhon's account identifies, involves a *remaking* of connections. More than that, what makes connections powerful in Proudhon's view is not simple agreement, but a recognition that the “fundamental laws of the universe” begin with *universal antagonism* and that what increases the quantities of collective force *and the quantities of freedom* in a given association is increases in the complexity and intensity of *balanced* conflict.

The specific dynamics of collective force is another of those questions that I want to come back to, in the context of careful readings of the relevant texts. Here, it is once again largely a matter of exploring the extent to which the “profusion and uncertainty” that I've associated with “positive anarchy” really is likely to be a *defining* aspect of the anarchy around which our “distinct, anarchy-centered anarchism” is likely to be constructed. It's a question of deciding whether all of the talk about “lawless and unprincipled” anarchy and all of the play with the figure of Déjacque's “bilge-rat” leads us to any practical conclusions. And, while I've undoubtedly made hard work of sifting through the various issues involved, I do feel like a

phrase like “the maelstrom of desire” is not just edgy hyperbole, that the peculiar association of the *tourbillon* and *harmony* in Fourier’s writings remains more or less intact when we connect Proudhon’s account of the simplest sort of “social contract” with his theories of *collective force* and his definition of *reciprocity*.

We are not wrong to think of what comes rushing in when we scuttle the ship of state as *anarchy*, but neither are we wrong to identify that anarchy with the *maelstrom* and the *tourbillon*, or perhaps even to think of “the coming storm” as a constant part of the anarchy to come. And it would not be inconsistent with these other thoughts to think of the work required to expand our capacity for “doing what we want and only what we want” as a matter of organizing new and potentially more powerful kinds of whirlwinds and maelstroms.

That last thought might, at the very least, provoke some very different conversations about “anarchist organization.”

V.—ANARCHY: ACTION IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

These preliminary, exploratory writings are always half pleasure, half drudgery for me. You can have the right elements in hand and still require a lot of experimenting before they are anything like an elegant ensemble. With this series on “Defining Anarchy,” I’m conscious, not for the first time, that between the simplest and most abstract sorts of definitions and those that we might really apply in practical terms there are a variety of clarifications regarding present contexts and future possibilities that need to be made. And the more we expand the scope of our definition of anarchy beyond mere antistatism, the more of these clarifications are necessary, as it becomes necessary to shift from simply negative senses of the term to positive conceptions—and to think of some potentially difficult concepts (profusion and uncertainty, “lawlessness” and “lack of principles,” etc.) in their positive senses. Profusion is, of course, obviously positive in a material sense—involving great, perhaps overwhelmingly great quantities of something—even while it appears to us negative from the point of view of organizing and controlling things—but perhaps only because we cling to particular notions of organization. The practical task for anarchists is—returning to the metaphor we’ve borrowed from Joseph Déjacque—to both scuttle the existing mode of organization and learn to recognize the anarchy that pours in to replace it as a medium for radically forms of organization—all without kidding ourselves about the difficulties or the stakes involved. And maybe that is a little easier if we take hold of the kinds of analysis provided to us by figures like Fourier and Proudhon, which lead us to expect that increases in real freedom may involve more tempestuous forms of organization.

Coming to terms with uncertainty may be a bit more difficult, even if it is very much one of the things we most need to do in the context of our present crises.



Uncertainty is not a concept that is particularly prominent in anarchist theory—and certainly does not generally figure as a positive value or indicator. But when we suggest that what is *tempestuous* about anarchy is a lasting feature, then it is not a stretch to further suggest that one of the ways we will know that we are acting as anarchists is that our actions will be taken in the face of fundamental sort of uncertainty.

As soon as we abandon *legal and governmental order*—general prohibition and equivalent sorts of permission—uncertainty necessarily becomes a constant factor in our practices. So there is a new set of skills to be mastered, at which we might expect anarchists to eventually excel.

And perhaps we are occupying a historical moment in which the real value of mastering those skills is particularly apparent.



But, before we turn to the practical questions—like living in a social world reshaped by asymptomatic contagion—let’s spend a bit of time in that part of anarchist theory where the question of certainty does indeed play a prominent role. In his early works, Proudhon returned a number of times to the philosophical question of the *criterion of certainty* and made a critique of the notion the centerpiece of the second letter in *The Philosophy of Progress*. In the *Second Memoir on Property*, he introduced the concept in a biographical account of the origin of the *First Memoir*:

By taste as well as by discretion and lack of confidence in my powers, I was slowly pursuing some commonplace studies in philology, mingled with a little metaphysics, when I suddenly fell upon the greatest problem that ever has occupied philosophical minds: I mean the *criterion* of certainty.

Those of my readers who are unacquainted with the philosophical terminology will be glad to be told in a few words what this *criterion* is, which plays so great a part in my work.

The *criterion* of certainty, according to the philosophers, will be, when discovered, an infallible method of establishing the truth of an opinion, a judgment, a theory, or a system, in nearly the same way as gold is recognized by the touchstone, as iron approaches the magnet, or, better still, as we verify a mathematical operation by applying the *proof*.

He then goes on to explain how the question of the criterion of certainty drove the research that led to *What is Property?* But, in the end, he did not find the criterion. And the sense we get is that his use of the concept was ultimately negative, critiquing various proposed criteria used to prop up unjust social relations.

He then returned to the question a couple of years later, in *The Creation of Order in Humanity*. There, he included a section on the “Solution of the problem of certainty.” There, it was a question of adapting Charles Fourier’s theory of the *series*—and those not already initiated into the mysteries of that system may find the argument more than a bit obscure. But what is clear enough, without descending all the way down that particular rabbit hole, is that, looking for a *criterion*, Proudhon seems to be finding a *process* or *practice* by which he will account for elements that perhaps necessarily remain *uncertain* in at least some senses.

In *The Philosophy of Progress*, Proudhon assures us that:

the truth in all things, the real, the positive, the practicable, is what changes, or at least is susceptible to progression, conciliation, transformation; while the false, the fictive, the impossible, the abstract, is everything that presents itself as fixed, entire, complete, unalterable, unfailing, not susceptible to modification, conversion, augmentation or diminution, resistant as a consequence to all superior combination, to all synthesis.

There is a good deal to unpack in this claim. Proudhon, finally turning to elaborate his *constructive* program, has declared himself a partisan of *progress* and a relentless opponent of

the *absolute*, with these two terms corresponding, on the one hand, to the fluid and at least potentially “true” and, on the other, to the (allegedly) fixed and false. So that:

the notion of Progress is provided to us immediately and before all experience, not what one calls a criterion, but, as Bossuet says, a favorable prejudice, by means of which it is possible to distinguish, in practice, that which it may be useful to undertake and pursue, from that which may become dangerous and deadly,—an important thing for the government of the State and of commerce.

And, to be clear, it is the shifting, progressive, that is “useful to undertake and pursue,” while all that makes a claim to an absolute, fixed character can be expected to “become dangerous and deadly.” So here we have the affirmation of a “favorable prejudice” in favor of all that we must consider, at least in an authoritarian context, *uncertain*. It is no surprise, then, to find Proudhon further claiming that “the criterion of certainty is an anti-philosophical idea borrowed from theology, the assumption of which is destructive of certainty itself” and proposing what is essentially a different kind of certainty: a *certainty without criterion*.

If you feel like we’re back in the hold of the ship of state, drilling away at the hull and hoping for the *sea change* that will transform *going down with the ship* into something more liberating, I’m right there with you...

This *new certainty* and *uncertainty* seem, at least at present, rather hard to completely distinguish. But that’s a “problem” that we can probably embrace, at least for now.

In *The Philosophy of Progress*, Proudhon sets up the project that he will pursue in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, where *justice* provides “a principle of guarantee for our ideas” and “a rule for our actions.” But justice is immanent and emerges from an ongoing process of balancing, a justification that is unlikely to ever be complete. Insisting that abandoning the absolutist conceptions of a criterion of certainty does not leave us unable to make useful general observations about the world, to elaborate “laws” speak usefully about tendencies—even to recognize what is *absolute* about the unfolding of material processes—he wants to distinguish between the “certainty” of those mobile, developing truths he has affirmed and the impossibility of using them as a rule for conduct in the moment. “There is a certainty for the theory, but there is no criterion for practice”—which means, among other things, that the certainty of the theory is not necessarily accessible to us in the moment.

So, for example, when Proudhon talks about the opposition between progress and the absolute as “an infallible criterion” with regard to himself, perhaps it is not incidental to the passage that he chooses a thousand-year life as the life that readers might know on the basis of that criterion—or that, even then, this “infallible criterion” largely identifies him as “the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be finished.”

If, then, I could once put my finger on the opposition that I make between these two ideas, and explain what I mean by Progress and what I consider Absolute, I would have given you the principle, secret and key to all my polemics. You would possess the logical link between all of my ideas, and you could, with that notion alone, serving for you as an infallible **criterion** with regard to me, not only estimate the ensemble of my publications, but forecast and signal in advance the propositions that sooner or later I must affirm or deny, the doctrines of which I will have to make myself the defender or adversary. You would be able, I say, to evaluate and judge all my theses by what I have said and by what

I do not know. You would know me, *intus et in cute*, such as I am, such as I have been all my life, and such as I would find myself in a thousand years, if I could live a thousand years: the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be finished. And at whatever moment in my career you would come to know me, whatever conclusion you could come to regarding me, you would always have either to absolve me in the name of Progress, or to condemn me in the name of the Absolute.

There is indeed a truth here, but it is very different, I think, from a criterion by which actions might be judged and shaped in the moment.



Let's take a step back from Proudhon's project, which at least allows us to connect this concern with uncertainty, even an embrace of the uncertain, with "classical" anarchist theory, and talk about more mundane things, like guiding our daily actions in the context of a global pandemic.

Particularly in the US, there are lots of aspects of the governmental and capitalistic responses to the threat of widespread contagion that have limited our options. Failed "relief" attempts—which have arguably just been successful capitalist wealth redistribution—have imposed all sorts of costs on cautious action that might easily have been avoided had the same resources been applied where they were needed most. But the corruption and ineptitude simply amplified what is arguably the single greatest difficulty associated with Covid-19: our uncertainty about so many aspects of its spread.

It is really astonishing how many questions still remain about very basic issues like the persistence of contamination on surfaces and within the last week we've seen the WHO appear entirely uncertain about the threat of asymptomatic and presymptomatic transmission. We remain uncertain about even precisely what kind of illness it is, with reported symptoms now covering a really remarkable gamut. Media coverage of all of these questions has been occasionally deep, generally unfocused and often unhelpful, so that, for example, we know enough to know that viral load and viral shedding in the early stages of infection are issues that we should be have answers about, but very little idea if the answers are out there or what they might be.

Still, even if the reporting was clearer and the urgency of things not amplified by governmental mismanagement, we would almost certainly be facing a situation largely defined by what we do not and cannot know. And that, it appears, is a situation we really, really do not want to be in.

The various responses to the snowballing crisis are all, in their way, quite interesting, as are the responses that we might have expected, but haven't yet seen. The other day, after spending some time trying to get very basic suggestions about handling face coverings, I observed that:

if ours wasn't a fundamentally failed society we would already have whole genre of articles on how often the dapper man-about-town washes his designer face masks, how many he packs for a weekend business trip, what clever luggage accessories he uses to keep his supply both clean and at the ready, etc.

Instead, we seem to have a lot of indications that US political culture has, in general, nearly exhausted its capacity to respond to crisis in anything but the most cartoonish ways. Think, for example, about the "right to reopen" protests, which look like nothing more or less than "open carry" demonstrations for possible contagion. *Privilege* is a word that has perhaps suffered from too widespread application at times, but I have trouble thinking of the claimed "right" to simply ignore the possible consequences of inadvertent disease transmission in any other terms (with or

without the martial posturing.) Having seen rote protests of “government overreach” turn almost immediately into protests of government restraint as soon as the new round of BLM protests erupted couldn’t have been any less surprising. And nothing about the old politicians somehow imagining the problem at the moment was lack of police funding was surprising, except perhaps the fact that they didn’t have the sense to keep that thought to themselves, at least for a little while.

There are certainly hopeful flashes of energy and light from various quarters, particularly where the protests and occupations have passed through their own fairly rote phases and participants are learning to occupy and make use of the comparatively novel social spaces that have emerged. And I’m in no hurry to see those spaces closed or to witness the postmortems that will inevitably follow. I hope the impulse to drag things out and drag things into the open will continue to prevail for a good long time, with or without help and encouragement from the anarchist milieus.

But I can’t help feeling that, alongside all the other things that are happening in this particular moment, there is a particularly anarchistic opening, of a sort that perhaps we are not well prepared to grasp as our own. The mixture of urgency and uncertainty we feel as pandemic precautions have become the factor organizing so much of our social existence, in a context where conventional political responses are so plainly inadequate, is a real taste, not just of the anarchic, but of a rather profound sort of anarchy, which we might associate with conditions a few steps “after the revolution” (with all due reservations about the *r-word*.) It is an experience of anarchy without liberation, as the whole stupid apparatus of authority continues to do its best to grind us down, but still...

Action in the face of a critical sort of uncertainty, under conditions where the whole apparatus of laws and rights struggles to find a purchase on acts with no very clear consequences, at a moment when the regime of authority is clearly showing strain at the seams — this is almost certainly no one’s idea of “the revolution,” but it may be as close as we are likely to come, for now, to being in the shoes of Déjacque’s *bilge-rat*, finally drilling through that hull and being fairly certain that the *anarchy* pouring in is not actually drowning us.

And perhaps that is all still rather vague, but one explanation would be that a genuinely anarchy-centered anarchism is not something we have had a lot of practice recognizing “in the wild.”



Constructing Anarchisms: Introductory Notes

This is the complicated bit—ironing out various wrinkles in the process and trying to tie together the various, still tentative conversations taking places on social media. Lacking any sort of model for this sort of thing, we’ll just have to work through it as best we can. But that’s one of the reasons that we’ve stretched a 12-month course over 13 months.

I suppose we’ll never have a clear sense of how many people have participated in various parts of the workshop, but there are close to one hundred members in the Facebook group alone. The main project page has become 2020’s most visited post in the Libertarian Labyrinth archive and most of the “business” pages seem to be getting 200-250 hits a piece. So we may not be *legion*, but we’ve certainly extended our numbers well beyond the half-dozen *usual suspects* to whom I originally proposed the project.

Thanks to everyone who has taken part so far, to whatever extent. Your feedback and your silences as well have helped, in various ways, in shaping the various course corrections I am implementing now.

So let’s deal first with the *administrivia*:

☞ I’m working to accommodate a variety of learning styles, which means a certain amount of duplication of key resources. For those primarily using the Libertarian Labyrinth site as a source for readings, the sidebar of each post will continue to include as many relevant links as it will comfortably contain. The [main project page](#) will always contain the most complete list of weekly course posts, notes and suggested readings—and I have added all of the introductory material (on Participation, Philosophy and Thoughts on Constructing Anarchisms) to the bottom of that page. So if you’ve lost something, head for that page, which should be linked at the top of the sidebar on each individual workshop-related page and is also linked in the main menu bar at the top of each page as “**WORKSHOP**”.

☞ That experience of reading in the Libertarian Labyrinth site will retain the potentially labyrinthine character of reading any hyperlinked text, with links out to additional, related writings beyond the scope of the Suggested Readings or even, at times, the Related Readings I have chosen to highlight in the sidebar of each post. I am going to try to be very selective in choosing the texts listed in the sidebar, to minimize distractions, while also including Suggested Readings from the previous week, to reduce unnecessary drifting from page to page. This will continue to be the richest experience, in terms of access to related information, but it will also be rich in potential distractions and temptations.

☞ For those using the audio recordings provided by the [Immediatism](#) podcast, I’ll be doing my best to insert links wherever it seems helpful, where recordings are available.

☞ In order to mark the simplest and shortest route through the course, and to accommodate those who want or need a more completely self-paced experience, I also working on providing material in two additional forms. The first of these, by popular demand, is a weekly pdf containing my main post for the week and the Suggested Readings, which will generally be background for my post the following week. At this point, that includes the following:

- [Introductory readings](#)
- [Week One readings](#)

And the obvious step beyond the pdf collections would be to include a print version of the material among the next-phase Corvus Editions, which will, with a little luck, start to appear in 2021.



Moving forward, we will be going a bit slowly through the holiday season, but the rhythm of things should be established. Each week will open with an essay by me, generally addressing the Suggested Readings from the previous week and ending with suggestions on how to approach the Suggested Readings for the week that is beginning.

So, for this week, the “Thoughts on Constructing Anarchisms” function as the last of the Introductory Readings and establish a range of considerations to bring to bear when reading the “Defining Anarchy” posts—which, in their turn, establish the background for my next essay “Constructing an Anarchism: An-Archy.” Early next week, that essay will appear, together with a couple of short Suggested Readings applying some of the ideas contained there and a few more addressing the topic of the next essay, “Tradition.” And so on...

I have presented the “Defining Anarchy” articles with very little preamble, by design. While we are hopefully decreasing organizational uncertainties, I hope that folks will begin to embrace, however strategically or provisionally, the sorts of theoretical and practical uncertainties that seem, to me at least, to accompany the embrace of *anarchy*. The five articles undoubtedly engage in more than their fair share of intellectual and literary *dérive* and free association, but I’m pleased to find that they also seem to hold together as a sort of rambling exploration of that central concept. If the association of anarchism and *uncertainty* is unfamiliar or seems untoward, perhaps the journey through these writings will at least clarify why that association has come to occupy a central place in my own anarchism.

So, if you haven’t taken the opportunity to dive into the readings yet, I encourage you to take the plunge.



Discussion Notes

Voline’s “On Synthesis” has drawn some interesting comments, largely because of his emphasis in early parts of the essay on *Truth*—complete with the *capital T*—is just the sort of thing to put many of us on our guard. I’ll be doing a more thorough analysis of the essay in a later post, as I incorporate it into « my anarchism », but, for the moment, here are some comments from various forums:

The approach that Voline takes is quite similar to that of Proudhon, whose [*Philosophy of Progress*](#) might yield some useful comparisons here. He sort of teases us with the possibility of “Truth” and “Life,” while emphasizing the various ways in which we can only gain approximate knowledge of them. Even the rhetorical move of describing everything that exists, “the great existing All,” as a kind of “synthesis” probably has to be taken as part of his argument against the utility of other conceptions of “knowing the truth.” Sometimes, after all, the truth is the “essence” of the existent—which at least seems rather different than a synthesis or resultant.

I think we’re free to think of parts of the essay as not entirely clear or dominated by the practical comments he wants to get to. But, in this case, maybe it’s enough to acknowledge that, assuming it’s worth talking about capital-T Truth, it’s going to involve more than we’re going to hold in thought at any one moment. And recognizing that is probably enough to carry us on to the practical conclusions he draws.



Voline starts, provocatively, by saying that Jesus would have had a hard time answering the question “What is truth?” And then he lays out three obstacles to full knowledge of truth, defined as “all that exists,” drawn from the much more mundane field of human experience: our senses are imperfect; reality is undivided; reality is in constant flux.

Again, this all seems like it could be lifted, without a lot of variation, from Proudhon’s *Philosophy of Progress*, where reality is presented as a matter of constant flux across a scope of more than human scale—perhaps not a bad description of a certain kind of *anarchy*—while authority depends on the pretense of the *absolute*, which is always an attempt to pretend that reality isn’t in constant flux.

I can understand the concern that Voline’s emphasis on Truth draws us back toward forms of thought that we might consider antiquated, but it strikes me that this is probably an account we could present in the language of Bataille, Deleuze or Derrida.

The work that Voline ends up doing when he turns to the problems he sees with anarchism is really a matter of attacking fixed ideas—a concern shared by Proudhon, Stirner, etc.

But even if the approach was not one with which we could easily connect, we *might* be interested in the way he works through it, simply because our discussions of anarchism *may* be haunted by a kind of capital-A “Anarchy,” which poses similar problems to those posed by “Truth,” “Life,” etc.

One way of thinking about the difficulties of defining “anarchy” is that it tends to be stuck, in most of our analyses, somewhere between partial definitions (anti-statism, anti-monopolism, voluntaryism, etc.) that are obviously not sufficient and a kind of capital-A “Anarchy,” in which the privative “an-” is clear enough, but the scope and precise nature of “archy” tends to be elusive (in familiar ways.)



A Bit of Preamble

A little background on the series: I’ve been working for a number of years now on a kind of “general commentary” on “anarchist history”—not so much an alternate account of our “general history,” but really a study of anarchist historiography and tradition-making. The work has received rather mixed responses, in part because the project itself was a bit obscure and in part because it seems bound to decenter tendencies and elements of tradition that arguably hold a kind of hegemonic sway in general anarchist discourse. But it has also been criticized for the emphasis on “anarchy,” perhaps in opposition to familiar forms of “anarchist organization.”

The result is the in-progress series “Our Lost Continent: Episodes from an Alternate History of the Anarchist Idea”—and when “Defining Anarchy” opens with talk about “all the preliminaries, all the hesitations,” that’s a reference to the 100+ pages of rationales and outlines that I had already written just clarifying the project so that I could get off to a promising start. The slightly misnamed “Defining Anarchy” series amount to a similar kind of preliminary writing for the theoretical section that will open “Our Lost Continent.”

You certainly don’t need to pay any attention to this other project, except to the extent that our exploration will continue to draw on resources assembled for it. But things will obviously be clearer if you’re aware that we are tracing much the same path it will explore.



General Thoughts (from various forums)

I would be lying if I said that the kind of work involved in “Our Lost Continent” doesn’t, at times, exacerbate my depression and delay less ambitious projects. But that’s mostly when I’m burying myself in the gazillion little details that allow you to grapple with more magisterial accounts of anarchist history.

I offer the “Defining Anarchy” series at this stage in our exploration because, among other things, I think the posts are a good example of how we can usefully just have some fun with the material, while also clarifying our thoughts. There are certainly parts of what I do that I wouldn’t wish on anyone not strongly drawn to their particular rigors. But the fun is a lot of fun—and this series was born of sense of obstacles cleared away.

The specific aim of the series was to suggest that something like an “anarchist synthesis” was possible, and perhaps necessary, from the moment that Proudhon claimed “je suis anarchiste” in 1840.

The case for a viable anarchist synthesis begins with a demonstration that anarchiste was, from the beginning, capable of embracing a range of expressions without losing its most basic sense. But that argument almost certainly depends on an account of anarchie that displays a similar unity-in-diversity. Ultimately, this will require a return to the problem of “*l’Anarchie, entendue dans tous les sens*” (“Anarchy, understood in all its senses”), but perhaps we could start by simply attempting to bridge the first great anarchist schism that we generally recognize. If we are to talk about an anarchy simple and clear enough to the full range of anarchists and anarchist tendencies in our diverse history, finding some common ground between Proudhon and Joseph Déjacque is almost certainly a useful and necessary first step.

And, from there, one thing leads to another, I engage in a bit of theoretical and literary *dérive*, Poe and Melville make appearances, etc. The part of “Our Lost Continent” that I hope we will be able to incorporate into this project is the sense that large parts of anarchist history and theory are both largely unexplored and still already « ours » in important ways, together with the sense that what remains unexplored is potentially a bit magical.

Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore...



If I had it to do all over again, the series would have been titled *Anarchy: A Descent into the Maelstrom*. But I was just playing around, exploring ideas without any very fixed agenda, so the likelihood that any given metaphor would go the distance seemed remote. “Defining Anarchy” is ultimately a pretty dull title for a series that puts so much emphasis on what is *tempestuous*, “lawless and unprincipled,” etc. about our *beautiful idea*.



New Translations

Work continues on a variety of other projects, of course, including the deep exploration of the work of E. Armand that I expect will remain ongoing for the foreseeable future. Adapting his poetry to English remains one of the more pleasant tasks—and one at which I think I can claim some success:

the twilight hour

This is the twilight hour:
the sky is gray,
a fine rain falls,
there are traces of snow on the road,
the solitude is tremendous,
the day ends on a dismal note, without grandeur or glory,
and the night is slow to fall,
hardly two or three stars shine faintly.
Somewhere a dog bays gloomily,
Frail shadows,
of little girls sent shopping, hastening their steps,
avoiding the drizzle as best they can.
Skeletal and desolate, bare trees stand out on the horizon,
In me, it is also half-light, *chiaroscuro*,
half day and half night,
the day of rare desires completely realized,
the night of aspirations unsatisfied,
of appeals unheard,
of waves untamed,
Within me, deep within me,
there are sad and silent winter landscapes,
snow that covers trails yet to be traced,
rain that falls on shadows in search of their bodies,
messages that seek their addressees.
Outside of me, as within me, this is the twilight hour.
March 1, 1937

E. Armand.

E. Armand, "L'heure crépusculaire," *L'en dehors* 17 no. 304 (Mars 1937): 118.



One of the most interesting things about the anarchist individualist publications like *l'en dehors* is that they tend to be filled, not just with poetry, but also with poetic bits of prose on various subjects related to life as an anarchist. Here, for example, is one by Maurice Imbard:

Activity

It is truly a fine, but a *pointless* thing to always dream.
Human evolution depends on our activity.
So struggle, always struggle, ceaselessly, without truce or peace. And, from this day forward, let our dreams become reality.
It is, however, a good, wholesome, but difficult task to free ourselves from the immense jumbles of prejudices, but don't hesitate. Let us not hesitate. Let each of you, let each of us, bang, cut and strike without respite, without ever growing discouraged. Be brave. Let us be brave—and let all obstacles be demolished.

These obstacles that we call God, Homeland, State, Property.
Rid yourself, let us rid ourselves of all tyrannies. Let he masters be no more. Let all the laws of the judge or of the priest be destroyed.

So, according to your strength and our, according to your knowledge and ours, according to all our desires, to all our needs, let us labor, act and strike—and let us strike unceasingly the monstrous Authority.

Maurice IMBARD.

Maurice Imbard, “Activité,” *L’En dehors* 2 no. 19/20 (fin Septembre 1923): 3.



Part of the work of understanding Armand’s work has been assembling a bibliography of his extensive publications, which has, in turn, sometimes required acquiring copies of works not held anywhere that I can consult them. And sometimes that leads to new avenues of research. I found, for example, that the copy of *Ainsi chantait un « en dehors »* I purchased for myself was originally presented by Armand to Robert Lanoff, a contributor to *L’Anarchie* and fairly popular anarchist songwriter. In no time at all, I had followed the thread far enough to acquire my very first anarchist *accordion score*—and finish at least a passable adaptation of this monologue:

Let’s Rise Up! MONOLOGUE

Words by LANOFF

To Work! Through the enormous effort of your hands, the machine suddenly starts up. Work, poor beggar; you must be brave. The wheel now turns almost furiously. Produce! Triple your boss’ capital, but die like a dog in a hospital bed. Do you feel the difference in the classes now? While you exhaust yourself, others feast. It is time, worker, that you open your eyes. Do you want to live better or worse? We want to free ourselves, despite it all. But at least respond to our final appeal. Let’s rise up, beggars, and break the iron law! It’s up to us to be free tomorrow. From this point forward, no more beggars bending their lean backs, no more miners digging their own tombs in the mine, no more old men in prison for stealing bread, but peace and happiness for the whole human race. Do you understand now what we want to do? Do you understand the greatness of the libertarian spirit? Worker, do you understand the common good? “The motto one for all is also all for one.” They say we should act without violence. But how to do it? You keep your silence. Do you wish to remain forever an oppressed being, serving your master, exploited eternally? If you don’t, let’s rise up en masse. Let’s resist, no matter what they say, and fight, no matter what they do. Make rifles and forge cannons. Let’s rise up, people! And woe to the cowards, the sell-outs, the traitors. Be bold, proletarians, and you will soon see the end of your misery!

ENVOI

We must finally reclaim our Liberty,
Battle from this day forward with tenacity.
To the renegades let’s deliver a resounding blow
And declare tomorrow the general strike!

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK TWO READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Approaching An-Archy

What is anarchy? This is a question that I have returned to repeatedly, a bit obsessively, with different results each time. I have come to the conclusion that *anarchy* is what we might call a *still-emerging concept*. At times it strikes me as almost shockingly *self-evident*, bold and bare like the lovers in some one of a thousand anarcho-naturist poems—or sometimes maybe just bold:

“What are you rebelling against, Johnny?”
“Whaddaya got?”

At others, the *anarchy of available anarchies* makes me wonder if I’ll ever really get more than glimpses of this *beautiful idea*.

Think of these two responses as poles in what may, at least for now, be a kind of necessary oscillation in our encounter with *anarchy*. We’re at the stage of confronting ourselves with the fact—what seems to be a fact, at least—that some of our most important concepts continue to elude us, both individually and collectively. And we’re faced with the sheer volume of anarchist history and tradition that cannot help but complicate matters for us. But the basic premise of this whole experiment is that, while the complications are real, they are very far from insurmountable and, with a bit of care, we can probably position ourselves in relation to all that complexity in a way that is not just surmountable, but perhaps is even advantageous.

We’ve already assembled some of what we need to engage with *anarchy* in all of its, y’know, *anarchy*. Paying attention to questions of sphere and scope of application—just not trying to use anarchy to answer questions or solve problems that don’t relate—will help us a lot. Being clear with ourselves and with one another about the specific realms to which we think anarchy most pertains will help as well. As someone already long accustomed to wrestling with these questions, it feels quite natural for me to be constantly shifting focus, talking about history at one moment and etymology at the next, shifting from the concerns of the very first conscious anarchists to those of my friends in various modern milieus—trying to balance the need for clarity and the fact that, in the end, *I’m really in it for the anarchy*. In this context, I am really trying to strike a useful balance, but there are going to be times when perhaps we should have a scrolling banner of the “PLEASE DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME” variety somewhere on the site.

But you should almost certainly try this at home—or something like it—but just do it in your own way with the tools you can bring to the task in the present.

The fact that *anarchy* is just *anarchy*, just right there, out there, taunting us with that “whaddaya got?” is probably the reason that we continue to talk about it, why people who pretty obviously want rather *archic* things want to talk about it, instead of falling back on some other language, some other rhetorical strategy. Whenever people talk about “rebranding” anarchism, I can’t help but laugh—because, whatever else anarchists may have got wrong over the years, the “brand” has served us well in a variety of ways. But there is no escaping the fact that the language of *anarchy* has been and remains a *provocation*, perhaps because it couldn’t be

anything else in the circumstances, and that building with a provocation as foundation is likely to produce complicated results.

So let's not try to escape those facts—and see if there are some other difficulties that we *can* escape.

✱✱

We're stretching out the opening a bit at this point, for a variety of reasons. I haven't been quite sure if enough of us were on one page to move forward. I've been doing what I can in various forums to fix that. I decided I wanted to share a French essay from the 70s—next week—and then realized how much of it was still untranslated. And the good folks at the [Anews Podcast](#) spent some time this week responding to the project—which, frankly, just put me in the mood to chat back a bit in the general direction of distant friends.

But it's time to start my own work of construction, starting with some conception of anarchy that doesn't consist of more-or-less erudite free association.

✱✱

It's time to *build*.

But we never really get to build *from scratch*.

To make these concepts « our own » is inevitably to enter into some kind of relationship with existing bodies of thought and those who share an interest in them. And perhaps that relationship is ultimately one of *sharing*—but it is very difficult to start there.

There's a work that almost certainly comes first, which arguably calls on us to channel our Inner Stirner, look at the available material in “the anarchist tradition” and see, at least for a time, « my food ». There's no real harm done if we just tear off whatever chunks seems useful. Ideas are rivalrous in other ways. But there's something to be said for being quite conscious about our *appropriations*, looking at anarchism from the outside, extricating first ourselves and then perhaps too-familiar ideas from familiar frameworks.

The problem of establishing a useful perspective will be different for each of us. Some of us will struggle to find a space outside of our anarchist beliefs from which we can still maintain a useful perspective. Some of us will perhaps have to begin by clarifying what we think *anarchism* is before we can meaningfully confront the tradition as a resource. That's one of the reasons for the long wind-up. For the moment, it's mostly just us and a couple of questions:

What is *anarchy*?

What is *anarchism*?

But now I'm going to start coming at you with *answers*, of a sort, which it will be necessary to treat as a kind of creative work—examples of answers, being precisely *exemplary* (in a modest sense), rather than *definitive*. That distinction is obviously easiest to maintain if it is indeed a question of multiple examples, which is why we will regularly pair a new conceptualization with some of my past writings on the same topic.

Approaching the concept of *An-Archy*, we've already introduced the texts from the “Defining Anarchy” series. This week, I want to present two more attempts to define or conceptualize *anarchy* for your consideration. They both deal with the complicated question of what Proudhon meant when we wrote about *anarchy*. The first, “[Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses](#),” deals with a bizarre set of interpretive problems introduced into the English translation of *Idée générale de la révolution au XIXe siècle*, when the translator attempted to clarify the text by translating many of the appearances of the word *anarchie* with English words that were not

anarchy. This might not have been a problem, except that Proudhon had himself suggested twice in the text that the various senses of the term were in some sense interchangeable. For example:

The first term of the series being thus Absolutism, the final, fateful term is *Anarchy*, understood in all the senses.

The problem posed by the diversity of those senses is one that I want to return to in next week's post, but you can read a partial exploration in the second reading, "[Anarchy: Historical, Abstract and Resultant](#)." This attempt to distinguish three types of *anarchy* that seem to appear in Proudhon's work really aimed to address a different problem in Proudhon scholarship, concerning his alleged shift away from anarchist ideas in his later works, but should be read here primarily as an example of the clarifying process.

Returning to the warring visions of anarchy with which I began this post, we might think of the first of these readings as dealing with an *anarchy* that at least Proudhon thought shown through in some relatively uniform way despite significant differences in the uses of the term, while the second demonstrates some of the real diversity in the possible definitions of *anarchy*. And we'll see if the two sets of insights can be combined in next's weeks conceptualization of the concept.

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That just leaves one reading for the week: Ricardo Mella's "The Bankruptcy of Beliefs" and its sequel, "The Rising Anarchism." Mella was a Spanish collectivist anarchist and one of the thinkers associated with the idea of *anarquismo sin adjetivos*. He was a talented and prolific writer whose works are marked by a fairly constant concern that the anarchic heart of anarchist thought should be maintained. He was hard on all *isms*, tracing an apparently inevitable trajectory from enthusiasm to dogma to "dreadful questioning:"

The enthusiasm of the neophyte, the healthy and crazy enthusiasm, forges new doctrines and the doctrines forge new beliefs. It desires something better, pursues the ideal, seeks noble and lofty employment of its activities, and barely makes a slight examination, if it finds the note that resonates harmoniously in our understanding and in our heart. It believes. Belief then pulls us along completely, directs and governs our entire existence, and absorbs all our faculties. In no other way could sects and schools of thought, like churches, small or large, rise powerfully everywhere. Belief has its altars, its worship and its faithful, as faith had.

But there is a fateful, inevitable hour of dreadful questioning. And this luminous hour is one in which mature reflection asks itself the reason for its beliefs and its ideological loves.

And, as the first essay draws to a close we find that *anarchism* is apparently not immune to this tendency to bankruptcy. But the sequel, if less poetic and moving, is useful in its measured thoughts about what might keep an anarchism *in the black*. It is also an early example of an argument for *anarchist synthesis*, but one perhaps more radical, or at least more compellingly presented, than that of Voline.

If individuals or groups are looking for a text to read closely or to discuss, I think it would be hard to find one that draws together so many of the concerns we have begun to address. And, as it is a particular favorite of mine, it seems likely that I will return to it again.

Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses

[From *Contr'un*, June 30, 2013]

“The first term of the series being thus Absolutism, the final, fateful term is Anarchy, understood in all the senses.”—Proudhon, *The General Idea of the Revolution*

In order to start to address the question posed in [the last post](#), about what Proudhon meant when he said “*I am an anarchist*,” we need to grapple a bit with the thorny question of how consistently he used his various keywords. One of the traditional methods of dealing with the complexities of Proudhon’s arguments, including those terminological issues, has been to wave our hands and recall that he was a “man of contradictions,” as if *contradiction* wasn’t very explicitly a part of his theoretical apparatus, about which he had a lot of fairly specific things to say. I think we can come to considerably clearer terms with Proudhon’s method. He left us quite a few explicit guides. In “[Self-Government and the Citizen-State](#),” I made extensive use a distinction Proudhon made in his correspondence between *critical* and *constructive* periods. Let’s explicitly add that distinction to the “toolkit” here, and explore some of the ways that it relates to some other concerns regarding the interpretation of Proudhon’s work.

I have long emphasized the importance of the shift in Proudhon’s use of keywords, marked explicitly in *The Philosophy of Progress*, when he opts to “preserve for new institutions their patronymic names.” Early on, Proudhon had mocked Pierre Leroux for believing that “there is property and property,—the one good, the other bad” and insisted that “it is proper to call different things by different names.” Hence the “property” vs. “possession” distinction. But he was, at the same time, already beginning to insist on a progressive account of some of his most important keywords—*justice* chief among them—which showed them progressing through radically different stages. Justice, for example, started its journey to more humane forms from beginnings in *force* and *fraud*. Harmonizing his choice and use of terms with his emphasis on *progress* was a critical moment in Proudhon’s development, and also, of course, a real stumbling block in understanding that development if we do not take careful account of it. It doesn’t explain *everything*, as sometimes it seems Proudhon was simply inconsistent in his choice of words, or tailored his expression to particular audiences, but it does give us another tool to attempt to resolve what may seem like real contradictions in his work (as opposed to productive or provocative *antinomies*.) The explicit change in approach to keywords occurs roughly at the watershed between *critical* and *constructive* periods. And it is probably simplest to think of that period in the early 1850s precisely as a kind of *watershed*, where the predominance of approaches shifted from criticism to construction. Prior to it, we are *more likely* to see Proudhon’s critical project at center stage, and afterwards, we are *more likely* to see some of his experimental constructions. The work has a tendency, if you will, to *flow* in one direction or the other, despite a mixture of emphases at most points in Proudhon’s career.

The Philosophy of Progress also provides us with two accounts of truth, which we might distinguish as *critical* and *constructive*. In the first, “the truth in all things, the real, the positive, the practicable, is what changes, or at least is susceptible to progression, conciliation, transformation; while the false, the fictive, the impossible, the abstract, is everything that presents itself as fixed, entire, complete, unalterable, unfailing, not susceptible to modification, conversion, augmentation or diminution, resistant as a consequence to all superior combination, to all synthesis.” In the second, “All ideas are false, that is to say contradictory and irrational, if one takes them in an exclusive and absolute sense, or if one allows oneself to be carried away by

that sense; all are true, susceptible to realization and use, if one takes them together with others, or in evolution.” Together, they correspond to the two phases of the program that Proudhon presented in the “Study on Ideas” in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*:

I intend to suppress none of the things of which I have made such a resolute critique. I flatter myself that I do only two things: that is, first, to teach you put each thing in its place, after having purged it of the absolute and balanced it with other things; then, to show you that the things that you know, and that you have such fear of losing, are not the only ones that exist, and that there are considerably more of which you still must take account.

Given these explicit indications of Proudhon’s method, and context, we should have a pretty good chance of navigating through his texts successfully. We should be on the lookout for any reading which seems to commit us to *simplism*, which does not seem to have a complementary critique or construction lurking somewhere nearby. We might be inclined to anticipate that most keywords will have *absolutist* forms to be critiqued and *balanced* forms to take their place in various experiments and approximations. And that is at least part of what we find—but things get fairly complex fairly quickly, since, beyond all of the *individuals* that are always also *groups*, and the fact that *constructive* concepts only acquire truth in *combinations*, it appears that there really are few, if any exceptions to this rule we have proposed. Even *absolutism* seems to come in *absolutist* and *balanced* forms, forcing us away from any very simple reading of Proudhon’s “opposition to the absolute.” Even *anarchy* seems to appear in a variety of senses, some of which are perhaps also *absolutist*, and all of which we are presumably to understand, *together*, as the “final, fatal term” of an evolutionary series away from at least *absolute absolutism*. It will be useful to revisit the discussions of *property* and *possession* in this context in the near future, but for now let’s at least begin to deal with the problem that’s already on the table.

I’ve started a project—really a formalization of a process I’ve been using for some time now—assembling collections of all the passages in Proudhon’s collected writings and correspondence where he uses particular keywords. At the moment, I’m working through all of the appearances of the words *anarchie*, *anarchiste*, and *anarchique*, and their plural forms, and finding some very interesting things, not the least of which is that Proudhon *most often* used those terms to designate “economic” or “mercantile anarchy,” which he associated with the goals of the economists, *laissez faire*, decentralization, and *insolidarity*. He also, of course, used the word *anarchy* to designate *self-government*, an English term he opposed to all of the authoritarian, governmental alternatives which would establish the rule of human beings over human beings. There is also the *anarchy* that, at least by 1863 and *The Federative Principle*, he came to think of as a “perpetual desideratum,” an ideal form which human approximations would never quite achieve. That has created problems for those concerned with knowing whether or not Proudhon should still be considered “an anarchist.” Putting these various notions of *anarchy* together, or deciding that they belong apart, is a project that may occupy us for a while.

I want to approach these questions by first giving Proudhon the benefit of the doubt. He was the guy we credit with first claiming the term, so let’s be fairly careful before we decide we can detach him from it. And, of course, this toolkit we’re assembling from Proudhon’s works is a fairly complicated rig. Ultimately, in order to use Proudhon’s work, we have to choose which of the various presentations of that work we’re going to begin with, and I want to propose, for our purposes here, to take the works of 1851-1861, roughly as I’ve described them in “[Self-](#)

[Government and the Citizen-State](#),” as that starting-place. What choosing those works, rather than, say, *What is Property?* or *The System of Economic Contradictions*, or perhaps just *The General Idea of the Revolution* by itself, gives us is precisely the toolkit of explicit writings on philosophy and method, much of which appeared in the period from 1853 to 1858, and enough of the slope on either side of our “watershed” to feel confident we’re not missing the general development of things. I am actually fairly confident that the approach from that 1853-8 period is relatively consistent with both earlier and later works, but that’s an assumption that is widely contested, with many interpreters differentiating the clear “property is theft” period from any of the more complicated formulations and/or considering the later work on federation as no longer anarchist.

Anyway, if we begin in this period where Proudhon had begun to talk explicitly about his philosophy and method, some questions naturally present themselves. For example, what sort of definition of “anarchy” would meet the criteria for *truth* that he laid out in 1853? Are the difficulties of formulating a *true idea* greater if the notion in question is *anarchism* or *being an anarchist*? Under what circumstances could an *ideology* be *true*, given these criteria? I think that it is fairly uncontroversial to believe that Proudhon, who thought of himself as “the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be completed,” might have had an evolving notion of what it meant to *be an anarchist*, but my sense is that the real problems of interpretation arise from the fact that there are so obviously several ideas in play.

So we have to ask ourselves whether the various, apparently different, meanings of “anarchy” can be accounted for as alternately *critical* and *constructive*, or *absolutist* and *non-absolutist*? Or do some of them perhaps arise in contexts where Proudhon had not clarified his method enough for us to easily apply those definitions? I want to take time in another post to really work through the developing theories of *property* and *possession* in these terms, but I think we can point to a number of possible kinds of relationships between concepts which might have parallels in the treatment of “anarchy, understood in all its senses.” For example, in *The Theory of Property*, we find discussions of *property* in its absolutist form, retaining the “right of increase” and the rest of its mystique, and unbalanced by any effective countervailing force. We also find discussions of a *property* which has lost its authority and many of its attendant “rights,” as a result of the critique of absolutism, and we find that property balanced by a “State” which has also been stripped of its authority. Alongside these, we find a somewhat negative treatment of *possession*, now understood as equivalent to *fief*, but the issue seems to be that it is now an *approximation* that Proudhon has moved beyond:

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.

There are, it seems to me, a lot of ways for ideas to fall short of *truth* in Proudhon’s terms, and only approximate means, in combination with other aspiring *true ideas*, to approach it. Can *anarchy*, *anarchism*, *anarchist*, etc., be exempt from this general rule? If not, then the treatment of anarchy as a perpetual desideratum is probably no objection to treating the later Proudhon as an *anarchist* after all, at least by the terms he established in the period where we are focusing our attention. That would leave open the question of whether the early notion of anarchy as self-government could be understood in some other terms, consistent with the work of an early-period Proudhon who had a different idea of how ideas and ideologies might work.

My immediate thought is that there is at least some evidence in both *The Celebration of Sunday* and *What is Property?* that Proudhon *always* leaned towards a progressive account of truth-in-ideas.

If we can make sense of the various senses of “anarchy” with the help of Proudhon’s statements about philosophy and method, then we need to sort them out in those terms. It’s not, I think, too hard to accept that “self-government” might involve a series of progressive approximations, or to understand Proudhon’s “perpetual desideratum” in much the same sense as William Batchelder Greene’s “blazing star” or my own “ungovernable ideal.” It’s a little harder to know quite what to do with *ideals* in Proudhon’s thought. In the context of his treatment of *metaphysics* (in the opening sections of *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*), we probably have to treat any “anarchist ideal” as an unavoidable but unscientific speculation about the *in-itself* of anarchy or a reflection of our sense that we are *not there yet*, but not ultimately the sort of engagement with *relations* that Proudhon was concerned with. We probably don’t have to take on all of Proudhon’s quasi-comtean positivism to see some value in emphasizing anarchy in the context of specific, individual interactions.

The most ideologically charged question that arises from sorting out these various anarchisms, which Proudhon apparently considered closely enough connected to sometimes gesture at them *en masse*, is undoubtedly the relation between *anarchy as self-government* and the *economic anarchy* which he sometimes quite explicitly connected to the concept of *laissez faire* and the goals of the free-market economists. Proudhon’s discussions of *economic anarchy* are fascinating, since they are largely negative, and perhaps even more so than his discussions of property, but, like the treatments of property, they periodically turn positive, and we see instances where *laissez faire* seems to be presented as a key element in *mutualism*. The parallels with the property theory suggest a very interesting set of possibilities. The transformation of *property* from *theft* to a potentially powerful tool of *liberty* occurred according to the critical itinerary we’ve already cited: first the *absolutist* elements of property were identified and critiqued, and its fundamental *untruth* established, and then those very same elements, now presumably rid at least of their aura of *authority*, were incorporated into a *balanced* (or *justified*, as balance and justice were one for Proudhon) *approximation* with the non-governmental *citizen-State* as the countervailing force. If there is a parallel treatment of anarchy, we’ll probably find it in Proudhon’s many statements about the close relation between *property* and *liberty*, and his opposition of *government* and *economy*. These have been the basis for the common claim that Proudhon advocated some kind of “market anarchism.” Now, the “system” that Proudhon summarized as always reducible to “an equation and a power of collectivity” may conform to some definitions of “market,” but I think the question of the relationship between the *anarchism* that he actually advocated, *mutualism*, and *the anarchy of the market*, may be substantially more complex and interesting than we have generally made it.

In the context of the present discussion, one of the most interesting passages of *The General Idea of the Revolution* is this:

“...the Government, whatever it may be, is very sick, and tending more and more toward Anarchy. My readers may give this word any meaning they choose.”

Given everything else he has said about the various forms of *anarchy*, it’s pretty hard to imagine this means Proudhon was indifferent to the differences between them. But it does appear that he considered *anarchy* as an appropriate label for a variety of tendencies associated with the

decline of government. One of those tendencies was obviously “the system of ’89 and ’93; the system of Quesnay, of Turgot, of J.-B. Say; the system that is always professed, with more or less intelligence and good faith, by the various organs of the political parties,” which he invoked in the 1848 “Revolutionary Program,” and characterized as:

Liberty then, nothing more, nothing less. *Laissez faire, laissez passer*, in the broadest and most literal sense; consequently property, as it rises legitimately from this freedom, is my principle. No other solidarity between citizens than that which rises accidentally from force majeure: for all that which relates to free acts, and manifestations of reflective thought, complete and absolute *insolidarity*.

But is *that* “the last word of civilization, and of right as well”? Was Proudhon really saying that there was no difference between himself and the economists with whom he had certainly expressed no shortage of differences? The continuation of the argument, in which he first seems to describe market anarchy and then explains how it will result in something that sounds more than a bit like anarchist communism, is a little hard to parse, but it appears that, however anarchic market forces may be and however non-governmental the resulting economic centralization may be, something else is required to maintain what I think most of us mean when we think of the outcomes of *anarchism*, and that missing element seems to be justice, a balancing of the forces of property and community—and suddenly we find ourselves facing what seems to be just one more of a series of formulas involving the balancing or synthesis of very similar elements, spanning Proudhon’s entire career. So what are we to make of this *economic anarchy*, which seems to be an anti-governmental force, but does not seem to be quite what Proudhon is aiming for? It seems to me that we have located a prime candidate for the category of *absolutist anarchies*. A range of more provocative questions are then raised, including, just as a start:

- Is there then a sort of *anarchism* that we might associate with this market anarchy, and, if so, is it perhaps a sort of *absolutist anarchism*? The answer, I think, from the Proudhonian perspective, will depend *on the* extent to which we think an aura of *authority* stills clings to notions like *property* and market.
- Assuming that *anarchy*, in this more general sense, can be rid of its absolutism, and that it makes sense to call oneself an *anarchist* as a means of signaling a commitment to both non-governmentalism and anti-absolutism, how would we construct the larger system within which that form of anarchism would steadily increase in *truth*?
- What role can we expect all the complicated and complicating collective individuals that people the Proudhonian landscape to play in all of this? I began to speculate, for example, on how “the market” might take its place alongside the citizen-state, in the “Notes on Proudhon’s changing notion of the State,” and the “Notes on the Notes” that followed. I’ll undoubtedly have to come back to some of those speculations.

There is a lot more than could be said about the questions raised by Proudhon’s sometimes puzzling discussions of “anarchy,” and I want to keep coming back to clarify what I think he really meant, particularly as I get a chance to do additional research on some keywords that are

only emerging as particularly interesting in this context. But I also want to spend some more time dealing with the methodological and philosophical issues.

I think an argument could pretty easily be made that what we see in Proudhon's approach to question of method, metaphysics, etc., is something very much like his anarchism or federalism, applied to the realm of thought. Indeed, there seems to be a strong suggestion in at least some of what Proudhon wrote that something like *mutualism* is essential in virtually all sorts of human endeavor. That seems like a notion worth following up on.

Anarchy: Historical, Abstract and Resultant

What follows is a look at three possible senses of *anarchy* related to Proudhon's work, together with a sketch of their possible relations as developments from one another. The intention here is to simply present some basic definitions as a kind of hypothetical framework, which can then be tested against close readings of the relevant texts.

Historical anarchy: In a society organized around the principle of *authority*, resistance appears as *anarchy*, whether it is the active resistance of those oppressed or simply the friction generated by the contradictions of an authority-based society. This is the sense that Proudhon most frequently gave to the term, drawing on existing usage, to describe various tendencies within existing societies: the violence emerging from political conflict, the "anarchy of the market," etc.

Abstract anarchy: The various manifestations of historical anarchy then suggest, however dimly at times, a general *principle* or social form, which unites them. In *The Federative Principle*, Proudhon gives us *anarchy* conceived as one of four *a priori* forms of government. These forms emerge "necessarily" and "mathematically" from the logical consideration of government and can be characterized through the consideration of two factors: the opposition of the principles of authority and liberty (understood in part as the opposition between division and non-division of power), and the symmetry or asymmetry of the rulers and the ruled. *Anarchy*, or *self-government*, is characterized by division of power and symmetry between the rulers and the ruled. It is the "government of each by each."

In that text, however, we are presented with this abstract *anarchy*, only to have it rejected as "an empirical creation, a preliminary sketch, more or less useful, under which society finds shelter for a moment, and which, like the Arab's tent, is folded up the morning after it has been erected." The obviousness of the forms is a "snare," as none of those that first present themselves through logical analysis are ultimately practicable.

Just as monarchy and communism, founded in nature and reason, have their legitimacy and morality, though they can never be realized as absolutely pure types, so too democracy and anarchy, founded in liberty and justice, pursuing an ideal in accordance with their principle, have their legitimacy and morality. But we shall see that in their case too, despite their rational and juridical origin, they cannot remain strictly congruent with their pure concepts as their population and territory develop and grow, and that they are fated to remain perpetual *desiderata*. Despite the powerful appeal of liberty, neither democracy nor anarchy has arisen anywhere, in a complete and uncompromised form.

This appears, then, to be a decisive rejection of *anarchy* as a guiding notion. In its place Proudhon presents *federation*, the only system that he believes can truly fulfill the role of "all political constitutions, all systems of government," which is "*the balancing of authority by liberty*, and vice versa."

The question is whether this appearance is deceiving. There are quite a number of additional questions raised, but perhaps we can start here:

- *Did Proudhon stop being an anarchist, did he discover he had never been an anarchist or is there some sense in which his rejection of this abstract notion of anarchy still*

leaves open the possibility of another anarchy, and thus another way of being an anarchist?

If we choose the first interpretation, then presumably we believe that the abstract anarchy of *The Federative Principle* was the same anarchy that Proudhon embraced as a positive goal, but that developments in his thought—perhaps the discovery in the 1850s that “the antinomy does not resolve itself”—led him to abandon that position.

The second interpretation seems a natural choice if we once again identify the abstract anarchy of the later works with the anarchy of the early works, but then recognize that this form of *self-government* could not remain “strictly congruent” with its “pure concept” in any analysis involving *collective force* and *unity-collectivities*, making it inadequate even in the earliest works, where at least the basic analysis of collective force was already at work.

The third interpretation requires that we recognize multiple senses of anarchy in Proudhon’s work—which we can certainly do given his explicit recognition of multiple senses in *The General Idea of the Revolution*—but also that we find a way of thinking about *federation* as not simply a replacement for an impracticable sort of anarchy, but as the key to some other form.

Each approach has consequences.

The first presumably preserves Proudhon within the anarchist tradition as a kind of early adopter or precursor, but then draws some kind of line between his mature work and *anarchism*. That then leaves us to ask what sort of *anarchy* was adopted by the anarchist movement as it emerged after Proudhon’s death—a question complicated by the fact that some of Proudhon’s late works, such as *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, were particularly influential in the period of the International and works like *The Federative Principle* seem influential in the present. If we think of Proudhon as an *early adopter* of an abstract anarchy later embraced by the explicit proponents of anarchism, then we are faced with the question of how we respond to Proudhon’s claim that such a notion is at best only approximately applicable to practice. The problem of collective force seems difficult to overcome, so we presumably forced to choose between the concept behind Proudhon’s declaration that “I am an anarchist” and the theory behind his claim that “property is theft.” If, instead, we think of him as a mere *precursor*, then we are left to determine just how the anarchy that emerged in later years differed from Proudhon’s conception and how it escapes his critique.

At this point, it is tempting to simply note that there is a great deal of discontinuity in the early anarchist tradition and a certain amount of opportunism when it comes to the use of Proudhon’s work in later anarchist thought. But the theoretical questions still remain, if we want to attempt to establish continuity in the tradition. I am not entirely opposed to the project of attempting to understand Proudhon’s mature work as something other than *anarchism* in the received sense—if that is the only way to move forward with a serious discussion of Proudhon’s mature work—but I think other options still remain.

The second choice forces us to confront the possibility that adopting the language of anarchy was something of a wrong turn for those who took up Proudhon’s project, with whatever degree of fidelity. That opens a lot of potentially interesting paths of inquiry, from an examination of “libertarian socialism” as an already existing alternative (in the works of writers like Gaston Leval) to the exploration of possible alternate histories (such as my still largely nascent musing about *atercracy*, *art-liberty*, etc.) But while I am attracted to these research possibilities as ways of illuminating aspects of the anarchist tradition, I’m still basically convinced that:

1. Anarchy is a fundamentally useful concept, which nothing else can really replace.
2. Proudhon's social science is a powerful set of tools, which we have barely begun to understand and use.
3. We don't have to sacrifice one to the other.

That forces us to return to the analysis in *The Federative Principle* and ask ourselves if the movement from abstract anarchy to federation is perhaps not a break, but yet another development? The "pure concept" of *self-government* seems to fail when it encounters the effects of collective force. If we attempt to envision that "government of each by each" in practice, with even the most basic elements of Proudhon's social science intact, we must account for the reality and even the "rights" of social "unity-collectivities." And it becomes nearly impossible to address the question of just who or what will take the role of "each" without noticing that some of the possibilities might also answer to "all," at least in some contexts. But if we are committed to the analysis that began with "property is theft," then this is precisely what we should expect and, as complicated as the next steps promise to be, confronting them is no setback.

It's important, I think, to treat the analysis in *The Federative Principle* as both *advanced*, in terms of Proudhon's theoretical development, and a bit *compressed*. What seems to have stuck with us is the *a priori* principles, when the lesson of the texts seems to be precisely that *we cannot simply stop there*, given the potential disconnections between their "mathematical" and "necessary" nature and the "infinitely flexible" nature of politics as an "applied art." Rigorous logical analysis is essential, but it appears that it also has its perilous side, if we do not follow through. As Proudhon said:

Logic and ingenuousness are primordial in politics: and that is exactly where the trap lies.

The third choice seems to be to follow Proudhon from *abstract anarchy*, through the difficulties and antinomies associated with its application, to *federation*—and then to ask ourselves if there is another kind of positive, practical anarchy that emerges in this new context, not simply as a kind of political *autarky* or as a *negative ideal*, but as the result—or *resultant*—of "*the balancing of authority by liberty*, and vice versa."

Resultant anarchy: Let us simply propose a third general variety of *anarchy*, which does not arise directly from the application of a simple principle to a simple society full of simple, individual subjects, but emerges from the balancing of social forces, norms and institutions. And let's borrow from Proudhon a word that he was fond of using in his later works: *resultant* (*résultante*). According to the *OED*, a resultant is "the vector which is the sum of two or more given vectors" or "the force that is equivalent to two or more forces acting at the same point," as well as simply "the product or outcome of something." So let us then say that we approach this other sort of *anarchy* as the sum of the various social forces in play (understood as vectors) approaches zero. And let us raise the possibility that we might speak of *quantities* or *degrees* of anarchy based on the intensity of the forces held in balance.

This third definition is presented here merely as a sort of hypothesis, a direction that subsequent research might pursue, as well as a potential escape from at least some of the difficulties that have emerged as we examined the first two. For those who might want to pursue the line of inquiry on their own, I can suggest that the most promising line of research seems to run from the 1840 discussion of "liberty" as a "third social form" and "synthesis of community and property," through the study on liberty in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church* and then on into the works of the 1860s.

THE BANKRUPTCY OF BELIEFS

To my brother J. Prat:

Faith has had its moment; it has also had its noisy bankruptcy. There is nothing left standing at this hour but the lonely ruins of its altars.

Ask the learned people—or those who still wear the intellectual loincloth—and if they wish to answer you conscientiously, they will tell you that faith has died forever: political faith and religious faith, and the scientific faith that has defrauded so many hopes.

When all the past was dead, gazes turned longingly toward the rising sun. Then the sciences had their triumphal hymns. And it came to pass that the multitude was given new idols, and now the eminent representatives of the new beliefs preach right and left the sublime virtues of the dogmatic scientist. The dangerous logorrhea of flattering adjectives, and the never-ending chatter of the sham sages put us on the path to what is rightly proclaimed the bankruptcy of science.

Actually, it is not science that is bankrupt in our day. There is no science; there are sciences. There are no finished things; there are things in perpetual formation. And what does not exist cannot break. If it were still claimed that that which is in constant elaboration, that which constitutes or will constitute the flow of knowledge goes bankrupt in our time, it would only demonstrate that those who said it sought something in the sciences what they cannot give us. It is not the human task of investigating and knowing that fails; what fails, as faith failed in the past, is the sciences.

The ease of creating without examination or mature deliberation, coupled with the general poverty of culture, has resulted in theological faith being succeeded by philosophical faith and later scientific faith. Thus, religious and political fanatics are followed by the believers in a multitude of “isms,” which, if fertilized by the greatest wealth of our understanding, only confirm the atavistic tendencies of the human spirit.

But what is the meaning of the clamoring that arises at every step in the bosom of parties, schools and doctrines? What is this unceasing battle between the catechumens of the same church? It means, simply, that beliefs fail.

The enthusiasm of the neophyte, the healthy and crazy enthusiasm, forges new doctrines and the doctrines forge new beliefs. It desires something better, pursues the ideal, seeks noble and lofty employment of its activities, and barely makes a slight examination, if it finds the note that resonates harmoniously in our understanding and in our heart. It believes. Belief then pulls us along completely, directs and governs our entire existence, and absorbs all our faculties. In no other way could sects and schools of thought, like churches, small or large, rise powerfully everywhere. Belief has its altars, its worship and its faithful, as faith had.

But there is a fateful, inevitable, hour of dreadful questioning. And this luminous hour is one in which mature reflection asks itself the reason for its beliefs and its ideological loves.

Then the ideal word, which was something like the nebula of a God on whose altar we burned the incense of our enthusiasm, totters. Many things crumble within us. We vacillate as a building whose foundations are weakening. We are upset about party and opinion commitments, just as if our own beliefs were to become unbearable. We believed in man, and we no longer believe. We roundly affirmed the magical virtue of certain ideas, and we do not dare to affirm it. We enjoyed the ardor of an immediate positive regeneration, and we no longer enjoy it. We are afraid of ourselves. What prodigious effort of will is required not to fall into the most appalling emptiness of ideas and feelings!

There goes the crowd, drawn by the verbosity of those who carry nothing inside and by the blindness of those who are full of great and incontestable truths. There goes the multitude, lending with its unconscious action, the appearance life to a corpse whose burial only awaits the strong will of a genius intelligence, who will strip off the blindfold of the new faith.

But the man who thinks, the man who meditates on his opinions and actions in the silent solitude that leads him to the insufficiency of beliefs, sketches the beginning of the great catastrophe, feels the bankruptcy of everything that keeps humanity on a war footing and is aware of the rebuilding of his spirit.

The noisy polemic of parties, the daily battles of selfishness, bitterness, hatred and envy, of vanity and ambition, of the small and great miseries that grip the social body from top to bottom, mean nothing but that beliefs go bankrupt everywhere.

Soon, and perhaps even now, if we delved into the consciences of believers, of all believers, we would find nothing but doubts and questions. All men of good will soon confess their uncertainties. Only the closed-minded belief will be affirmed by those who hope to gain some profit, just as the priests of religions and the augurs of politics continue to sing the praises of the faith that feeds them even after its death.

So, then, is humanity is going to rush into the abyss of ultimate negation, the negation of itself?

Let us not think like the old believers, who cry before the idol that collapses. Humanity will do nothing but break one more link of the chain that imprisons it. The noise matters little. Anyone who does not feel the courage to calmly witness the collapse, will do well to retire. There is always charity for the invalids.

We believed that ideas had the sovereign virtue of regenerating us, and now we find ourselves with ideas that do not carry within themselves elements of purity, justification and truthfulness, and cannot borrow them from any ideal. Under the passing influence of a virgin enthusiasm, we seem renewed, but at last the environment regains its empire. Humanity is not made up of heroes and geniuses, and so even the purest sink, at last, into the filth of all the petty passions. The time when beliefs are broken is also the time when all the fraudsters are known.

Are we in an iron ring? Beyond all the hecatombs life springs anew. If things do not change according to our particular theses, if they do not occur as we expect them to occur, this does not give in to the negation of the reality of realities. Outside of our pretensions as believers, the modification persists, the continuous change is accomplished and everything evolves: means, men and things. How? In what direction? Ah! That is precisely what is left at the mercy of the unconsciousness of the multitudes; that is what, in the end, is decided by an element alien to the work of the understanding and the sciences: force.

After all the propaganda, all the lessons, all the progress, humanity does not have, it does not wish to have any creed but violence. Right? Is this wrong?

And it is force that we accept the things as they are and that, accepting them, our spirit does not weaken. At a critical moment, when everything collapses in us and around us; when we grasp that we are neither better nor worse than others; when we are convinced that the future is not contained in any formulas that are still dear to us, that the species will never conform to the mold of a given form of association, whether it may be called; when we finally assure ourselves that we have done nothing more than forge new chains, gilded with beloved names,—in that decisive moment we must break up all the rubbish of belief, that we cut all the fastenings and we revive personal independence more confidently than ever.

If a vigorous individuality is stirred within us, we will not morally die at the hands of the intellectual vacuum. For man, there is always a categorical affirmation, the “becoming,” the beyond that is constantly reflected and after which it is, however, necessary to run. Let’s run faster when the bankruptcy of beliefs is done.

What does it matter that the goal will eternally move away from us? Men who fight, even in this belief, are those who are needed; not those who find elements of personal enrichment in everything; not those who make of the interests of the party pennant connections for the satisfaction of their ambitions; not those who, positioned to monopolize for their own advantage, monopolize even feelings and ideas.

Even among men of healthier aspirations, selfishness, vanity, foolish petulance, and low ambition take center stage. Even in the parties of more generous ideas there is the leaven of slavery and exploitation. Even in the circle of the noblest ideals, charlatanism and vanity teem; fanaticism, soon intransigence toward the friend, sooner cowardice toward the enemy; fatuity that rises up swaggering, shielded by the general ignorance. Everywhere, weeds sprout and grow. Let’s not live delusions.

Shall we allow ourselves to be crushed by the grief of all the atavisms that revive, with sonorous names, in us and around us?

Standing firm, firmer than ever, looking beyond any formula whatsoever, will reveal the true fighter, the revolutionary yesterday, today and tomorrow. Without a hero’s daring, it is necessary to pass undaunted through the flames that consume the bulk of time, to take a risk among the creaking timbers, the roofs that sink, the walls that collapse. And when there is nothing left but ashes, rubble, shapeless debris that will have crushed the weeds, nothing will not be left for those who come after but one simple work: to sweep the floor of the lifeless obstacles.

If the collapse of faith has allowed the growth of belief in the fertile field of the human being, and if belief, in turn, falters and bows withered to the earth, we sing the bankruptcy of belief, because it is a new step on the path of individual freedom.

If there are ideas, however advanced, that have bound us in the stocks of doctrinarism, let us smash them. A supreme ideality for the mind, a welcome satisfaction for the spirit disdainful of human pettiness, a powerful force for creative activity, putting thought into the future and the heart into the common welfare, will always remain standing, even after the bankruptcy of all beliefs.

At the moment, even if the mind is frightened, even if all the pigeonholes rebel, in many minds something stirs that is incomprehensible to the dying world: beyond ANARCHY there is also a sun that is born, as in the succession of time there is no sunset without sunrise.

THE RISING ANARCHISM

Sequels are never good. But dear friends who, judging the first installment good, decided to publish it as a pamphlet, ask me to expand the material a few more pages, and I cannot and do not wish to refuse.

I wrote “The Bankruptcy of Beliefs” in a painful moment, impressed by the collapse of something that lives in illusion, but not in reality, which sometimes plays with ideas and with affections, to torment us with our own impotence and our avowed errors.

The truth does not give way before ideological conventions, and those of us who profess to worship it, must not, even through feelings of solidarity, much less through party spirit, sacrifice even the smallest portion of what we understand to be above all doctrines.

Whoever has followed the gradual development of revolutionary ideas, and of anarchism above all, will have seen that in the course of time certain principles began to crystallize in minds as infallible conditions of absolute truth. They will have seen how small dogmas have been elaborated and how, through the influence of a strange mysticism, narrow creeds were finally asserted, claiming nothing less than the possession of the whole truth, truth for today and tomorrow, truth for always. And they will have seen how, after our metaphysical drifts, we have been left with words and names, but completely bereft of ideas. To the worship of truth was succeeded by the idolization of sonorous nomenclature, the magic of sensationalism, almost a faith in the fortuitous combination of letters.

It is the evolutionary process of all beliefs. Anarchism, which was born as a critique, is transformed into an affirmation that borders on dogma and sect. Believers, fanatics and followers of men arise. And there are also the theorists who make of ANARCHY an individualistic or socialist, collectivist or communist, atheistic or materialistic creed, of this or that philosophical school. Finally, in the heart of Anarchism, particularisms are born regarding life, art, beauty, the superman or irreducible egoistic personal independence. The ideal synthesis is thus parceled out, and little by little there are as many sects as propagandists, as many doctrines as writers. The result is inevitable: we fall into all the vulgarities of party spirit, into all the passions of personalism, into all the baseness of ambition and vanity.

How do we uncover the sore without touching the people, without turning the subject into a source of scandal, into the material of new accusations and insults?

For many, Anarchism has become a belief or a faith. Who would deny it? Because this has become so, passionate quarrels, unjustified divisions and dogmatic exclusivisms have been provoked. That is why, when the evolution has been completed, the bankruptcy of beliefs, a reality in fact, must be proclaimed frankly by all who love the truth.

When Anarchism has gained more ground, the crisis must necessarily arise. Iniquity manifests itself everywhere. Books, magazines, newspapers, meetings reflect the effects of the rare contrast produced by the clash of so many opinions that have sneaked into the anarchist camp. In open competition, doctrinal particularisms fall one by one in the battle of beliefs. None are firm, and they cannot be, without denying themselves.

The illusion of a closed, compact, uniform, pure and fixed Anarchism, like the immaculate faith in the absolute, could live within the enthusiasms of the moment, in febrile imaginations, anxious for goodness and justice, but it is exhausted by truth and reason. It dies fatally when the understanding is clarified and analysis breaks down the heart of the ideality. And the supreme moment comes to shatter our beliefs, to break up the ideological clutter acquired from this or that author, in love with one or another social or philosophical thesis. Why hide it? Why continue to fight in the name of pseudo-scientific and semiological puerilities? Truth is not enclosed in an exclusive point of view. It is not guarded in an ark of fragile planks. It is not there at hand or at the reach of the first daring soul who decides to discover it. As the sciences, as everything human is in formation, it will be perpetually in formation. We are and will always be forced to follow after it through successive trials; in that no other way is the flow of knowledge formed and certainty established.

This is how Anarchism will be surpassed. And when I speak of Anarchism and I say that in minds something stirs that is incomprehensible to the dying world, and that we sense beyond the ANARCHY a sun, which is born because in the succession of time there is no sunset without orthography, I speak of Doctrinal Anarchism, which forms schools, raises chapels and builds altars. Yes; beyond this necessary moment of the bankruptcy of beliefs, is the broad anarchist

synthesis that gathers from all the particularisms that are maintained, from all philosophical theses, and from all the formidable advances of the common intellectual work, the established and well-checked truths, whose demonstration every struggle is already impossible. This vast synthesis, a complete expression of Anarchism that opens its doors to everything that comes from tomorrow and everything that remains firm and strong from yesterday and is reaffirmed in today's clash that scrutinizes the unknown,—this synthesis is the complete denial of all belief.

There is no need to shout: Down with the beliefs! They perish by their own hands. Belief, like faith, is an obstacle to knowledge. And in the restless stirring of so many anarchists speaking, beliefs fail. We will not hide it. Let every one of us throw away the old dogmatism of their opinions, the loves of their philosophical predilections, and launching the mind on the broad paths of unrestricted inquiry, reach as far as the conception of a conscious, virile, generous Anarchism, that has no quarrel except with conventionalism and error, and has tolerance for all ideas, but does not accept, even on a provisional basis, anything except what is well proven.

This Anarchism is the one that is quietly forming. It is the one that is elaborated slowly in the beliefs able to feel the pressure of the atavisms that appear everywhere. It is the one that made me write "The Bankruptcy of Beliefs:" a cry of protest against the reality of the anarchist herd; a cry of encouragement for personal independence; a call for the expansion of the ideal that every day lives stronger in me and encourages me to fight for a future that I will not enjoy, but which will be an era of justice, well-being and love for the men of tomorrow. This Anarchism is the rising Anarchism, capable of collecting within its breast all libertarian tendencies, capable of encouraging all noble rebellions and of impressing on generous spirits the impulse of freedom in all directions, without hindrance and without prejudice, with the sole condition that exclusivism does not raise Chinese walls and that the understanding is delivered entirely and unreservedly to the truth that beats vigorously in the most diverse modalities of the new ideal.

It will no longer be said in the name of Anarchism: No further! Absolute justice, revived in the dogma that now dies, will be but the indeterminate goal that changes as human mentality unfolds. And we will not fall into the strange and singular error of setting a limit, however distant, to the progress of ideas and forms of social benefit.

The rising Anarchism proclaims the beyond endless, after having knocked down all the barriers raised by the age-old intellectual absolutism of men.

Don't you believe that all the particularisms, all the theories, are now failing, that all the factories of rubble, awkwardly raised for the glory of new dogmas, are collapsing? Don't you believe that the bankruptcy of beliefs is the last link in the human chain that breaks down and offers us the full breadth the anarchist ideal, pure and without blemish?

Faith will have blinded you. And you would do well to renounce the word freedom; that can be a herd even in the midst of the most radical ideas.

For our part we limit ourselves to record a fact: anarchists of all tendencies resolutely walk towards the affirmation of a great social synthesis that encompasses all the various manifestations of the ideal. The walking is silent; soon will come the noisy break, if there is anyone who insists on remaining bound to the spirit of clique and sect.

Whoever has not emancipated himself will be left behind with the current movement and will seek redemption in vain. He will die a slave.

Ricardo Mella

Sources:

La bancarrota de las creencias, by Ricardo Mella, «La Revista Blanca», 107, Madrid, December 1, 1902.

El Anarquismo naciente was published as a continuation of *La bancarrota de las creencias*, in a pamphlet published in Valencia, in 1903, by Ediciones El Corsario.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

Constructing an Anarchism: Notes on the Approach

Off on the Right Foot

We're starting with an odd mix of cautions and pep-talks, because we need an odd mix of critical distance and passionate engagement if we're going to complete the task at hand. "Expect contusions," but "please do try this at home." It's easy to draw the preliminaries out too long, but it's hard to be sure we've really situated ourselves where we need to be until the long opening moment starts to feel a little awkward. But we can guess that we have carved out a space for exploration when people start to try to occupy it, as some already have on Facebook, Reddit, the Anews Podcast and—in a somewhat more adversarial fashion—a couple of comment sections. That means, I think, that we can shift some of our attention from a profusion of questions to a profusion of answers—none of which, of course, will necessarily be *your* answers.

Getting to the Point

We've set ourselves a particular course — a journey from *anarchy* to an *-ism* — and for some of us, steeped in some form of the *critique of ideology*, the trick is making that trip sound like something other than a march to the scaffold. Fortunately, there are various sorts of *-isms* and part of our journey through anarchist history will involve encounters with a number of those varieties, suitable for the projects of various sorts of anarchists. But we should probably try to make clear, here at the outset, how the particular path I am taking aims to combine both a search for bits useful to individual constructions and the articulation of a *shareable anarchism*, which might serve as a tool for broad synthesis.

As I work through my list of chosen concepts, I will be elaborating a kind of *system*—one that is presumably useful in the planning and pursuit of anarchistic projects of a practical nature. In that context, the invocation of *an-archy* marks a rather complete rejection of the organizational principles of the status quo, Proudhon's theory of *collective force* is adopted as a specific and broadly applicable anarchistic social science, with *federation* and *mutualism* designating particular kinds of anarchistic relations, and so on... The simplest way to provide examples for others to examine, evaluate, adapt, reject, revise, etc. in their own experiments is to sketch out a model—or at least give a pretty clear picture of a toolkit—even if the results are explicitly of a provisional sort.

If *anarchy* is the principle and *anarchism* is, in some sense, the application of the principle in real relations, then we can expect a good deal of the exposition dealing with the other concepts to focus on questions of authority, hierarchy, oppression, domination, exploitation, etc. Starting from that radical rejection of the status quo, part of the project obviously has to be directed toward elaborating a critique of what is and proposing viable alternatives. In the context of that part of the project, the *anarchist tradition* is presented as a largely untapped resource, which anarchists of various tendencies might be expected to put to better use than has previously been the case.

I certainly believe that we have inherited remarkable resources and that many of the failures of various anarchist tendencies might be remedied, at least in part, by some concerted scavenging through those resources. But that's only part of what is driving this project.

The other part is an insistence on *anarchy-centered anarchism* as the great lost treasure of « our » "lost continent." But anyone concerned about that *-ism* at the end of the journey is

probably also aware that keeping anarchism anarchy-centered is not the easiest task. So perhaps it will be useful here to work quickly through my list of concepts, with a particular eye to how that centering of anarchy is likely to be maintained at each step:

☞ In the context of an anarchist theory, the invocation of *Anarchy* should, it seems to me, impose certain limits to systematization. Proudhon's appeal to *an-arche* was a simple expression of his opposition to everything that would try to present itself as eternal and unchanging. To treat anarchy as a kind of principle should prepare us for concepts and theories that are always approximate in the moment and subject to more or less immediate revision.

☞ With that idea of anarchy held at the center of our investigations, it seems natural to think of *Tradition* as simply another kind of approximation, subject to competition, reevaluation, revision and ultimately the sort of ongoing *Synthesis* we find elaborated in Voline's 1924 article (but invoked repeatedly in the works we will be examining.) Anarchy resists systemization, but so too does the raw material of the anarchist past. And, rather than imagining that all we have to do is just cut things down to size in the right way, perhaps there is a more radical and simultaneously more inclusive lesson to be learned from that fact.

☞ The question then becomes whether or not we can assemble a critical toolkit, including perhaps some kind of *social science*, that still centers anarchy among our concerns. My answer is a fairly unabashed pitch for a recovery, rectification and extension of the hidden-in-plain-sight Proudhonian sociology. And that argument will largely take the form of reexamining familiar notions (*authority, hierarchy, exploitation, domination, etc.*) through the lens of another vocabulary: *Governmentalism, Aubain, Federation, etc.* But the concept that concerns us most at this moment is almost certainly *Collective Force*, arguably the heart of Proudhon's analysis, which led him to think about increases in qualities as varied as productive power and freedom in terms of what I think we have to recognize as *increases in anarchy* within given systems of relations. If forced to make choice proposed by Bakunin between **science** (in its more governmentalist forms) and **life**, I would like to think I would always choose the latter—to the point of Déjacque's "bilge-rat," who drills away at the ship of state, regardless of what will eventually pour in—but it isn't clear that we have to choose. And one of the issues I want to touch on in all of this section, but perhaps specifically in the material on *Mutualism*, is the fact that in the period of *anarchy-without-anarchism* the *-isms* proposed in anarchist circles were as often as not something other than ideologies.

☞ An anarchy-centered social science obviously makes it easier to talk about programs without feeling like that scaffold is right around the corner. Drawing on recent material from the *Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism*, I want to propose a rather simple, 3-part program—build around the concepts of *Contr'un, Encounter* and *Entente*—that addresses an anarchistic conception of the self, a rudimentary *social system* (drawn from Proudhon, but perhaps not so far from the *union of egoists* in spirit) summarizing anarchic relations among anarchists and some suggestions about how we might conceptualize anarchistic relations with non-anarchists.

☞ The end point, then, should be an *Anarchism* that remains meaningfully anarchy-centered, if also necessarily approximate and subject to all manner of critique and revision. And if some degree of ideological commitment is hard to escape in this kind of exercise, I hope it will be clear that there has always been a possibility, clearly represented within the anarchist tradition, of treating our *anarchism* primarily as a tendency, rather than an ideology.



A basic assumption in all of this is that *anarchy* itself is not diminished by our poking and prodding. It appears to me, on the contrary, that *anarchy* may be one of those ideas that is more than capable of expanding to match or more than match our attempts to master it, ultimately infusing our efforts with more of its own character.



Our next “week” is two weeks long, in order to accommodate the holidays, so I’m not going to rush myself too much over the next couple of days to finish both the René Furth translation and the post on An-Anarchy. But I shouldn’t be more than a couple of days behind schedule on either. In the meantime, if anyone has thoughts about this post, the Ricardo Mella readings or anything else more or less relevant to our exploration, comments are welcome in the Facebook group, r/Mutualism, here on the blog or anywhere else you think you might be able to catch my attention.

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP

Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK THREE READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: An-Archy

The first order of business is to again thank everyone who has followed along—and particularly those who have taken the opportunity to comment. A special shout-out to the folks on the [Anews Podcast](#), who took some time again last week to talk about “Constructing Anarchisms.” The responses—sometimes even the trollish ones—have helped make clear the various little course-corrections that seem necessary. There is necessarily a lot of the work on this project happening just-in-time (or, like today, just-past-time) and the kind of active engagement required on my end is a lot easier to maintain when there are signs of life elsewhere.

Among the course-corrections you’ll notice moving forward is a slight change in my list of building-block concepts. Mutualism and federation are out, replaced by individualism and guarantism. As will be clear when we get there, these are fairly small shifts in focus, but they represent clarifications for me, prompted in part by feedback received on the early material.

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On, then, to *An-Archy*, hyphenated in this way to underline the fact that there are really two concepts—*anarchy* and the *archy* it intends to do without—that will have to be addressed.

Two Working Definitions

As we turn to my construction-in-progress, I hope to provide two slightly different resources for those of you who intend to attempt your own construction later. I obviously need to provide some fairly straightforward definitions for the concepts I’ll be using, together with some indication of how they fit together to form a useful *anarchism*. But it is also important to underline the extent to which these specific conceptualizations are choices made within specific contexts—and then to explore the background of those choices with enough care to make others’ choices easier. Sometimes it will also be necessary to make more than one choice, provide more than one definition, while clarifying why that is a necessity. And, of course, explaining the twelve concepts on which I will focus will require addressing a range of other, related concepts.

Addressing *An-Archy*, perhaps we can begin with a very simple, structural definition and a general observation:

☞ As should already be clear, I think we have to treat *anarchy* as a still-emerging concept, in part because we are still coming to terms with the precise nature of the *archy* it seeks to eliminate. Perhaps that’s the way we should be thinking about all concepts of any importance. In *The Theory of Property*, Proudhon observed that “Humanity proceeds by approximations” (including, significantly, “the approximation of an-archy”) and I think we have to suspect that one of the ways that *archy* manifests itself is the form of approximations taken for something more finished and persistent. That’s a question we’ll undoubtedly have to return to at various points in our exploration. For now, let’s just emphasize that most of our “definitions” of concepts like *anarchy* will really be more like descriptions of some one of its aspects or applications.

☞ That said, we can point with a good deal of confidence at some of the more prominent aspects of the reigning *archy*: *hierarchy, authority, governmentalism, oppression, exploitation,*

etc. In my model construction, I want to focus on questions of social relations and their structure, so let's say that, in this context, *anarchy* entails *horizontality*, the complete absence of *hierarchy*. While I am prepared to recognize every sort of *difference* between individuals and groups of individuals, and to attempt to account for the practical consequences of those differences, it appears to me that every attempt to translate those differences into *inequality* (in the sense of social inequality, the persistent elevation of any individual or group above any others on the basis of their identities or social roles) is necessarily going to find itself at odds with the most basic sorts of anarchist critique.

This approach is narrow, in the sense that it is focused on particular structures of social relations, but also quite broad in other ways. The *archy* that it opposes is not simply capitalism, the state-form, patriarchy or any of the other specific specific hierarchy (all of which can be critiqued from a variety of perspectives), but instead the general pretense that every social body must have a "head," that someone must always "lay down the law," etc. It identifies a particular target, a particular *archic* way of looking at the world, but makes no particular claims about the reasons for the hegemony or ubiquity of the *archy* it opposes.

Compared to the conceptions of *anarchy* already introduced, it undoubtedly seems a bit tame. And it says something at once amusing and important about anarchist ideas that we might begin with an opposition to what is arguably the basic structure of the majority of our social institutions and still feel like maybe we've haven't made a good start. But let's see where this definition takes us and what it contributes to the specific project of a shareable, synthetic anarchism I have proposed, while we also explore larger contexts and other options.

A Historical Interlude

One way to contextualize specific conceptualizations is to compare them to those made in the past, which are not always the shining moments of clarity that we might imagine they were. When *anarchism* emerged as keyword, ideology and movement in the 1870s, for example, there was a considerable amount of baggage already associated with the term, as well as a considerable amount of not always accessible history accumulated in what was at that time still a largely undocumented anarchist past.

Our hyphenated an-archy threatens to drag us into a confrontation with the details of that emergence and perhaps we should just go with the flow. That form can perhaps be seen as a nod to Proudhon and the *anar-chie* of 1840, which as good an "authority" as Kropotkin assures us was not quite the *anarchy* of the collectivists or anarchist communists. In the essay "On Order," he began by noting that "a party devoted to action, a party representing a new tendency, seldom has the opportunity of choosing a name for itself." He discusses the *beggars*, *sans-culottes* and *nihilists*, who were all presumably named by their opponents, and then presents this rather remarkable origin story for *anarchism*:

It was the same with the anarchists. When a party emerged within the International which denied authority to the Association and also rebelled against authority in all its forms, this party at first called itself *federalist*, then *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. At that period they actually avoided using the name *anarchist*. The word *an-archy* (that is how it was written then) seemed to identify the party too closely with the Proudhonists, whose ideas about economic reform were at that time opposed by the International. But it is precisely because of this — to cause confusion — that its enemies decided to make use of the

name; after all, it made it possible to say that the very name of the anarchist proved that their only ambition was to create disorder and chaos without caring about the result.

Forget the anarchists who actually *seized* the opportunity to call themselves “anarchists.” What Kropotkin will distinguish as “modern anarchism”—itself a curious characterization, as *anarchism* was at that time really a new label—was named by its enemies—the Marxist?—in order to “cause confusion.”

And the “modern” anarchist communists learned to live with it...

It’s a weird story, which seems to play ideological games with the historical facts—and, in the long run, it wasn’t a story even Kropotkin could stick to. Proudhon would reenter the story of anarchism in later tellings. And perhaps it was always “the Proudhonists” who were the target of Kropotkin’s comments, although they were not particular fond of the language of *an-archy*. Most likely, Kropotkin was just repeating bits of ideological hearsay. After all, by the time he became involved with the International in 1872, the “Proudhonists,” who had been instrumental in the founding of the organization and they rather swiftly purged from it, were really a distant memory.

There are indications, too, that Kropotkin had yet to really engage with Proudhon’s work directly. In 1883, Marie Le Compte (responsible for the less famous, but nearly simultaneous *other* English translation of “God and the State,” reported to Benjamin R. Tucker’s *Liberty* these details from Kropotkin about his activities in prison:

At 10 I read Proudhon half an hour, then take five minutes’ exercise by whirling my chair over my head, then read Proudhon. At 2 the guard comes to say promenade in the court. I promenade half an hour, then write on my “Prisons of Siberia” for two hours (all I am ever able), then read Proudhon.

Chair-whirling Kropotkin is one of those images worth a side-trip, I think. More immediately worth our attention is the potential mix of confusion and uncertainty about that anarchist past that informed the formation of “modern anarchism.” Back in 1881, Kropotkin tells us that “the anarchist party quickly accepted the name it had been given” and then goes on to explain how the ideological conflicts were presumably dealt with by a return to the sources.

So the word [anarchist] returned to its basic, normal, common meaning, as expressed in 1816 by the English philosopher Bentham, in the following terms: “The philosopher who wished to reform a bad law”, he said, “does not preach an insurrection against it.... The character of the anarchist is quite different. He denies the existence of the law, he rejects its validity, he incites men to refuse to recognize it as law and to rise up against its execution”. The sense of the word has become wider today; the anarchist denies not just existing laws, but all established power, all authority; however its essence has remained the same: it rebels — and this is what it starts from — against power and authority in any form.

If, however, you were not expecting Jeremy Bentham, inventor of the Panopticon, as the source for the “basic, common meaning” of *anarchy*—particularly as the rest of the explanation sounds an awful lot like Proudhon—well, you’re not alone. And, if we didn’t know about all of that furious later reading of Proudhon (and chair-whirling), it would be hard, I think, to avoid

noticing the similarities between the emergence of that explicit *anarchism* and certain all-too-familiar kinds of *entryism*. When I first read “On Order” in the context of my work on the language of anarchy, I could help but think of this spicy, but probably apocryphal bit from Kenneth Rexroth’s *Communalism*:

There is a story that, when the Communist International was formed, a delegate objected to the name. Referring to all these groups he said: “But there are already communists.” Lenin answered: “Nobody ever heard of them, and when we get through with them nobody ever will.”

Placing Kropotkin in the villain’s role was even a kind of thought experiment I played out in a long-ago post on “the Benthamite anarchism and the origins of anarchist history.” Unsurprisingly, the idea of Bread Santa as the bad guy was too alien even for much outrage. Fair enough. We know the essay was not Kropotkin’s last or best attempt to engage with the anarchist past. We also know, I think, that it was not the last silly thing he said about the “Proudhonian” parts of that past. So what are the takeaways from this particular episode? Maybe these:

This anarchism thing never been easy.

We all have to start somewhere.

Sometimes even our best and brightest have been a bit off the mark, even in relation to the basics.

Again with the Etymology...

I don’t want to spend a lot of time and energy on etymological considerations. That’s the sort of thing that is all too prevalent in online discussions of anarchism. And we’ve already touched on some of the relevant details. But let’s review a few key bits and raise a couple of new questions.

We are pursuing *anarchy* as conceived through the broader of the proposed etymologies, as *an-arche*. The prefix *an-* is *privative*, which, according to the *OED*, means “consisting in or marked by the absence or loss of some quality or attribute that is normally present.” We recognize in *arche* a concept that, as Stephen Pearl Andrews put it, “curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of elementary principle, with that of *government* or *rule*.” Go in search of the other significant uses of *arche* and the combinations get curious indeed. So when you put the two together you should at least expect to do without an awful lot of things that you might otherwise expect to be present, with the absences being particularly noticeable among things that might pretend to be *eternal*, *essential*, *certain* or *absolute*.

We aren’t going to solve theoretical or ideological problems with even the best dictionary. But it’s probably worth noting that there is nothing about the word *anarchy* that precludes broad interpretations, sweeping denunciations, whether we’re talking about something like Proudhon’s *anti-absolutism* or the insurrectionary desire to “to finally come to daggers with life.” (And this might not be a bad time to recall that, for Proudhon, insurrection was a Plan B to which he clung for much of his life. See “[My Testament, or Society of Avengers](#).”) Indeed, it is probably when interpreted most broadly, most sweepingly, that is is most shareable, even if it is not in that form that it will seem most appealing to some who might be invited to share.

The Anarchist Question

It's never been easy. This is the horn that I would like to stop blowing about now, but if folks have spent time with any significant fraction of the material presented so far, I imagine the point has been made.

If we go back to the beginnings of the anarchist tradition, we find that the clearest conceptions of *anarchy* were complex, with multiple meanings in play. (See “Proudhon’s Barbaric Yawp,” “Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses.”) And sometimes the conceptions were not as clear as they might have been, if only because anarchist thought was a work in progress. (“Anarchy: Historical, Abstract and Resultant”)

Moving forward through the anarchist past, we encounter a range of difficulties that have made the transmission of ideas from generation to generation, or even just between contemporary factions, anything but clear and simple. We can’t escape the fact that ignorance and confusion have, at times, been woven into the fabric of anarchist tradition, nor should we neglect the fact that the urge to rectify that sort of error has been persistent enough to almost count as an anarchist current on its own. Almost from the beginning, students of anarchists ideas have proposed means of coming to terms with the anarchist past, often seesawing between despair and optimism. (“The Bankruptcy of Beliefs,” “The Rising Anarchism,” “The Anarchist Question.”) We might seesaw a bit ourselves, seeing how perennial some of the questions we face have been throughout the anarchist past, but I think there is something reassuring in finding that the questions have already been asked, often by some of the most familiar names in anarchist history, even if those investigations have not always received the attention they perhaps deserve.

A Theory of Archy

One of the things I’ve learned about the study of the anarchist past is that many of the things we imagine it can’t provide us are indeed there, ready and waiting, but we tend not to find them until we’ve done enough work on our own to know what we lack. Five years ago, when I wrote “Toward a General Theory of Archy,” *archy* was really just another in the series of neologisms that filled my writing at the time. I knew that I had reached certain limits, however temporary, in my reading of the “classics,” where the shifting vocabularies and conceptual toolkits add layers of complexity to ideas that are already challenging. So I was expanding my own conceptual toolkit, with mixed success, trying to establish some comparatively fixed points to which I could relate the shifting senses of more familiar keywords in the works of Proudhon, Bakunin, etc.

Archy is not really *arche* in any of its historical senses. At first, I simply wanted a kind of place-holder for all of the things that anarchists have opposed historically. I discovered parallels between Proudhon’s critiques of capitalism and of governmentalism, then hoped to extend those critiques to institutions, like the patriarchal family, that Proudhon had not adequately analyzed or critiqued. Much of what I will be sharing in the coming weeks was ultimately a product of that project, although the insights came in fits and starts. (“Escheat and Anarchy,” like “Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses,” emerged from the correction of existing translations.)

For a few years, I spoke about *archy* in public forums and including it in my writings, *as if* the notion had secured its place in historical anarchist theory—and there weren’t many bold enough to call my bluff. And eventually it was no longer a bluff, as I found that the term did indeed have a certain currency in certain 20th century anarchist circles. By the time I wrote

“Archy vs. Anarchy,” I didn’t need to make or avoid any claims about the novelty of the term—but I suppose there may be plenty of other more or less unauthorized innovations there.

“Archy vs. Anarchy” is a simple introduction to the anarchism I’ll be constructing over the coming weeks. I have paired the three short readings on archy with René Furth’s long, but very interesting article on “The Anarchist Question,” as preparation for my post on Tradition, rather than revisiting the material from the “[Extrications](#)” series, which some of you may have already read. I will summarize what I think is useful from those exploratory writings. Those trying to pace their reading schedule should notice that next week’s readings will include Voline’s essay “On Synthesis,” which, again, some participants will have already read, and that “Escheat and Anarchy” will be more thoroughly discussed in Week 7, when we look at Proudhon’s theory of exploitation.

Our Lost Continent & the Journey Back—1840

Proudhon's Barbaric Yawp

— Je vous entends : vous faites de la satire ; ceci est à l'adresse du gouvernement. — En aucune façon : vous venez d'entendre ma profession de foi sérieuse et mûrement réfléchie ; quoique très ami de l'ordre, je suis, dans toute la force du terme, anarchiste. Écoutez-moi. — P.-J. Proudhon, Qu'est-ce que la propriété?

[I understand: you are engaged in satire; this is addressed to the government. — Not at all: you have just heard my serious profession of faith, over which I have reflected long and carefully; although I am very friendly to order, I am, in the full force of the term, (an) anarchist. Listen to me.]



The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me—he complains of my gab and my loitering. I too am not a bit tamed—I too am untranslatable; I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world. — Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”

Every story has to start somewhere. And when the story is that of *anarchist history*, it seems hard to find a more likely place to begin than Proudhon's 1840 declaration—*je suis anarchiste*—which we generally treat as the first instance of at least one kind of anarchist position-taking.

The form of this first anarchist declaration is almost certainly familiar to those of us who have made some attempt to claim the anarchist label. Most of us know the “you must be joking” reception and have made the “we mean it, man” response. And most of us have more than once then gone on to the “listen to me” stage of things and tried to explain to baffled or incredulous listeners just what we are talking about. For those of us who have been around a while, perhaps all of that has even become relatively routine. Still, I think most of us, no matter how long we've claimed the label, might be willing to admit that our willingness to make the claim has often been more certain than our grasp on precisely what that claim involves us in. It is not, after all, entirely up to us; and whatever we may make of the phrase has to contend with what is now a long history of similar declarations.

Now, imagine making that declaration, not just for *our* first time, but for *the first time*.

Imagine *je suis anarchiste* as an inaugural event, a position-taking in a world where “being (an) anarchist” was a previously unattempted feat and where there were no clear criteria for determining just what should follow and validate such a declaration. Imagine speaking the phrase, making the declaration in *a world without anarchists*—at least in the sense most relevant to modern anarchist identities and identifications.

That's a hard place to occupy now, in a world where “being an anarchist” is a relatively common, if not necessarily well-defined phenomenon. But at the moment when Proudhon made his declaration, it was arguably not even clear how one would diagram its structure, let alone fathom its consequences. After all, French grammar allows us to read the final word of that phrase as a noun or as an adjective. Does *anarchiste* designate a role, identity or affiliation, or does it indicated a tendency? *I am an anarchist*—although there are, perhaps, no others, at least in the precise sense I am using—or else *I am anarchistic*—unless, of course, we decide that “the full force of the term” includes all these various senses (and Proudhon would indeed later embrace “anarchy, taken in all its senses,” so this final interpretation may be an immediately relevant precedent.)



Multiple stories start with Proudhon's declaration. We will follow one of them for almost a hundred years. But another ends almost as soon as it begins, because this moment, this event is not ultimately sustainable.

Almost immediately, we move from a moment of pure and perhaps boundless potentiality to the exploration of all that moment might contain, in potential form, or imply. There is what we might call, borrowing from Whitman, Proudhon's *barbaric yawp*—for which, in that moment, “not a bit tamed” and “untranslatable” seem perfectly appropriate descriptors—and then the “listen to me,” followed by 180 years (and counting) of attempts at enough taming and translation to put the potential energy stored up in that moment to some practical use. And that has meant, among other things, repeated attempts at restaging the initial moment, repeated declarations, followed in their turn by explanations that, when they are successful, capture some aspect of the anarchy that Proudhon invoked, but inevitably leave more to be said.

A significant portion of the material on which this history will draw will have been part of a long series of *anarchist declarations*. And some of the failures of anarchist theory to accumulate and develop in some more systematic manner may be attributable to this dynamic, which tends to draw us back—if not to *first principles*, as anarchists have a complicated relationship to *arche*—to familiar forms of position-taking and equally complicated relationships with origins and systemization.

All of that will, I think, become increasingly clear as this exploration progresses. But, for now, what I would like to suggest—as a kind of preliminary conclusion and guide to orient future action—is this:

We have still not even come close to exhausting the radical possibilities of that inaugural moment. “Je suis anarchiste” remains, despite all of our efforts, nearly as untamed and untranslatable as it did in 1840.

And, perhaps, recognizing that fact will at least help us, as we retrace our steps from that point, to determine how best to orient ourselves and our anarchist activity with regard to the questions and possibilities raised by that initial declaration.



Onward, then! But perhaps we still want to take a moment, just on the verge of beginning in earnest, to think about the route ahead of us and make a few last minutes arrangements.

First, let's observe that exploring a lost continent is perhaps a task best undertaken with a party—and then acknowledge that ours is already partially assembled. Along with Max Nettlau and Proudhon, who will accompany us, in one capacity or another, throughout the journey, we should welcome Walt Whitman, whose inclusion here involves much more than just the opportunity for a fun post title. Whitman's work has long been a kind of touchstone for anarchists, myself included, and it will function at times in this study as a kind of poetic foil for more conventional theoretical work we'll be examining.

Whitman will get his own introduction in due course, but, for now, consider him at least on a path likely to cross our own at various points.

Second, in case this dynamic I have described of a sort of eternal return to basic anarchist questions seems implausible, let me cite at least one contemporary anarchist who seems to recognize a similar dynamic. Consider this passage from Alfredo M. Bonanno's “The Anarchist Tension:”

So anarchists keep asking themselves the same question: What is anarchism? What does it mean to be an anarchist? Why? Because it is not a definition that can be made once and for all, put in a safe and considered a heritage to be tapped little by little. Being an anarchist does not mean one has reached a certainty or said once and for all, 'There, from now on I hold the truth and as such, at least from the point of view of the idea, I am a privileged person'. Anyone who thinks like this is an anarchist in word alone. Instead the anarchist is someone who really puts themselves in doubt as such, as a person, and asks themselves: What is my life according to what I do and in relation to what I think? What connection do I manage to make each day in everything I do, a way of being an anarchist continually and not come to agreements, make little daily compromises, etc? Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, whether we are old people or children, is not something final: it is a stake we must play day after day. When we wake up in the morning and put our feet on the ground we must have a good reason for getting up, if we don't it makes no difference whether we are anarchists or not. We might as well stay in bed and sleep. And to have a good reason we must know what we want to do because for anarchism, for the anarchist, there is no difference between what we do and what we think, but there is a continual reversal of theory into action and action into theory. That is what makes the anarchist unlike someone who has another concept of life and crystallises this concept in a political practice, in political theory.

Although Bonanno may seem like strange company for at least some of the figures likely to be featured in this examination, I don't think it is unfair to suggest that this passage—one of my favorite bits of modern anarchist writing—describes a dynamic at least not significantly different from the one that I have begun to explore.

Whether these two expressions come anywhere close to *representing* a key elements in "the anarchist tradition" is course, a question that only the proposed exploration can attempt to answer.

So, again, *onward!*

Toward a General Theory of Archy

A lot of my frustrations with the anarchist milieu have less to do with the sorts of internal problems we face, which seem to me to be logical manifestations of the larger social environment, and more to do with the fact that, even if we had the will to address the various things that hold us back, we might not have enough shared theory and vocabulary to get the job done. But, as I have said, my feelings of alienation have been parallel to, and undoubtedly also arise from, a very strong sense of having finally plumbed a lot of the depths of anarchist theory and history. The combination leaves me very few excuses for putting off writing the sort of general anarchist theory that I have been circling for the last few years, something I've been wrestling with as I added the role of anthologist to the various other roles I've played within the milieu. I could be generally agnostic about defining terms like *anarchy* and *anarchism*—in their various senses—as long as the primary vehicles for my work were blogs like this one, the Libertarian Labyrinth archives and Corvus Editions. It's been easy to treat everything as a working translation or a sketch for a chapter in a work to be completed when more data had been gathered. And it has also been extremely useful to do so, and not to tie myself prematurely to a particular guiding narrative. Opening anarchism onto itself and its possibilities, by documenting all the messiness of its history and the complexities of its earliest theories, has, I think, been an extremely useful project, and one in the context of which I think I can claim some real accomplishments.

It is, however, only part of the work necessary to rethink the milieu in terms that allow us to move on beyond existing obstacles. Adding complexity to the narrative of anarchist history and showing the permeability of sectarian boundaries is a good tonic for those who think of our problems in terms of rigidity, dogmatism, etc. For us—and I proudly count myself a member of that particular faction—more *anarchy* in our *anarchism* just seems natural. By itself, however, this approach doesn't necessarily have much to offer those who are concerned that anarchy might ultimately be a principle of pure dispersion, insufficient to guide us toward the specific changes we desire in our lives and relations. Fortunately, the sort of clarification of the idea of anarchy that would be necessary to chase the fears of this group is likely to be of use to the rest of us as well, and that other work of opening closed narratives and engaging complexity has probably unearthed everything we need to attempt some sort of positive account of anarchy as sufficient to the needs of anarchism—a narrative shareable by a variety of present tendencies, but also one suggesting a shared thread through various historical tendencies.

In my present state of dissatisfaction with the anarchist milieu, such a narrative, while shareable, can't help but also be a sort of provocation. For me, one of the lessons of the past couple of years is that some "sectarian" battles, very narrowly defined, are indeed worth fighting. To embrace "anarchism without adjectives" in any sense that is not absurd and ultimately indifferent is to adopt the hardest sort of line against any sect that would attempt to ground anarchism on any basis but the shifting ground of anarchy. That means taking a stand against the various would-be "anarcho"-authoritarianisms and the ideological quibbling of various competing approaches. So feel free to take what follows as quite consciously polemic. Just understand that I'm pretty sure it's a well-grounded polemic, the product of decades of thinking about these issues, and, of course, it is not *just* polemic.

Nearly everything I have written recently converges on this potential *shareable narrative*, with the "Propositions for Discussion" being the central bit of work. In the sections that I've outlined so far I've set up a couple of basic claims about anarchy:

1. The nature of the idea of *anarchy* leaves very little room for arguments about definitions—unless they are rather fruitless fights about etymology and whether anarchy is “the right word” for what anarchists have proposed. As anarchists have understood it, at least, anarchy really does “accept no adjectives.”
2. The majority of our disputes have really been over the range of human relations for which anarchy seems to be a suitable ideal. When we get bogged down in debates over whether a capitalist *employer* is a *ruler*, the question really seems to be whether the relationships we oppose in the political and economic realms are sufficiently of a type that principled opposition to one demands opposition to the other.

It is at this point that our lack of shared vocabulary and theory makes our lives very difficult. We have our laundry lists of things that we oppose—oppression, exploitation, hierarchy, authority, absolutism, privilege, government or governmentalism, statism, sexism, racism, patriarchy, etc., etc., etc.—but all of these terms are subject to the usual tug-of-war that determines the local meanings of ideologically charged words. In the end, even anarchists can’t agree on what they all mean. Marxists and Proudhonists will see different sources for the exploitation of labor, and different mechanisms in its operation. Anarchists will trot out Bakunin’s “defenses” of “the authority of the bookmaker” and the “invisible dictatorship” almost as often as our opponents. Some anarchists are perfectly comfortable with the notion of “anarchist law” and complain that “anarchy mean no rulers, not no rules”—and there are ways to turn the various words in those phrases in directions that are consistent with the main currents of anarchist thought, but it’s very hard to tell at any given moment if that’s what’s on the table. We need a way of defining the “archy” that unites the various things that we’re against, but, if anything, the trend at the moment seems to be away from that sort of approach and toward a taxonomy of oppressions that are considered either incommensurable or subject to a rigid sort of hierarchy of severity.

I’ve had a suspicion for a long time—a thought I’ve voiced here on a number of occasions—that there was something in Proudhon’s analysis of *unity-collectivities* and *collective force* that might serve to bring together at least some of these opposition into a kind of General Theory of Things Anarchists Oppose. But there are at least a couple of steps in making that case. First, there is the necessity of finding the connections, or at least clear grounds for the connections, in Proudhon’s own work—where, we can be sure, any standard for identifying archic relationships will have been applied somewhat unevenly. Then, it is necessary to demonstrate that the proposed standards are applicable under present conditions, in the context of 21st century anti-authoritarian discourse. If, for example, it was possible to find parallels between the critique of capitalism and the critique of governmentalism in *What is Property?*, it would still be necessary to show that the critique could be extended to patriarchy and that it would either connect those analyses to, say, the analysis of privilege or demonstrate why that connection wasn’t necessary.

The hardest part of reading Proudhon’s work is probably simply the sheer number of writings, and the very diverse nature of them, joined with the fact that, for Proudhon, there was obviously a great deal of connection between the various analyses. I’ve noted more than once how often a key piece of theory will be tucked away in some entirely unexpected place. The presence of key remarks on the nature of the “citizen-State” in *The Theory of Taxation* is just one example. The various twists and turns in Proudhon’s use of keywords—well-documented over the years on this blog—is another complicating factor. The strategy I’ve had to develop to deal

with these problems has involved a lot of keyword-searching across all the digitized volumes, a lot of mapping of equivalent terms, and the establishment of chronological accounts of the development of various concepts. Another decade or two of that and I think I'll know Proudhon's work pretty well, but the last decade of it has arguably given me a useful sense of the broad outlines of his project, with really in-depth knowledge of some aspects of it. And if some of the mysteries of his use of words like *anarchy* and *anarchist* still elude me, the nature of our elusive *archy* has become increasingly clearly to me.

As I've been suggesting over on Mutualism.info, some key answers seem to have been hiding in plain sight, clustered around the famous claim that "property is theft." It took some time to clear away a lot of dubious interpretations of that phrase, to focus on the issue of "collective force" and get clear about the account of exploitation provided in 1840. That work accomplished, it became possible to see that a fundamentally similar account of governmentism was present in various places, such as the "Little Political Catechism" in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*. And when the manuscripts of *Economie* became available online, we gained Proudhon's own testimony that the two processes were, in fact, fundamentally the same in his estimation. It took wading through the "Catechism of Marriage" to see that Proudhon's strong feelings about the physical inequality of the sexes was still joined to a strong insistence on other sorts of equality—a state of affairs that is hard not to find maddening, but which seems nonetheless to have been the case—which opens at least the possibility of attempting to extend Proudhon's anarchic critique to the institution of patriarchy (as I started to do in "[The Capitalist, the Prince, the Père de famille, and the alternative.](#)")

It turns out that Proudhon may have even laid some of the foundations for an extension of his own critique. In the "Little Political Catechism," he wrote:

Of the Appropriation of the Collective Forces, and the Corruption of the Social Power

Q.—Is it possible that a phenomenon as considerable as that of the collective force, which changes the face of ontology, which almost touches physics, could have been concealed for so many centuries from the attention of the philosophers? How, in relation to something that interests them so closely, did the public reason, on the one hand, and personal interest, on the other, let themselves be misled for such a long time?

A.—Nothing comes except with the passage of time, in science as in nature. All starts with the infinitely small, with a seed, initially invisible, which develops little by little, toward the infinite. Thus, the persistence of error is proportional to the size of the truths. Thus, one is thus not surprised if the social power, inaccessible to the senses in spite of its reality, seemed to the first men an emanation of the divine Being, for this reason the worthy object of their religion. As little as they knew how to realize it through analysis, they had a keener sense of it, quite different in this respect from the philosophers who, arriving later, made of the State a restriction on the freedom of citizens, a mandate of their whim, a nothingness. Even today, the economists have barely identified the collective force. After two thousand years of political mysticism, we have had two thousand years of nihilism: one could not use another word for the theories which have held sway since Aristotle.

Q.—What was the consequence of this delay in knowledge of the collective Being for peoples and States?

A.—The appropriation of all collective forces and the corruption of social power; in less severe terms, an arbitrary economy and an artificial constitution of the public power.

Q.—Explain yourself on these two headings.

A.—By the constitution of the family, the father is naturally invested with the ownership and direction of the force issuing from the family group. This force soon increases from the work of slaves and mercenaries, the number of which it contributes to increase. The family becomes a tribe: the father, preserving his dignity, sees the power he has grow proportionately. It is the starting point, the type of all such appropriations. Everywhere where a group of men is formed, or a power of collectivity, there is formed a patriciate, a seignior. Several families, several societies, together, form a city: the presence of a superior force is felt at once, the object of the ambition of all. Who will become its agent, its recipient, its organ? Usually, it will be that of the chiefs who hold sway over the most children, parents, allies, clients, slaves, employees, beasts of burden, capital, land—in a word, those who have at their disposal the greatest force of collectivity. It is a natural law that the greater force absorbs and assimilates the smaller forces, and that domestic power becomes a title of political power, and only the strong may compete for the crown.

There is a good deal here that is interesting, but certainly nothing is more interesting, from the point of view of moving beyond Proudhon's anti-feminism, than this treatment of the father and the constitution of the family as the example of how the "appropriation of all collective forces and the corruption of social power" gets its start.

I don't want to get too bogged down in the textual details here, but if you wanted to explore them yourself you couldn't go too far wrong by tracking down the various references to this "power of collectivity" (*puissance de collectivité*.) Regular readers of the blog should recognize the phrase from a line from *Justice* that I have quoted many times:

Voilà tout le système social : une équation, et par suite une puissance de collectivité.

That is the whole social system: an equation, and consequently a power of collectivity.

I have generally used this as a description of anarchy, to the extent that its fundamentally anti-systemic character can be expressed in terms of a system. (This sort of slightly paradoxical relation of anarchy to archic systems, which I have already mentioned in the case of Bakunin, seems to be something of an occupational hazard for anarchist theorists.) What I've suggested is that anything that can't fit into this very simple model probably falls somewhere within the realm of *archic* relations. But perhaps we can clarify things just a bit more, with another look at the two elements of this "system."

Let's start with the *equation*. Proudhon describes the scenario he is imagining:

Two families, two cities, two provinces, contract on the same footing: there is always that these two things, an equation and power of collectivity. It would involve a contradiction, a violation of Justice, if there were anything else.

So, here, the *equation* is a matter of being "on the same footing," of equal standing between the parties. *Equality* was an extremely important keyword for Proudhon. *Society*, for example,

was essentially a synonym, in the sense that equality was the primary precondition for relations worth calling “social.” But Proudhon was at the same time very skeptical of any sort of material equality. In *The Philosophy of Progress* he wrote:

...the correlative of liberty is equality, not a real and immediate equality, as communism intends, nor a personal equality, as the theory of Rousseau supposes, but a commutative and progressive equality, which gives a completely different direction to Justice.

And later in the same work:

Some philosophers who think themselves profound, and who are only impertinent, imagine that they have found a flat refusal of the principle of equality, which forms the basis of the anti-proprietary critique. They say that there are not two equal things in the whole universe.—Very well. Let us admit that there have not been two equal things in the world: at least one will not deny that all have been in equilibrium, since, without equilibrium, as without movement, there is no existence.

So equality become, through its “commutative and progressive” character, closely connected to *reciprocity*, defined by Proudhon as “the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements,” and roughly synonymous with *justice*, which he understood in terms of the balance of interests among equals. And all of them are essentially aspects of anarchy, understood in its most general sense.

Of course, as interesting as all that is, and as vital as it is to understanding Proudhon, it doesn’t necessarily take us much closer to the sort of tools we need to recognize *archy* whenever we encounter it. For that, we have to look at the other half of Proudhon’s “system,” the “power of collectivity” and the ways in which it is appropriated and corrupted.

There’s nothing terribly complicated about the “power of collectivity,” which is, of course, the “collective force” familiar from *What is Property?* and various other works. And there’s really nothing mysterious about the way that this force or power (*puissance*), which is a product of society (in the sense we’ve just noted), comes to be appropriated by individuals, who then transform it into some form of more-or-less *governmental* power (*Pouvoir*) and use it against the very society that created it. Real force changes hands as a result of relations that are in some sense *collective*, but lack the element of equality that would make them really social, and the rationale for this privatization is the denial of equality—in that form that is hardly distinguishable from society, reciprocity, justice, etc.—through some alternate systemization of the social body, through what Proudhon called “the external constitution of society.” Now, “external constitution” is a fiction, or at least a misunderstanding, depending on some rhetorical sleight-of-hand in order to introduce hierarchy in the place of society. Of course, one of the most common forms of this fiction is precisely the one that takes “society” as a thing, the unity-collectivity of the associated individuals, as opposed to a relation of equality and justice among them, and then elevates that *real* collectivity to a *fictive* superiority over its component members.

And now maybe things are getting a little complicated, or at least unfamiliar to those not steeped in Proudhon’s thought. If every individual is a group, and every organized group is a sort of individual, these unity-collectivities are real, and have their own interests. They even, Proudhon suggested, have a sort of “soul,” if we have to talk about what “realizes” them, but that “soul” is nothing but the collective force that it contains. But, here again, we have dipped into the

realm of figurative language, aimed at identifying *alternatives* to those in archic systems. In a less rhetorically loaded explanation, Proudhon identified the collective force in these social beings as their *liberty*, so that it is precisely liberty—material liberty, everything in these social systems above the sort of bare subsistence we might expect from isolated, unassisted labor—that is appropriated by the various classes of usurpers as a means to elevate themselves. But *elevation* is not one of the elements of the proposed system, and Proudhon was quite clear that the composite nature of social collectivities did not grant them any authority or precedence over the individuals of which they were composed. An association of some number (N) of workers—all assumed to be on an equal footing—produces at least N+1 individuals whose interests must be balanced if justice is to be served, but those individuals all remain on that equal footing.

So, if we stopped here and tried to sketch out the characteristics of *archy*, what would they be? If every form of association produces a collective force, then in an anarchistic society we should expect to see that force serve the interests of all the individuals, whether human individuals or social collectivities, in a just, balanced way—not according to any mechanical, quantitative form of equality, but according to a “commutative and progressive” process of creating and maintaining an equilibrium of interests. If we borrow terms from the most familiar of Proudhon’s analyses of collective force, we should expect to see individuals compensated both individually and collectively for their contributions, with no individual or class of individuals being able to appropriate more than a balanced share. Importantly, we should find some awareness of the collective force resulting from the association and collaboration of individuals and a steady experimentation to find the best means of balancing, *justifying* all the various interests. And, indeed, if we follow Proudhon’s principles, as opposed to his imperfect practice, the individualities included in that balance might ultimately range “from the infinitesimal to the universal” (as Fourier might have said.) In an archic “society,” then, we can expect to find equality denied and the products of collective action individually appropriated—in most cases, precisely as a means to maintain inequality. That privatization may take the form of economic exploitation, hierarchical government, or any number of systems of inequality based on the exploitation of identitarian categories. A full analysis would have to involve sketching out a wide range of such systems, but it seems likely that virtually all of the forms of exploitation, oppression and privilege that we oppose could, in fact, be mapped onto roughly the same framework.

And if that is the case, then perhaps the problem of discovering the proper scope for the application of anarchy is not a great deal more difficult than that of defining it.

Escheat and Anarchy

One of the difficulties in explaining the anarchist critique—and of distinguishing anarchist tendencies from those that propose only partial breaks with authority—has been the fact that the two fundamental critiques associated with anarchist thought—*anti-capitalism* and *anti-governmentalism*—have been difficult to unite, despite indications that they emerged together as part of a single critique in the work of Proudhon. We are arguably more in touch with those particular origins than we have been for most of anarchism's history and in many ways our understanding of Proudhon's thought steadily improves. In social media discussions, when it is a question of critiquing capitalist exploitation, vague references to "usury" or recourse to Marxian ideas are increasingly replaced by appeals to the theory of *collective force* and reference to the *droit d'aubaine* that seems to justify the appropriation of the fruits of association by the capitalist class. On the anti-governmental front, we have begun, at least, to explore the problem of "the external constitution of society," which Proudhon attributed to the governmentalist state. But the connection between the two critiques has remained a bit elusive.

Part of the problem has been that we are still in the process of making Proudhon's thought our own. In the meantime, we have been guided by those who went before us and particularly by the translators of the few works by Proudhon that have been available in English. The fact that these translations have been, for the most part, quite good has perhaps lulled us into some complacency. But we have learned over time that sometimes otherwise excellent translations have been badly wrong at crucial moments. The translations of *anarchie* in *The General Idea of the Revolution* are among the most cautionary examples we have discovered to date, but there have been others. And perhaps it is time to ask if Tucker's translation of *droit d'aubaine* as "right of increase" has led us astray.

A focus on "increase," and particularly on the "right" to accumulation at the heart of capitalist relations, has seemed obviously useful. At our present stage of understanding, it has been extremely important that we understand the mechanisms by which the wealth produced by associated labor is consistently alienated and turned against the producers. It has been equally important for us to focus to some extent on the alternatives to a system that consistently concentrates capital and to explore alternatives that instead emphasize the circulation of resources. But that has, in some ways, left us engaging with Proudhon's critique of 1839 (from *The Celebration of Sunday*), where "property is theft" because it is the result of "putting aside." We have, it seems to me, only really made half of the 1940 analysis our own. We have seen clearly enough that the individual "right" to "dispose at will of social property" is a source of injustice and material inequality, but we have not always been able to clearly articulate just how our critique is specifically anarchist—and opponents (anti-state capitalists and the like) have seldom hesitated in their attempts to paint our anti-capitalism as simply *tacked on* to our anti-governmentalism.

At the same time, our anti-governmentalism has arguably lacked a bit of theoretical clarity. We may disagree about the details regarding capitalist exploitation, but there doesn't seem to be much disagreement among anarchists that it exists and that its primary mechanism involves the appropriation of the fruits of labor by capitalists. And there is probably no form of consistent anarchism with economic ideas that could not be described or derived by the use of the theory of collective force. The same almost certainly cannot be said about the critique of "external constitution." When we turn to the anti-governmental side of the anarchist critique, however, the diversity of approaches is really striking. While *an-archy* would seem to indicate a complete

break with government, it is extremely common to see anarchists focus simply on abolition of the state, while promoting some form of “radical” or “true democracy.” Rather than taking our main cues from the strong, consistent anti-authoritarian critiques in the tradition, we are prone to emphasizing the possibility of exceptions—whether practical, as in the case of “democratic decision-making,” or largely rhetorical, when we invoke “the authority of the bootmaker” (all too often without much apparent recollection of the contexts in which the phrase was originally used.) Some anarchists make the case for “anarchist law,” while others assure us that “anarchism is against rulers, but not rules.” Some defend “natural rights” and many defend “natural” (or naturalized) *systems of desert* (“from each...; to each...,” etc.) We seldom manage to advance a consistent critique of the necessity of government, authority or even hierarchy—and as a result fall back on the project of seeking “justification” or “legitimacy” for particular forms of these institutions. And, all too often, we find self-proclaimed anarchists responding with bits right out of our opponents’ playbooks when we try to draw the focus back to *anarchy*.

When we want to emphasize the really radical quality of Proudhon’s anti-governmental critique, we refer to his *anti-absolutism*. Whatever his failures in applying the standard, his *anarchy* was informed by critique that reached beyond specific institutions to the philosophical theories and habits of thought on which they were erected. According to Stephen Pearl Andrews, anti-absolutism was already implied—however “curiously”—in the notion of anarchy or *an-arche*:

Arche is a Greek word (occurring in mon-*archy*, olig-*archy*, hier-*archy*, etc.), which curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of *elementary principle*, with that of *government* or *rule*. (“The Pantarchy Defined,” 1873)

And the provocative passages in *The General Idea of the Revolution* certainly suggest that Proudhon’s understanding of the notion of anarchy was more complex than we often assume. (See “[Anarchy, Understood in All its Senses](#).”) But, ultimately, while this broad understanding of anarchy gives us a philosophical critique capable of working in various contexts and at various scales, its connection to the sociological theory of collective force and the economic critique of exploitation seems to require something that is at least not yet explicit in our analysis.

The logical point of contact is that notion of “external constitution,” which Proudhon employed to describe the relationship between society and the governmentalist State. I’ve discussed Proudhon’s critique of Louis Blanc in “[Self-Government and the Citizen-State](#),” but the basic idea is that authoritarians see society as a social body that must have a “head,” with that head above and apart from the rest of the body, directing it and “realizing” it. Proudhon agreed that social collectivities existed, but disagreed that this authoritarian conception of their organization was necessary or correct. Without the authoritarian lens, social bodies could be seen as engaging in a decentralized self-regulation.

The question is whether this particular notion, which saw only very limited use by Proudhon, applies to more than just the governmentalist State. If, for example, it seemed to apply more broadly to politics (to constructions like “the people” and perhaps to certain abstract constructions of “society” itself), to economics (to the construction of “the economy,” but also of “the firm”), etc., then we might suspect that we were closing in on our “general theory of archy.” And it turns out that the evidence of that generality may have been “hiding in plain sight” right along, veiled by Tucker’s choice when it came to translating *aubaine*.

It turns out that the *droit d’aubaine* is arguably not best understood as the right of *increase*, but as the principle of *escheat*. Wikipedia informs us that:

Escheat is a common law doctrine that transfers the real property of a person who died without heirs to the Crown or state. It serves to ensure that property is not left in “limbo” without recognized ownership.

Some definitions naturalize the relationships involved by describing this transfer as “reversion” to the state.

Now, when we go back to Proudhon’s account of the *droit d’aubaine*, things perhaps look a bit different. We have a principle designed to assure that property is not “left in limbo,” which appears to mean either a specific proprietor, their specified heirs or the state (meaning, in practice, those who can claim to be the “head” of the social body.) What Proudhon seems to do is to insist that some version of this principle already contributes to the very constitution of property. Individual workers can only make individual claims, with the fruits of collective force doomed to “limbo” (which here means essentially anything resembling “social property”) and eventually passing to a capitalist class by virtue of their position as apparent “head” of some economic body (firm, economy, etc.) The main difference between the status of the citizen in a governmental state and that of the worker in a capitalist firm is that while the contribution of the worker to the constitution of the firm (or of the real associations that produce wealth for the firm) is perhaps even more obvious than that of the citizen in the constitution of the political state, the firm aspires to the recognition granted to the state by virtue of its relation to society, while essentially denying that any such society exists among laborers and capitalists. From the point of view of the real associations, the firm is a sort of external constitution, but from the point of view of the firm (and, of course, of its “representatives” and proprietors), it is the workers themselves who are individually considered inessential and essentially *external*.

What Proudhon’s analysis suggests, of course, is that “limbo” is the proper home of most of what is called property. And this is arguably as true of common property as it is of the exclusive, individual variety. This is perhaps one of the key reasons that mutualist economics have almost always emphasized *circulation*, even when they were fairly far removed from these theoretical roots. In the early days of the current mutualist renaissance, it was common for us to talk about property as a “problem” with no definitive solution. But I suppose it should come as no surprise to anyone that the thought of “limbo” does not hold particular terrors for those who have constructed their political projects—to one extent or another—around the concept of *anarchy*.

And perhaps it is in the opposition of escheat and anarchy that we will find the connections we have been looking for.

Escheat guards against the limbo that is perhaps *proper* to those resources ultimately claimed as property. It does so with the aid of an abstract collectivity, which is always assumed to have a prior claim to, well, just about anything that individuals cannot convincingly claim is solely the product of their own exertions. This abstract collectivity possesses a plausibility derived in part from the existence of real associations and in part from the dominant belief that every social body must have a head.

Without the imposition of a “head,” the social body is a kind of anarchy. Authority simply asserts that such things cannot be and proposes to provide the “missing” ruling elements, which are external either in the sense that they wholly appropriate the real associations through force or fraud, or in the sense that they involve the creation of new functions in no way intrinsic to the organization of the anarchic social organism. And, really, this is perhaps all that authority ever does. But every time that it does its work—replacing anarchic association with relations of command and control—it produces hierarchy and it produces the conditions for exploitation.

It seems to me that this principle of escheat at least provides us with a kind of basic model, in which we can see elements common to both capitalism and governmentality. And that seems like a useful clarification. It remains to be seen how far towards a “general theory of archy” this step takes us, but it appears to be a step down the right path.

Archy vs. Anarchy

These short contrasting entries constitute an attempt to sketch out some basic principles of existing *archic* society and some *anarchic* alternatives. Those alternatives are drawn largely from what we have been calling the “neo-Proudhonian” project. As such, they are not necessarily the alternatives most often proposed by self-proclaimed anarchists. They are proposed, however, as a means of approaching some baseline for a consistently anarchistic synthesis of existing anarchisms. That approach will undoubtedly require considerable elaboration and clarification of the contrasting principles and tendencies presented here—but it is important to make a start.

<p>The Polity-form: <i>Archic</i> social organization seems to quite consistently depend on a particular conception of social collectivities as <i>bodies</i>—specifically rather anthropomorphic bodies with the organs of direction placed in some “head.” This model of social collectivity seems to inform our understandings of the patriarchal <i>family</i>, the governmental <i>state</i>, the capitalist <i>firm</i>, the democratic <i>People</i> and, sometimes, even the anarchistic <i>commune</i>, <i>community</i> or <i>federation</i>.</p>	<p>The Federative Principle: An alternative principle is <i>federation</i>, understood in its more radical, <i>anarchic</i> senses. That almost certainly has to include doing more than simply networking conventional polities. Freedom from the polity-form allows considerably more flexibility in the realm of decision-making (so often a stumbling-block in discussions of anarchistic organization), potentially transforming legislative networks and assemblies into largely consultative bodies, specializing in the gathering and dissemination of the far-flung knowledge necessary as context for sound, responsible local action.</p>
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<p>External Constitution: Proudhon described the governmental State as “the external constitution of society,” referring to the belief of some of his fellow socialists that society was not “realized” until it was given a “head,” in the form of a government, to direct it. There are probably a variety of ways in which the constitution of politics can be considered “external” to the actual associations to be “realized,” starting with the transformation of the individual into a <i>citizen</i> and the mass of individuals into the <i>People</i>—and then extending through all of the various ways in which identities are legally constituted within governmentalized collectivities.</p>	<p>Constitution by Association: The actual, fluid, evolving associations established between individuals and groups of individuals seldom resemble that <i>archic</i> centrally controlled social body. Instead, we find acephalous bodies, bodies with capacities distributed according to less anthropomorphic models and evolving networks that may stretch the metaphor of a social body to its breaking point. Among the alternatives to external constitution explored by Proudhon, we find the idea that the distinction between <i>society</i> and <i>government</i> could perhaps be erased. In its strongest statements, the proposal to replace political relations with economic relations amounts to a proposal to simply recognize the organization of daily life as all the “government” that anarchy can accommodate—a proposal that would obviously alter the way we think about daily life.</p>
<p>Legal and Governmental Order: Proudhon made some strong statements about the absolute opposition of anarchy and social orders rooted in authority. Without necessarily embracing the claim that there is, for example, no middle ground between anarchy and dictatorship, we perhaps have to recognize that once the possibility of binding legislation has been recognized, the limitation of the principle seems at least quite difficult. The existence of the <i>prohibition</i> seems to imply <i>permission</i> in other cases and the status of acts not already granted or denied some prior stamp of approval becomes hard to even account for.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Contr’un Glossary: Legal Order 	<p>Responsibility: In the absence of both prohibition and permission—the logical outcome of rejecting legal and governmental order—<i>responsibility</i> emerges as the key concept “governing” action. And anarchistic responsibility is specifically mutual responsibility in the face of uncertain consequences. Each act potentially exposes the actor to an unbounded set of possible responses, but the mutual character of this extreme exposure ought to create incentives that minimize the extremity of responses—in the interest of preventing cycles of reprisal spinning out of control, but also because the responses are no more authorized in advance than the actions themselves. Best practices for avoiding damaging conflict will almost certainly begin with some attention to the problem of carrying one’s own costs.</p>

Hierarchy: The stratification of society, with its establishment “rights” to command and “duties” to obey, is perhaps not the whole of *archy*, but it is obviously a necessary element in the aspects we’ve examined so far. And perhaps it would not be too much to claim that anarchist social relations would be impossible without some the “elevation” of some party, sect, faction or representative symbol above the mass of not-unequal individuals and daily interactions. This notion of the “not-unequal” seems necessary, if only in passing, to avoid a simple slide to an in sufficiently examined notion of *equality*.

Difference, Mutual Interdependence, Reciprocity: The alternative is one in which the *differences* among individuals—differences of capacity, experience, interest, etc.—are treat *as differences* and as largely *incommensurable*. Where judgements about equality or inequality demand some shared scale or measure, the recognition of difference allows us to entertain the possibility that no such shared scale exists—at least where it is not imposed. And that is a possibility that anarchist thought almost certainly needs to take quite seriously, if it is to avoid naturalizing certain kinds of social hierarchy. (Fortunately, the anarchist tradition is rich in attempts to address the *unique*.) Viewed without an already hierarchical lens, even fairly simple social interactions seem to suggest that mutual interdependence is the norm—and where interdependence is indeed mutual, it seems hard to make a strong claim for one dependent as the element that “realizes” the potential in another, unless we do so in the very non-hierarchical sense that there is a kind of *mutual* “realization” in horizontal association. At that point, however, it seems more useful to consider the dynamics of association in other terms—and it is here that Proudhon’s theory of *collective force* seems to find its field of application. That analysis, in turn, ought to help us break down what is perhaps the most stubborn instance of the polity-form—the individual human subject—as we come to terms with *reciprocity*—not in terms of some simple “equal exchange,” but, in the form that Proudhon proposed, as “the mutual penetration of antagonistic elements.” (And here, as I have suggested so often in the part, Walt Whitman joins Proudhon and Stirner as a thinker with contributions to make to our emerging analysis.)

Authority: If *hierarchy* is a structural form dependent on some kind of imposed scale or yardstick, then *authority*, understood in two related senses, is the yardstick and the rationale for its imposition. The two concepts are intertwined in the common sense of archic societies and both almost certainly represent attempts on our part to make sense of the world that we find ourselves in, starting with the intuition—correct or not—that we are surrounded by something other than a random arrangement of whatever stuff the universe is built from. We imagine a *creation*, then a *creator* and then some sort of *plan*, before attempting to make our experiences—and our own plans—conform to those imaginations. The plan—if *we could know its details*—would perhaps provide the sort of authority that could serve as a standard and measure of our projects and our differences, as well as giving evidence of an ultimate source of authority. But knowledge of that ultimate, authoritative blueprint and its author seem to be the one thing that is not offered to us by any of the major schools of thought. Searching our philosophical and religious schools, we find the hypothesis that that is no plan and no author,—and that perhaps our intuition is based doubt and projection of our own capacities;—the possibility that there is indeed a plan, but one unknowable to us; and religious the option of faith, revelation, etc., which ultimately seems to want to have it both ways where the question of knowledge is concerned. There are other options as well, but it seems fairly clear that this sort of ultimate authority has never been established according to the usual standards of evidence. And an authority that cannot establish itself authoritatively seems to be nothing but an invitation to juggling and abuse.

And it doesn't seem to matter how far we attempt to drag the meanings of *authority* from some divine or natural origin. There remains some sense that a particular kind of vision or knowledge provides a rationale for imposition of some standard, creating a duty to conform in those who lack it. And—all quibbling about “the authority of the bootmaker” aside—that doesn't seem to be a notion that anarchists can consistently embrace. Bakunin himself suggested that even perfect knowledge would have to be resisted if it came to us in forms that demanded compliance.

Influence, Attention to Authority-Effects, Vigilance: With the notions of *mutual interdependence* and the Proudhonian version of *reciprocity*, we have already guaranteed that *influence* will be an important (if generally *mutual*) factor in our understanding of social relations and that expertise will find its uses. We've simply raised the question whether any standard can show itself sufficiently self-evident to move us from the terrain of largely incommensurable *differences* to that of *inequality*. This objection to authority does not a denial of differences in individual *power*, but it does attack the means by which those differences might be naturalized and made the basis of some new, *archic* social form.

It is important to recognize the extent to which what we have previously called [authority-effects](#) can still emerge, even where the principle of authority has been rejected, simply because even the most anarchic social organization does not occur in a vacuum. There are likely to be both external, material constraints on our free associations and there are certainly no guarantees that the expertise and experience needed at any given moment will be simply given. So we will always find ourselves combining a principled opposition to the imposition of plans and standards with a vigilant concern about the kinds of accidents and externalities that might constrain some among us more than others.

This is one of the circumstances where an awareness of the dynamics of collective force is likely to be among the most important tools in our kit.

Exploitation and the Right of Escheat: What is perhaps a bit abstract when framed in terms of anti-hierarchy and anti-authoritarian theory gains considerably in practical import when we recall that Proudhon’s reimagining of *anarchy* took place in the midst of a critique of *exploitation*—a critique that he explicitly extended from the economic to the political sphere and one that we can undoubtedly extend much farther. One of the things that the analysis of exploitation provides us is a considerably more dynamic look at the consequences of *archic* organization and its power to continuously concentrate capital of various sorts in a comparative few hands. It isn’t just a question of a one-time appropriation of surplus value or even just the sum of all the individual instances of that kind of exploitation. To harness collective force against its primary producers is to provide oneself with the capacity to *tighten the screws* at various points all through the economic cycle, to transform economic wealth into political clout, etc.

- [Escheat and Anarchy](#)

Property as a Problem: Early in the period of mutualism’s reemergence, it was common in at least some of our circles to talk about “the problem of property,” acknowledging that there was a lot about the issues raised by anarchist critiques that we had perhaps not yet plumbed entirely. I think that the shift in focus toward social-scientific analysis and particularly the attention given to the dynamics of collective force have dramatically increased the questions we might raise about how best to solve that problem.

It isn’t clear that the sort of *balance-of-despotism* proposed in *Theory of Property* is well adapted to modern contexts, where the amplifying powers of collective force and the technological base are so great. For the same reasons, it isn’t clear that the familiar demand that individuals be compensated with “the full fruits of their labor” gets us very far—unless it is toward some kind of communistic arrangement, which, in turn, does not necessarily address the dangers of exploitation.

The possibility of a specifically *mutualist* property—raised by Proudhon in his last manuscripts—and, in general, the possibilities of anarchy in what I’ve called its [resultant](#) form, remain largely unexplored. But it seems likely that it is in this general direction that our explorations should turn.

- [Property, Individuality and Collective Force](#)

Limited Economy: If we were to attempt a kind of *philosophical* summary of what has been proposed so far, pulling back from the specifics of Proudhon's work or even the anarchist tradition in general, we might have recourse to something like the distinction made in Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share* between *general* and *limited economies*. *Archic* social relations are shaped by the questions that they consider answered in advance, the standards they take for granted and the structures—starting with the presence of vertical ranks—that give them their fundamental character.

General Economy: *Anarchic* social relations—taken in, as Proudhon put it, “the full force of the term”—are, on the contrary, characterized—at least in our present, largely *archic* context—by the lack of these fundamental standards and, in general, by a lack of foregone conclusions when it comes to specific arrangements. We know that *archic* arrangements seem to have failed in establishing their bona fides, but, beyond that, the positive implications seem to carry us into realms dominated by profusion and uncertainty. It is not, of course, a question of any of the real problems we face becoming any more difficult to solve. It may, in fact, be quite the opposite. But the loss of familiar certainties—even if they were of a dubious sort all along—does carry with it a range of new costs.

Anarchy—in the full force of the term—is only negative in the sense that it precludes one particular sort of social arrangement—and one related view of the world. But, of course, that worldview has been pervasive. It has shaped our major institutions and shaped us as social subjects as well.

the anarchist question

rené furth

dispersion

Anarchism is a permanent obstacle for the anarchist.

It scatters more than it gathers. It fritters away energies rather than concentrating them. It squanders its gains when what is necessary is to mobilize them for new acquisitions. Summary judgments and the remnants of old popularizations stand in for the methods of analysis and the precise knowledge that it lacks.

Instead of devoting the best part of our efforts to the struggle against capitalism and political power, we exhaust ourselves struggling to patch up and hold together our fragile means: groups, press, networks of communication. It is with great difficulty that we find the means to support ourselves on any kind of basis. The groups and organizations keep breaking up; those that take their place slip despite themselves in the ruts dug by the predecessors — unless they refuse everything, and toss and turn, for a while, this way and that.

The majority of the publications are as ephemeral as they are little known. Their theoretical basis — when there is something that resembles a theoretical basis — remains unstable and ragtag. In the best of cases, they earnestly reframe the old questions: celles those that had been forgotten for fear of the challenges. Or else they inject into the little anarchist world some elements of research and analysis done elsewhere, which is certainly useful and only too rare.

to depart or to begin again?

This complete lack of cohesion and continuity reduces the anarchist movement's powers of attraction to such a point that it can only retain a minority of the minority that traverses its sphere of influence. The numerical insufficiency contributes in turn to the limited life span of the initiatives, the poor quality of the contributions and the resorption of the exchanges.

That penury does not only concern the "specific" milieu, the groups and formations that proclaim themselves libertarian. Those who identify their practice with a libertarian perspective, without associating themselves with the milieu — precisely because they observe its deficiencies and because they are wary of the confusion that tarnishes anarchism — would have everything to gain from the existence of a living movement: information, theoretical reflection, variety of experiences, contacts, stimulants (even in polemics).

It remains to be seen whether we must stick with this admission of failure. Many have done so and have left for revolutionary tendencies that offer them greater means, a coherent theory and a more stimulating intellectual climate. Others hang on, unmoved by the confusion and fragmentation, because all that interests them is the radicality of specific, ad hoc actions or the rough outline of a lifestyle. Let's not speak of those who have ordained themselves the proprietors of an "inalienable anarchy," anarchists of divine right and guardians of orthodoxy, assiduous above all to track down the deviations not provided for in the catalog of their ideological bric-à-brac. Let's leave these dealers in second-hand goods to call the shots in their shops; the innocents who stumble in there linger less and less.

If we want to put an end to this critical situation, the question arises: is anarchism condemned by its nature to fragmentation, to outbursts with no future, to vague ideologies? If

not, can it find within itself the unifying principles that would give it strength of conviction and power to intervene?

What is serious is that these questions are so rarely posed, except by those who respond by leaving anarchism behind. They are at least implicitly at work in the attempts made by certain grounds to find their way out of the fog. The inertia of the milieu reins in these attempts and limits their duration; they nevertheless constitute a first positive element, without which it would hardly be worth the trouble of struggling with this sort of questioning.

the absence of forms

At first glance, what characterizes anarchism and its lack of continuity is the absence of forms. At all levels, we encounter the shapeless.

Its most obvious manifestation is the inevitable return — always in the same terms — of the problem of organization: the absence of forms in the relations between individuals, between groups. The proclamation of the informal is only a resignation to the unformed. We can indeed perceive that spontaneous relations are more to be valued than being stuck in a closed group, set against all others and worn out by internal conflicts. I also admit that nothing is more delusive than the formalism that consists of mapping out mighty organizational schemes and waiting for the masses to throw themselves into them, or the formalism that wears out people in the maintenance and upkeep of some bit of machinery that cannot find a use in real life. But the informal cannot be a solution, precisely insofar as the temporary and fluctuating character of this type of relations does not allow the preservation and extension of gains.

The problem of organization is, in fact, secondary. It is a question of consequence, and not of causes. No real accord is possible as long as we limit ourselves to pooling refusals, vague formulations and slogans. At the slightest debate regarding substance, the facade of unity cracks. It could hardly be otherwise: how, in the absence of some clearly defined bases, can we know what we've signed up for? Agreement on a particular point does not make up for indecision and contradictions on a variety of other questions, which remain in the shadows because no effort is made to achieve an overview. It is impossible for us to offer newcomers a comprehensive vision with which they can engage.

It is this way that the dispersion and loss reach their culmination. It has become customary — for a long time now — to carve anarchism up into little, clearly separated segments, each of which bear the marks of some popularizers. The link with the original works or the social movements that furnished the "label" is most often cut. The "individualists" know as little of Stirner as the "libertarian communists" know of Bakunin or Kropotkin. What does it matter? The founding fathers (and Stirner is one despite himself...) tended to have a general view of the problems, and a connection with the knowledges and ideas of their times. They often show themselves to be more modern than their followers.

Another purely internal and outdated criticism? It is true that a new generation of libertarians if better able to avoid arbitrary splits, by no longer separating the social revolution from the subversion of everyday life. But it pushes negligence, and even pure and simple refusal, even further as soon as it is a question of giving a coherent expression to its reasons for acting and its practice.

Even groups anxious to translate their experience into a more rigorous formulation, to widen the discussion and allow a reflection on their journey, have difficulty avoiding breaks. First, because they want to keep their distance from the anarchist milieu and, on the other hand,

because the consciousness of making an original and modern attempt tentative releases them with little thought from seeking in the past of the libertarian movement for the precedents or arguments that could support their research. So they remain engaged in a very compartmentalized activity, which prevents them from grasping as a whole the links, theoretical and practical, that connect their enterprise to the global project of the anarchist revolution.

fragments of anarchy

Another fragmentation further weakens our capacity for expression: ideas circulate very badly across borders. Few translations are made and the French, to take one example, *prendre un exemple*, are largely ignorant of the anarchist books published in German, England or Italy.

We can ask ourselves whether the dispersion results only from temporary conditions or if it is inseparable from the anarchist movement. A backwards look leaves no doubt; the multiplicity of tendencies and sub-tendencies is chronic. But this is also more a symptom than a cause. The fragmentation does not only come from loss, from the fact that, of the essential works, we only retain isolated elements, detached from the unity that gave them their true sense. The "inaugural" works are themselves fragmented. Even at its highest level, libertarian thought remains fragmentary.

In Proudhon, anarchy clearly underlies certain books (those of the period 1848-1852) more than others; it fades in some periods, or remains mixed with reactionary slag. His multiple activities, the crises of daily life divert Proudhon from ordering and clarifying his concepts, which often leads us to believe there are contradictions where there is only imprecision. Eltzbacher rightly reproaches him for his irregular and changing language. (But it is also true that a theory does not immediately create its own intellectual domain, and we have made no effort to reread Proudhon.)

What can we say about Bakunin? His work is made up mostly of unfinished books, of immoderate letters. Stirner himself, the most purely "theoretical" of the anarchists, is the man of a single book, composed of fragments: commentaries on works read, polemics, the still trembling transcription of interminable tavern discussions. Nothing is more characteristic than the title of Tucker's book: "Instead of a Book. By a man too busy to write one. A fragmentary exposition of philosophical anarchism."

More generally we can say that anarchism appears only in fragments in the life of an anarchist. It is not just a question of "crises of youth." The conditions of existence are such, and the mental pressures, and the influence of the mechanisms assembled through education, that anarchy struggles to free itself from authoritarian reflexes, intolerance and fear of liberty. It is the same for events: revolutions are anarchist in their beginnings...

The fragmentation is still more intimately connected to the nature of a current that attaches more importance to life than to thought, and has always emphasized passion, intuition and instinctive urges. "Science only deals with shadows," said Bakunin. "The living reality escapes it and only gives itself to life, which, being itself fugitive and fleeting, can and indeed always does grasp everything that lives, which is to say everything that passes or flees." The sentence could be from Stirner...

the words of the tribe

Everything leads us toward the rupture. Where would we find the unifying energy capable of susceptible gathering up the fragments, of resisting the dispersion? We lack the elementary basis for any possible cohesion: a common language. We have no language. That is why we are still always reduced to speaking of anarchism, instead of speaking as anarchists regarding today's world and the life that we lead here. How to speak as an anarchist, to speak anarchistically, is not self-evident. We employ the words of other, haphazardly, with all the misunderstanding that produces, or we use worn out, lifeless words, which drag along for generations, from pamphlet to discussion and from discussion to "incendiary" tract...

Result: we have no end of trouble making ourselves understood or even to make ourselves heard; these stammerings become truly inaudible. It is at this level that the necessity of a theorization makes itself felt every day. A theory is, first of all, a well constructed language, some clearly defined notions between which we can establish logical relations.

It is not a question of a formal procedure. Clarifying concepts implies — and calls for — a clarification of ideas and methods of analysis. This also demands on our part the confrontation of different expressions of anarchism in order to discover common forms and constants. Finally, and above all, this effort of clarification demands a labor of critical revisions and updating, since the aim is not to establish a catalog but to elaborate a language capable of grasping (for purposes of knowledge, communication and action) the present reality.

It is tempting, obviously, to simply use the categories and notions produced by systems better assimilated by those to whom we wish to address ourselves (and marxism, in particular.) And in that way it is impossible to avoid the use of a marxist (or psychoanalytic) vocabulary circulated widely through the human sciences. This is, however, a new source of confusion. This vocabulary reflects theoretical constructions whose cohesion is strong and whose imprint can divert our ideas, distort their meaning and obliterate their originality. To use the words of others without further examination is to lock ourselves within their ideology. Hence the need to examine what can be integrated into our coordinates without parasitism... and to check if our intellectual tools withstand the confrontation.

Whatever the domain envisaged, going beyond atomization requires a radical overhaul of our way of seeing and of our habits. Beneath the discontinuous, we will have to look for the continuous; beneath disorder, the forms that give cohesion and meaning to the whole. More generally, we will have to come to grasp anarchism as a global reality that refuses partial and arbitrary definitions insofar as we can identify and describe its concrete manifestations in the history and in the life of men.

a return to the sources

Even if this proposition appears absurd to the partisans of tradition and spontaneity alike, it is a question of becoming fully aware of what anarchism is, consciousness of the anarchist phenomenon: as historical movement, as current of thought, as a permanent feature of social ferment and individual emancipation.

This recasting implies a return to the sources that will allow, so to speak, the rediscovery of anarchism in its nascent state, not only in the events and works of the past, but in the actions, behaviors and writings that, today, give it a new expression.

To clarify the connections, most often explicit, that exist between the fragments, their common reason for being. Through gradual restructuring, to identify the connections in larger and larger wholes. And this is still only a prerequisite, which is insufficient to effectively merge in practice, in spontaneous consciousness, the fragments of anarchy that are accessible to us. It is useful to know what there is in common between a savage strike, a communitarian experiment, a past insurrection, a page from Proudhon and a new analysis. But the dispersion will only cease when a current of life spontaneously connects these exploded realities in order to establish between them a field of force capable of producing new impulses and ideas.

In other words: we will have a real chance of overcoming dispersion when we have reestablished an active cultural life in the anarchist milieu.

culture, counter-culture

What many among us forget — or want to ignore — is that a common culture is a powerful unifying factor. When pushed, we recognize this force of cohesion when it is a question of denouncing the dominant culture: doesn't it function to join together in a single submission, in a common "ideal," the diversity of individuals and social classes? But the fact is that it ne s'installe qu'en écrasant, en disloquant des cultures particulières. The history of colonization and its cultural imperialism furnishes no end of examples. And one discovers, finally, that there exists in France an "internal colonization," that the centralizing State is built on the ruins of regional cultures, on the crushing of differences.

The bourgeoisie ideology only extends its influence by condemning to suffocation the ideas, works and modes of life that are opposed to its principles and rules. The deviant elements that are persistent enough to resist find themselves gradually assimilated and distorted. Denouncing this process is quite insufficient. The true response consists instead of reviving, reinforcing the cultural forms thus eliminated or neutralized.

One could also respond that only the complete disruption of the capitalist system will allow the implementation of a different culture. Okay... if we do not forget that no revolution is possible outside of certain "subjective conditions" (awareness, knowledge of means and end, "capacity" in the Proudhonian sense), which are precisely cultural factors.

the state against culture

The affirmation of the liberating role of culture has long remained a constant in the workers' movement. Revolutionary syndicalism, in particular, has endeavored to put this conviction into practice. It has not only stepped forward to give militants the training (political, economic, technical) necessary to lead effective struggles and to participate, after the revolution, in the collective management of the new society, but also to develop a "producers' ethic." The very idea of a proletarian culture was to gain ground for some time: that the working class forge its own forms of expression and oppose the artistic productions of the bourgeoisie with works devoted to the life, problems and values of the proletariat.

The libertarian conception of culture was closely linked to its critique of the State. We find it expounded in all its aspects in Rocker's work (still unpublished in France) on "Nationalism and Culture:" culture and state power are two fundamentally contradictory realities; the strengthening of power inevitably calls for a regression of cultural activity, since that activity requires complete freedom of expression and respect for diversity. The stimulant of collective spontaneity is

essential for the blossoming of works suited to the needs and aspirations of the greatest number. Direct state intervention, on the contrary, paralyzes creativity through its exclusions and instructions, or else it only supports production that meets the tastes and interests of a privileged minority.

We are far, today, from such positive conceptions of culture. The word is from now on invested with a negative charge, automatically serves to repel. But if we have every reason to be wary of cultural optimism, we must also react rapidly against the automatisms that replace reflection with conditioned reflexes. (There is a leftist conditioning...) The fetishized words, whether positively or negatively charged, are as pernicious as slogans. They bypass the discussion and deny the problems instead of tackling them head on.

We must avoid, at the outset, too restrictive a definition of culture. To stick to a very general and common sense, I would say that it consists of the set of representations, symbols and works that express the moral, intellectual and aesthetic values that guide the relationships of men with the world and the relationships between men in a collectivity. Culture codifies and transmits the beliefs of the collectivity, its conception of the world, its impression of life. It inscribes itself in behavior, at best in a lifestyle.

Defined in this way, culture cannot escape the critique of ideology as developed, in particular, by Marxism. In fact, any culture is determined not only by the state of technology and knowledge at a given time, but by all the conditions of life (forces and relations of production, social and political divisions, systems of domination, etc.) It will therefore mobilize in the first place the conceptions of the classes that own and control the means of expression and dissemination. It will celebrate the values invoked to justify and preserve the established hierarchy.

toward a one-dimensional culture

A first restriction imposes itself. No culture can be considered the simple "reflection" of the economic and social infrastructure. It develops in a sphere of activity that has its own logic — often stubborn — and contains too many elements borrowed from previous forms of existence, elements that remain tightly interwoven in the more recent representations. Witness how slowly the repercussions of new scientific and technical conditions are assimilated by the collective mentality.

Furthermore, great cultural works do not constitute a simple demarcation of the given reality, or an interpretation totally structured by the dominant ideology. The work of art is an attempt at reinterpretation, often critical. Far from being limited to a justification of the forms of existence imposed by contemporary society, it generally denounces the suffering caused by these forms of existence: loneliness, failure, nostalgia for a life where the values proclaimed would actually be achieved. Even "the demand for happiness takes on dangerous accents in a system that brings distress, deprivation and pain to the majority" (Marcuse).

Culture is thus shaped by two opposing tendencies. One aims to justify the existing order, to shape collective life according to its standards, to disseminate beliefs, myths and an image of life that integrate the individual into the whole and ensure the survival of the system. The other, on the contrary, encourages criticism of what is in the name of what could be: in the name of the unrealized values, repressed desires, denied fulfillment and new possibilities opened up by the revolution of knowledge and means of action.

It is this contradiction that is in the process of eliminating what we have called "mass culture" and is, in the words of Marcuse, a one-dimensional culture. The products that they bring to the markets, intending them for mass consumption (films, television programs, records, "popular" novels, magazines) suppress contradiction and its critical ferment. The demand for happiness is reduced to the desire for well-being, the accomplishment called *standing*. There is no longer any question aspiring to the impossible: happiness is a matter of savings and payments.

The role of one-dimensional is to make the given reality appear *natural*, to show it capable of infinite progress. And if, most of the time, labor remains a matter of coercion and boredom, the margin of leisure offers compensation for that effort and that wear and tear: peace at home, vacation trips and machines that let us dream in our seats. To the passivity imposed by the conditions of labor is added the fascination with the flood of images that transform the news of the world into a soap opera. And each, according to their means, seeks to give to each in spectacular form the achievement of their existence.

What place remains for "working-class culture" in this magma that drowns particularities and the sense of reality, that veils the real conflicts? Material access to cultural in no way means effective appropriation. Works of critical culture may be sold as paperbacks, but they are only read by those who are prepared to read them. The same goes for television, where late artistic or intellectual broadcasts are seen only by "the elite."

In the end, it is no longer even necessary for the State to intervene to channel production (even if it does not hesitate to do so, on occasion, to eliminate a product that is insufficiently compliant.) The "cultural" industry itself ensures the promotion of entertaining and anesthetic goods that meet the needs of the dominant ideology.

the counter-currents

These observations, and more simply the gloomy prostration of sanitized imagery or "cultural" rites, can lead quite naturally to the rejection of anything that pertains to culture. But the sterilization cannot reach the desired degree. Against the homogenizing current of "mass culture" are opposed counter-currents, ceaselessly turned back, but which for some time at least resist the general mingling. Through books, films (often low budget), theatrical shows (often marginal), through cartoons and comics, they express what the euphoric ideology seeks to camouflage: that violence is not the privilege of a wicked few, but is inscribed in the whole of relations of domination and exploitation; that daily life, with its exhaustion and its illusory compensations, constantly reinforces isolation, aggression and fear of liberty.

These negative currents innervate what is now called a "counter-culture". For a long time, this has also remained reserved for a minority. It becomes a collective phenomenon and takes a more radical orientation: a global refusal of cultural production (except for records...), a craze for raw information, a systematic preference given to the spoken word over the written word (except when it takes the form of the *parole brute*).

Against the fetishism of the product, against the passivity of the consumer, the counter-culture affirms play, improvisation, and celebration. Against isolation, it calls for encounters at the mercy of chance and wandering, community life. Against the "moral order" (work, family, country), it extols vagabondage, sexual freedom, spontaneous cosmopolitanism, respect for life and nature, non-violence. We could go on, but this is not an inventory. What I would like to make clear is that the counter-culture acts like a culture. By rejecting the values of the dominant

culture, it affirms its own values, which are not only proclaimed, but embodied in the beginnings of a way of life.

The strength of the counter-culture is that it proceeds from a collective sensitivity and is realized in behavior. This is the sign of a living culture. Its weakness, on the other hand, lies in the scarcity of the works, in the absence of the coherent thought essential to overcoming the stammering and the vague humanitarian considerations. It thus easily becomes prey for confused mystics. Ecology itself becomes mystical, with quite a wave to the soul of returning to the earth always put back and tours of the world never undertaken.

We find the dispersion, haziness and incompetence of expression which also paralyze the anarchist movement. An additional point of convergence between anarchism and the counter-culture... It is still to be feared that their weaknesses are added more easily than their creative potential.

libertarian culture

The counter-culture is a potential culture. It can be, at least, — if it is not sooner or later recuperated by the dominant ideology — the breeding ground of a new culture.

One of the reasons for its fragility is the absence of a past. We can obviously consider that as an advantage and as an additional attraction. No constraining tradition, no stifling models, no knowledge to take in or respect. Invention can give itself free rein. Life rediscovers its spontaneity, invades forbidden playgrounds. But spontaneity is exhausted in repetition, thought ends when it is enclosed in a limited circle of ideas. Expression is frozen when it no longer finds form on which to base itself. So the counter-culture seeks a past, or pasts, by taking hold of fragments drawn from ancient cultures, preferably exotic (Buddhism, Hinduism) or from cultures crushed by white imperialism - (Africa, the Indians of the Americas) or else from marginal traditions (esotericism).

the anarchist pasts

Because it has a past, anarchism can more easily refocus and thereby find a power of resistance against dissolution in the great one-dimensional magma. Paradoxically, its past is virtual: it is still to be established...

More precisely, anarchism has two pasts. A "manifest" past, which is that of the established anarchist movement, with its patchiness and its narrow tradition, but also—a positive point, which will be discussed further—its non-conformist way of life. The defeats and disappointments, the constant internal struggles have left their legacies of mistrust and unavailability. Years of survival cut off from the world have prevented the irrigation of the milieu by modern ideas. The poverty of means and the waning of intellectual activity have dried up the resources of a tradition that was no longer mentioned except in hearsay to preserve the orthodoxy of reassessments and new inputs.

This sclerosing past has lost its grip after the recent development of a new libertarian milieu, which is very informal and still disparate. It owed little to the established "movement" and began to discover the past of anarchism as a social movement.

What we retained of it so far was too often legend embellished by nostalgia and self-justifications.

The renewed interest in anarchism and, more generally, the disruption of the stalinist and leninist hegemony draws new attention to the revolutionary movements and the socialist experiments that did not lead to the "proletarian" State. From the war in Spain (finally viewed other than through military deeds) we go back to the makhnovist movement, then to that Jurassian Federation that was the true crucible of anarchism. The centenary of the Commune has also allowed some things to be put in order.

Publications and translations multiply. New studies are published and others are in progress. Historians connected to the anarchist current take part in this work of rediscovery, with the obvious aim of identifying the original and positive aspects of the experiments that they describe, without piously leaving in the shadows what they consider to be weaknesses or errors. It would, however, be unjust to pretend that all anarchists have lacked interest in their history until recent years... Indeed, they hardly had the chance to publish their research, and that information blockade, which locked manuscripts and documents in desk drawers, was enough to stifle burgeoning careers. Even published books, like Voline's *The Unknown Revolution*, do not escape the little circle of initiates.

read, comrade

This past is still virtual: both because it is in large part still to be brought to light and because it is not yet active. It will be active from the moment that it exerts its influence on our thinking and our behavior. This implies an intermediate stage: moving from fragmentary rediscovery to the reconstruction of the whole. At the point where we are, the stages of our history which reappear are still too exclusively those of heroic periods. Publishing, even when it is somewhat marginal, does not escape the laws of the market. By force of circumstances, we publish what is most likely to sell. In the history of the Makhnovstchina or the Durruti column there is an epic, "western" side that can appeal to a large number of readers. And, a bit more seriously, the unknown aspects of the Russian Revolution or the achievements of self-management in Spain appeal to a relatively large fraction of the leftist public or simply the left. As for the exploits of the Bonnot gang or of Marius Jacob, they can boast of the suspense and the quaint elements so dear to detective novels.

We must note the thing without lamenting it too much. It is good that these books can appear and that they come to break the wall of silence (and of falsification) deliberately maintained by the Stalinist "historians." Even the history of illegalism — not to mention the exceptional personality of a Jacob — sheds light on certain nihilist tendencies of anarchism, and therefore on anarchism itself.

What is in question is the still incomplete nature of the "disinterment," first with regard to the periods chosen, but also at the level of the method of approach. By limiting ourselves to a particular series of events, we often give up on making comparisons between it and other anarchist interventions. What is important for us is a global view of libertarian social movements, with their lines of force, their constants and their interferences. It is indeed a question of reconstruction and not partial descriptions.

I believe, moreover, that such a work can only be carried out in a truly fruitful manner by libertarian historians. I do not doubt the honesty of researchers who are not "committed." We can often even recognize in them more than honesty: a real passion for their subject. But I expect more from anarchist historians. Let them go beyond the reconstruction of the facts, to see what sort of anarchism is at work in the events they are studying, what it brings that is new or

particular compared to the anarchisms that preceded it, and what identity persists beneath the variations.

I do not wish to open a debate here on objectivity in history. But I hope that the history of the anarchist movement will be for us more than “historiography”, that it will really be a past questioned in the light of our present. A past that, at the limit — and this limit is inevitable — changes with our present, according to the lights and shadows that our concerns, our intuitions and our projects throw on it.

Let us go farther. The facts are nothing in themselves. They do not “speak” until they are illuminated by the meaning of a coherent whole. It is precisely through their sensibility and libertarian consciousness that a historian can establish new links between facts, give a common sense — or just a sense — to events that have thus far remained disparate and “silent”. Must we specify that such an understanding has nothing to do with a manipulation of history according to the needs of a *line* to be defended or revised?

the history of ideas

The reconstructing of our past will only be complete, will even only be possible on the condition of integrating the history of ideas into the history of events. I am not thinking only of the ideas formulated by the men and groups involved in the events that we study. That goes without saying. It is also necessary to address the theories developed in a certain of works presenting themselves as libertarian or claimed as their own by libertarians. It is, quite simply, a question of making a history of anarchist philosophy.

In this regard, we find ourselves almost totally destitute. Doubtless, there are useful works on Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin. We owe them, almost always, to authors foreign to the libertarian movement ... and in general we do not take them into account. (What attention have we shown to Gurvitch's, Ansart's or Bancal's books on Proudhon, or to Arvon's book on Stirner?)

Even more than in the domain of social history, the reconstitution must here be a reconstruction, if not simply a construction. The relations to be identified are multiple. It will be necessary to study the influences of social movements on the works, and vice versa; to situate each work among the intellectual productions of its time. Truth be told, two types of history of anarchist philosophy are possible — and necessary. The first would describe the “systems,” their intellectual and sociological circumstances. The second — a more subjective and, properly speaking, a more philosophical work — would start from current thought to reread (in the sense of reinterpreting) the founding texts. Such a rereading could lead, to give one simple example, to rejecting Stirner in the name of Bakunin, or Bakunin in the name of Stirner; it could also assimilate both in the name of a single existential revolt against the System. We have to rewrite anarchism.

The interest, for us, to unearth old tomes? First of all, they are not all to be unearthed, as some are carefully arranged in publishers' stocks (Rivière's Proudhon, for example.) These old books are first of all testimonies, attempts to draw from consciousness and give form to proposals for transforming the real. That reality, we can agree, is no longer ours. Or no longer quite ours... But what certainly remains, what deserves examination and discussion, is the spirit in which the critiques and the proposals were formulated.

If there exists (at least virtually) an anarchist theory, studying its genesis and its transformations is a way of grasping it.

To deny is amount to the same thing as rejecting the history of the revolutionary movement under the pretext that only the present interests us.

There is more. Behind each book stands an individual, who fought to change the world they lived in, to find other forms of life and of relations. To condemn those individuals to oblivion or to pious dismissal, is to agree with those who sought to reduce them to silence during their lifetimes; with those who, after their deaths, have distorted their thoughts or actions in order to eliminate their influence. Regarding Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin himself, many — among us too — settle for the considerations of Marx and his followers. Giving a fair and credible image of anarchism also means showing that anarchists have said and done something else, and that what they have said still provides us with the means to understand our world and to act in it.

a lifestyle

Through the reactivation of its past, anarchism can recover its culture. The diversified activity that this renaissance entails will in itself constitute an invigorating factor of cultural life. The aim of the operation, of course, is not to be able to bring a bookish knowledge into line with our antecedents. It is above all a matter of knowing ourselves better, of reintegrating into our field of consciousness the values, dreams and ideas that have made anarchism a historical reality.

Libertarian culture, however, has other sources and other manifestations. An active past is a past mobilized by and for a present activity. A culture, to come back to the initial definition, only becomes reality if it permeates mentalities and behavior, if it is embodied in the lifestyle of a community. On this level, at least, libertarian culture has held up quite well. Anarchism was formed and developed in the struggle against all oppressions and all alienations. In the most diverse conditions, it has manifested consistent conduct: primacy granted to direct action, confidence in spontaneity (individual or collective), a refusal of means that contradict the aims and a desire to simultaneously change the world and life.

This consistency is not due solely to the permanence of a "revolutionary tradition." It is above all the effect of a fundamental will to liberty that produces homologous reactions in a variety of situations.

What applies to collective struggles also applies to personal existence: rejection of domination and submission, attempts at a way of life freed from taboos, independence of judgment and decision. It was logical that anarchism was the revolutionary tendency whose attention was most immediately directed to everyday life. The presence of an individualist current, skeptical of the possibilities of a future social upheaval and all the more concerned with short-term liberations, strongly contributed to orient the anarchist milieu in this direction.

The struggle against repressive sexual morality, birth control, the search for a non-authoritarian pedagogy thus inscribed anarchist values in the forms of practical life. These were not just propaganda themes; they were also more than hypotheses to be experimented with: a way of life developed, education was spontaneously carried out in daily contacts. The meeting between the libertarian culture and the new counter-culture takes place in the most natural way on this level. We find this overlap even in attempts at communitarian life (which had already encountered the same difficulties in the days of *milieux libres*...)

So the existence of a libertarian culture, with its own values, with its accumulated ideas and experiences, with its particular sensibility and way of life, does not seem to me to be contestable. I would even add that, like every culture, it has an integrative function. It imbues individuals with the convictions and aspirations of the anarchist collectivity, leads them to assimilate the

means of understanding, of communication and of specific intervention, and it inserts then into the community.

There is no reason to refuse this natural and necessary process, if the culture in question expresses and puts to work these essential resources of anarchism which are questioning, insubordination, a critical spirit and the will to personal achievement. What is really problematic is the form taken by libertarian culture: its gaps, its losses of substance, its weakening and its aging. It is precisely because it is not in a position to fulfill its function of integration that we are reduced to dispersion.

a dominated culture

One could ask if the integration process does not insidiously go beyond the purpose that I attribute to it. The insertion of a momentum of revolt in the forms of an anarchist culture could well constitute a first step, a mediation, in a process of recuperation for the benefit of (dominant) Culture.

The first point to consider — and I have already touched on this in passing — is the fact of dominated cultures. To extend its hegemony, the state system must abolish the distinctive characteristics, the non-institutionalized collective links that prevent it from having a direct hold on the “citizen”: historical communities (voluntarily or forcibly melted into the “nation”), regional languages, class consciousness. The mold of compulsory education, the control of the media, not to mention the sacrosanct military service, aim to create a normalized individual, cut off from their concrete attachments.

Libertarian culture is subject to the same flattening as the cultures of the provinces or colonized countries. The mechanism of repression operates from day to day, according to the logic of the system, without even the need for visible interventions. The gaps in official history, the silences of the news media and the closure of access to the means of dissemination do their job quite naturally. Let us add, for anarchism, that the whole apparatus of conditioning renders minds unreceptive to ideas that put freedom first. In the end, the weakening of the currents thus neutralized does the rest.

Yet another factor has contributed to the stifling of anarchist culture. As dogmatic Marxism has gained the status of dominant ideology in the revolutionary movement, it has imposed a falsified image of anarchism. It has thus come to reinforce very effectively the repression exercised by bourgeois culture.

It is now a question of reversing the proposition. If the dominant ideology must crush particular cultures in order to reduce the individual to the stage of an atomized element, cut off from any autonomous community and any divergent tradition, the reactivation of a refractory culture can be a very effective leaven of resistance. Without doubt, it will be influenced by established ways of thinking and imposed living conditions. But it will suffer them all the less to the extent that it is supported by a clearer consciousness of its difference.

social life

The return of an anarchist cultural dynamism should stimulate the counter-currents, which would feed it in return. We come back to the earlier question: is this not a participation in global cultural life, and therefore indirectly participation in the renewal of the dominant culture?

We cannot simply reduce the cultural life of a society to its dominant culture. One of the essential ideas of libertarian sociology is the opposition between the State and social life (society), the State being considered a parasitic excrescence capturing the energies of society and focusing them according to the interests of a minority.

The battle against the State cannot be limited to an action of opposition and contestation; it also demands a permanent effort to reinforce, on all planes, social spontaneity and the collective capacity for initiative and autonomous organization. (I have developed this idea at greater length in *Formes et tendances de l'anarchisme*.) The same is true for cultural activity, which springs from a collective need, a spontaneous tendency in social life. Again, we must not forget that the multiplication of state interference and the extension of ideological apparatuses intertwine the statist and the social much more closely than at the time when the first anarchist analyzes (of liberal origin) were developed.)

So it is not a question of rejecting cultural life as a whole, but of preventing as much as possible its diversion, its alienation by ideological apparatuses. The best way is still to reinforce as much as possible the counter-currents, the anti-authoritarian tendencies, by giving them means of expression and grounds of confrontation, by radicalizing them with an anarchistic consistency. If regional cultures are already perceived as a danger, a source of division and non-conformity, the existence of a revolutionary culture, born of the struggle against capitalism and the State, constitutes a permanent risk of insubordination and deviation.

Foundation

The arguments for a libertarian culture are limited in scope. Their interest consists above all in defining a possible field of action, in bringing together on a more explicit basis those who feel the need for continued intellectual activity. Only a vibrant and diverse cultural life will be able to create a real force of conviction by drawing a growing number of individuals to places where “something will happen”: discussions, study days, editorial boards, etc.

points of reference

It is futile to seek to revive an intellectual activity if all its manifestations have dried up. We can coordinate, intensify, but not begin from nothing. Despite the dispersion, despite the occultation of the anarchist tradition, we can graft new contributions onto the fragments of anarchy that have remained alive.

The work of questioning and updating undertaken by the review [*Noir et Rouge*](#) is still recent, and can be continued. [*Anarchisme et Non-Violence*](#) reaches a circle of readers little marked by the old anarchist milieus and its concerns can take hold directly on the "counter-culture"; its working methods and approach to relations can be extended to other groups or publications. In [*Recherches libertaires*](#) (I also cite my own ties...) we tried, with modest means and intermittent perseverance, to at least maintain an awareness of the shortcomings and a conviction regarding a possible renewal. [*ICO*](#) (“Informations, correspondances ouvrières”), whose references are to the socialism of the councils rather than to anarchism, remains an active meeting point where discussions and exchanges of information continue. Let us not forget *La Tour de feu*, some issues of which (“Salut à la tempête”, “Artaud”, etc.) represented the counter-culture well at a time when it was hardly mentioned. The reflection on anarchism has also continued in personal works. That of [Charles-Auguste] Bontemps, for example, who in the elaboration of his “social

individualism" has always been concerned with the rigor of the foundations and the persistence of an anarchist intellectual life. Or that of Guérin, announcing — and stimulating — this current of ideas that is now rediscovering anarchism starting from Marxism.

Another notable sector of our cultural activity is the historical studies undertaken by certain of our comrades on the stages of the anarchist movement, on pedagogical experiments, etc.

Research on anarchism once against becomes an anarchist research. The CIRA (Centre international de recherches sur l'anarchisme) can become an essential link in the network of exchanges since it allows not only the circulation of documents but also information on the works in progress and contacts between those engaged in them.

With regard to the established anarchist movement (I am speaking of its situation in France), we can consider as positive the renunciation of the illusion of a single organization whose basis of agreement is the vagueness of common principles and the flight from substantive discussions.

The formation of groups based on "ideological" and tactical unity presents at least the one advantage the we are entitled to expect from them: a clear definition of their bases and the elucidation of the tradition on which they claim to be founded. The need for clarification seems to be recognized, since there was talk some time ago about organization-to-organization dialogue. It remains to be seen under what conditions it will be done, and whether the absence of a sufficiently developed language will not cloud the confrontation.

In the end, within the limits that I have already noted, we can count on the contagion of the "counter-culture". The clarification that is taking place in the movement of ideas that emerged from May 68 may become another component of our cultural life, insofar as spontaneist agitation and its systematic anti-intellectualism are beginning to give way to the demand for theoretical reflection and more in-depth information on the currents that have come together in leftism.

This panorama will appear very optimistic after the admission of bankruptcy in my first chapter. It is, in part, a matter of perspective. Yes, there were living cells that endured in the atrophied tissue of anarchism. The irrigation is now better, and new cells have come to graft themselves on what remains. But we still haven't found the forms (theoretical structures, communication networks) that would allow us to unify and assimilate the disparate material of the anarchist revival.

the anarchist tradition

This is why I insisted so much on the need to first identify the forms produced by anarchism in its genesis and its evolution. To take up against a word I used despite an apparent contradiction, it is about reconnecting with the anarchist tradition. If a tradition is sclerotic, it is because the community that claims it is sclerotic.

A living community, in permanent evolution, has an active tradition (in the same sense in which I spoke of an active past.) If we content ourselves with bringing to light fragments of our past, we will end up at best creating a mosaic of information, a fragmented knowledge. A tradition, on the contrary, retains and nourishes everything that lets itself melt into its organic unity.

However, we have not escaped the paradox. Tradition implies transmission, continuity, available funds. While we have yet to invent our tradition... A tradition is always in the process of transformation. Some of its elements are falling into disuse, others are unearthed and reactivated. Links are made which were not given at the start. Connections are established between different stories. Stirner is introduced into the anarchist current by his posterity.

Kropotkin places Fourier at the source of libertarian socialism, and as a function of Fourier's current "return" we can expect an imminent injection of his ideas into modern anarchism. These processes of appropriation can also carry much further in time: Etienne de la Boétie, Epicurus, Lao-Tzu... A living tradition is a conquering tradition.

The reestablishment of certain connections prompts us to reconsider some renunciations. The libertarian communist groups are tempted to assert that they owe Proudhon nothing. No doubt they are far from the People's Bank. But libertarian sociology is the essential work of Proudhon and we all remain dependent on his hypotheses and analyzes. Rather than concentrating on some of his utopian constructions, we should re-examine — and reuse — his methods of analysis, his dialectics. Let us not forget either that the theory and practice of self-management have solid roots in Proudhon. Not to mention his influence on Bakunin, on the anti-authoritarian current of the First International (even if the "collectivists" had to fight "proudhonian" reformists there.) Likewise, non-violent anarchists deny Tolstoy and more readily attach themselves to Gandhi,... who himself owes much to Tolstoy,... who himself was marked by Proudhon.

This is not a genealogy undertaken for fun. The interest of the thing is to discover what is implicit in our positions and what are the lines of cohesion. The search for unity comes through the search for foundations. But this is still only one aspect of the real foundational work, which for us takes place in the present. The anarchist past is not lacking in disparity or inconsistency. Our reading of the past will therefore also depend on the consistency that we have introduced into our current ideas, these two structuring efforts constantly sending us from one to the other.

And as soon as we tackle the shaping of our ideas for the present, we find ourselves confronted with the stream of modern intellectual life.

communication networks

We would again be the losers if the "rereading" was done to the detriment of a "reading" of the present: a theoretical interpretation of the new forms of alienation and of the fight against alienation, a confrontation with the theoretical research that is developing around us. The libertarian movement will be animated by an effective cultural life when all these processes are intimately linked, when we can approach the intellectual life of the moment with the knowledge originally acquired by our tradition and re-examine our past with both acquired knowledge and current experiences.

We will arrive at this degree of "mobilization" in stages (if we arrive there at all...), through a collective work that will require great diversification. So there is a new risk of dispersal. We could only remedy this by increasing the overlaps, by forming teams based on common interests, on synergies or interactions. Here again, we will be hampered by our small number and our geographical dispersion.

The first condition, and the most stimulating, will be to multiply the number of encounters, using all the means of communication at our disposal (including the means of transportation...). Periodicals will be needed so that everyone can be kept abreast of other research, and so that all of this output can be used and discussed. At a more spontaneous level, we can envision networks of correspondence (relayed if necessary by newsletters) that would announce projects, provide information on the research and maintain the more informal discussion.

Above all, it will be necessary to create meeting places and times, where contacts would be established beyond the limits of organizations or particular sectors of intervention. I do not see these meetings primarily as "seminars" or "colloquia" (which I do not exclude, far from it), but

as crossroads where the exchange of ideas would take place as current events (significant events or actions taken) dictate.

The interest of these "cultural centers" would be to be independent of "organizations", whose exclusivity and rivalries are not very conducive to unprejudiced encounters.

So much the better if each group hosts its own intellectual activity. But to set up cultural networks, it is much better to start from personal relationships and affinities, communities of interest or relations that certain groups maintain between themselves according to the needs of short-term actions. Nothing would, of course, prevent the members of an organization from participating in these contacts.

One could object that it is, once again, to remain informal. The forms — when there is a need for forms — would be determined by the tasks pursued: debates to be prepared, journals to be published, editing, etc. And, in any case, it is a question of allowing precisely those forms (theoretical structures, language, cultural ramifications) to emerge that could provide a *raison d'être* and some transparency to the formalization of relations.

Here I would like to leave the field of hypotheses and proposals, in order to jump into that of utopia (or even the science fiction dear to many of us.) These networks could give themselves a center, or centers (let us remain federalists), points of interference and passage, places for permanent meetings. Friendly bookstores are already playing this role. More is needed: access not only to recent books but also to older or rarer documents with reduced print runs. And above all the possibility of working on site, alone or with others, of living for a while at the "center", of meeting people there. Scattered teams would meet there, meet other teams, take and give the "news". Let us add — why skimp? — means of publishing, and one more step will lead us to a community built around an activity of publishing and printing (some American communities live on the publication of a newspaper.)

Finally, community or not, we would have there a nerve center for the libertarian movement, at once memory and factor of invention, laboratory and good hostel, in short, to return to science fiction, a "powerhouse." A Foundation.

overture

The "program" that I have just outlined is the result of great optimism. I will invoke in favor of optimism the current extension of an anti-authoritarian movement in all aspects of life and I will recall the historical precedents. The anarchist movement has already experienced periods of intellectual turmoil, which indicates that it is not congenitally insane.

That said, the proposed program is tainted with a primary weakness: it is the work of a single individual. This is common in anarchist milieu, but that is no reason to put up with it. From my point of view, like that of *Anarchisme et Non-violence*, these notes are therefore intended first of all for the discussion of the reasons and the modalities of a cultural activity. From there, we will see if a "common program" is possible, not in the form of a manifesto in x points, but as a coordination of actions already initiated or at least planned.

To prevent this debate (and the expectation of debate is another proof of optimism) from starting with misunderstandings, I would like to put some of my positions in perspective. The negative and dissolving tendencies of anarchy prevail by force of circumstances over its positive and creative tendencies. To really bring into play the dialectic between one and the other, it seems necessary to me to reinforce the latter, and I have oriented my remarks in this direction. This does not mean that I wish to eliminate the negative.

The search for unity. — I do not believe that a re-reading of anarchism (as a social movement, as an intellectual tradition) can lead to a single theory. An anarchist "system" is unthinkable, but we can at least consider a systematization, always open to questioning and new contributions. It would already be a big step forward if we found face to face — with all the contradictions and interferences that entails — with well-structured and well-informed theories.

A thought centered on the idea of freedom ("it is the emptiness of the hub that makes the wheel turn" said Lao-Tzu) is inevitably led to plurality, because it cannot base its orthodoxy on any authoritarian body, even of a "scientific" nature, that would distinguish between the straight line and heresies. But we can interrogate each theory regarding its consistency and the value of its information.

Theorization and culture. — We have such a delay to make up for that shaping one or more theories will necessarily be a long-term project. It is the theorization that is to be immediate. It has as a condition a plural intellectual activity that must be able to inscribe itself in a diversified cultural life. I have particularly mentioned the "founders" here, but cultural life implies the circulation of much more varied texts: works relating to testimony or rage, imagination or the lampoon. Déjacque, Darien and Cœurderoy will have their say. Biographies, memoirs, books filled with souvenirs maintain the traces of the "lived tradition." The very multiplicity of small, ephemeral publications is not a cause of weakness and loss if there exists a current of clarification and unification that can serve as a relay and a stimulus.

Finally, there has been a lot of talk in these notes about work, effort, elaboration, etc. It is true that there is a lot to do, but we will do it all the better if we do not forget the pleasure of encounters and discoveries, the taste for exploration and experiment, curiosity and receptiveness. A cultural life is largely made up of those things.

"External" ideas. — The "reinvention" of an original tradition in no way means a return to a vacuum. We recognize a spontaneous anarchy on the plane of action: regardless of any anarchist label or any filiation, certain interventions in social movements or in daily life manifest the logic of a libertarian struggle. It is time to recognize that the same is true of thought and cultural activity. We have no more monopoly on libertarian expression than on libertarian action, even if it is up to us to develop to the end the anarchist logic of certain attitudes or certain ideas.

Particularly incandescent "fragments of anarchy" have been emitted by the surrealists, and quite recently by the situationists. After the war, existentialism released a current of ideas that had clear libertarian components. The anarchists have gone right past surrealism as if nothing had happened. (A regular collaboration of the surrealist group with the *Libertaire* group began in the early fifties ... but the newspaper was already in the hands of "revisionists.") Existentialism has been no better understood — and even the sponsorship that Stirner could give it has been of no consequence.

Situationist ideas have had a more direct impact, as they have had on the whole of the authoritarian movement (even if the mark often remains superficial); but as regards the official spheres of the anarchist "movement", they above all triggered a panicked reaction and helped to ripen one of the periodic schisms of the F. A. (1967).

I am sticking here to clearly marked cross-currents, in order to go quickly. Each group, each individual, according to their own coordinates, can be led to look for their references outside of the tradition. No limit, except that of internal cohesion, can be opposed to the absorption, by an anarchist theory, of substances and radiations useful for its growth and vitality.

Order and progress. — It is above all from the anti-authoritarian movement of recent years that anarchism will draw its energies for the time being. Such a process of assimilation calls in

return for questioning. But anarchism carries within itself the impetus for its own questioning. Its negative and dissolving tendencies are unlikely to lose their vigor with cultural revival. Contestation, the will to rupture, the temptation of particularism and fragmentation, the rejection of everything given and the passionate impulses are inseparable from anarchism. No tradition, however flexible and evolving, can avoid questioning, least of all in an anarchist environment. The drying up of cultural life, and not its demand for form and continuity, leads to the sclerosis of tradition. The effort of construction and unification does not suppress negativity; on the contrary, it directs the destructive tendencies towards their true aim: the "old world", its ideology and its apparatuses of domination.

The anarchist question — since we must speak about it once again in closing — awaits a practical answer. Prove movement by walking. Reappropriation and assimilation only take on their meaning and effectiveness in a new production: the development of a language through precise analyses and experiments in communication, the extension, in our writings, of writings passed down or recognized.

I list here two particular steps, because they can be undertaken immediately, with all of the incomplete, approximate and provisional character that our situation will lend to them (as evidenced by this text...) The more-or-less groping and erratic search for a new kind of life also continues its course, with a first effort (part of the "underground" press) to achieve expression.

This attempt at communication, which is itself in search of antecedents, should naturally converge with that which derives from the written word.

We can hardly say more. I have tried to indicate some necessary steps, some starting points and some potentialities. The concrete forms of our cultural life will take shape along the way, each stage being able to open up, for the stage to come, possibilities that were unforeseen until then.

[WEEK THREE NOTES]

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK FOUR READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Tradition

I've decided to skip "Notes" this week and devote the time to other projects. (So if, for example, you were interested in 175 installments of anarchist writing, fiction and memoir, on exile in New Caledonia, I've at least provided the [bibliography](#).) The post on An-Anarchy has elicited some passionate responses, but they have mostly been of the "after the horse has bolted" gate-keeping variety. And while it is true that even those conflicts have their uses — C'est du choc des idées que jaillit la lumière and all that — some kinds of light are considerably less likely to provide much clarity for our particular purposes here.

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Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. — Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)

Anarchism is a permanent obstacle for the anarchist. — René Furth, "The Anarchist Question" (1972)

We've started with a rather complicated collection of remarks on *anarchy*. For the purposes of my *construction*, I'll be emphasizing anarchy in social relations as a matter of strict horizontality or absence of hierarchies. But the sense of much that has been said so far is that anarchy is not the sort of concept that can be conceptualized once and for all, requiring instead repeated reformulations in evolving contexts. We'll be continuing to explore the ways in which we not only can, but perhaps must "make our own anarchy" as we "make anarchy our own." Part of that exploration will involve an encounter with *individualism* in a few weeks, but right now we have to address the fact that what Marx said about "making history" (no doubt in the most *materialist* sense) is also true of *making sense of history*, as we turn to the question of (collective) *anarchist tradition*.

(We'll get to the question of just now *nightmarish* the weight of that tradition might be or what sort of *obstacle* it might pose to anarchists, but first let's see if we can present tradition in a somewhat kinder light.)

In the "Notes on the Approach," I described *tradition* as "[a] kind of approximation, subject to competition, reevaluation, revision and ... ongoing synthesis." In "[Extrications: History, Tradition, Theory](#)," I described it as "a loose bundle of narrative elements likely to be invoked when anarchists, or relatively well-informed others, talk about anarchist theory and practice"—before going on to explore the relations between history, tradition and theory in considerably more detail. Rather than repeat that material here, I encourage folks to read that essay carefully. And for the purpose of the current *construction*, picking up the discussion there of the various kinds of *anarchy-talk*, let's just say this:

☞ The *anarchist tradition* is, in its *actual* form, simply the ensemble of all that anarchists are saying about anarchism or anarchist ideas in any given moment, together with whatever share of historical anarchist utterances remain *active* in some sense in anarchist discourse. It is not a *sum* or *resultant*. We cannot count on it to “add up” in any very consistent sense. Indeed, we expect that it would exhibit considerable conflict and inconsistency, assuming we could somehow make all of its elements simultaneously present to consciousness. It is what we might call, following Proudhon, a work of *collective reason*. As part of what that means is that we don’t really expect to find all of it in any one head.

At the end of our exploration, those who wish to will presumably propose their own sense of *anarchism* as a *concept*. But anarchism is also various other things, other *phenomena*, which together form the environment and context for projects like the present one and which any fresh conceptualization of anarchism will have to confront. As we’ve already noted, there is no question of starting our conceptualizations and constructions “from scratch.” Our anarchism may end up being an *affirmation*, *modification* or *rejection* of other anarchisms that are present among the elements of the current state of anarchist tradition, but it will almost certainly be one of those things.

There is, of course, much more that might be *activated* through our explorations. Just as we can’t help but know that we are not the first to make the effort to “be an anarchist,” we can hardly help but sense that the anarchist past contains a great deal about which we can simply have no very informed opinion. Elements come and go from the active, current mix, responding to changes within the anarchist milieu, so that ideas or views that were quite central to the anarchist tradition of another time and place may be largely unknown in the present and new concerns may burst suddenly into anarchist discourse. And the more we sense the richness of the resources not currently in use, the more we have to suspect that incorporating them might then lead us on to still other resources that have, at present, only a kind of *virtual* relation to the *actual* anarchist tradition.

We end up with choices to make about how far afield we are going to look for possible pieces of our own anarchist theory, what breadth (in terms of applications and ideologies) and what depth (in terms of history, languages, etc.) we are prepared to explore in our engagement with tradition, and how much energy we are prepared to bring to the task of activating elements of the anarchist past presently on the margins or outside the scope of the anarchist tradition. Those choices should logically be shaped by our present circumstances and needs, including our degree of comfort with the anarchist tradition as we experience it and our sense of the adequacy of existing anarchist theory.

I have quite obviously chosen to embrace a very broad and deep conception of anarchist tradition—and those of you who have decided to ramble with me through the “lost continent” of early anarchist history don’t have much choice but to accept that breadth and depth as conditions of the joint exploration. It should already be clear that my own choices are driven by a sense that *synthesis*, across both ideological currents and the divisions of time and place, is necessary for the development of anarchist ideas. But it is important to note that an expansive conception of anarchist tradition does not in any way commit *you* to that position or to agreement with any of the elements, familiar or unfamiliar, that you choose to explore. The scope of tradition recognized involves a choice of what you are prepared to account for or, in the defense of your conceptualizations, to be accountable for.

Those who believe that answers to questions about anarchist theory should only draw from a narrow tradition, made up of presumably tried-and-true elements, might have a practical point, provided we think that the need for new exploration really isn't that great. But I expect that a deep faith in the tried-and-true is not something to be taken for granted among those willing to take on the sort of itinerary we've mapped out.

Still, there are limits to how far afield it is practical to go—and these questions regarding anarchist theory are presumably of some practical concern for most of us. So it probably makes sense for participants to be on the lookout, particularly when we turn to the rapid survey of the anarchist past, for elements and episodes that look particularly promising. In my own case, I eventually found, after decades of rather unfocused exploration, that the issues that seemed most pressing to me involved the concept of *anarchy*—at which point my task became that of finding some useful way back to present concerns, starting from Proudhon and his “barbaric yawp,” *je suis anarchiste*. Others will find other points of emphasis and plot out other itineraries for their individual research. But my hope is that the process of looking over my shoulder as I continue to come to terms with my truly expansive conception of the anarchist tradition will both suggest resources that might not otherwise have come to mind and mark out some excursions as not worth more than a second-hand experience, while providing at least a sketch-map of the anarchist past.



☞ *Tradition*, then, is something given as soon as we make the attempt to “be an anarchist.”

We can make choices about how we will think about anarchist tradition, but we can hardly avoid thinking about it, even if it is just to attempt to somehow strike out on our own and “be anarchists” in some entirely novel way. And even then we might be forced to recognize that our attempt to break free of a given conception of anarchist tradition simply amounts, from a less individual perspective, to our contribution to the collective work from which tradition arises. The next would-be anarchist to come along would confront an anarchist tradition — in this very general sense — shaped by our rebellion, but would face the confrontation nonetheless.

The question becomes whether this amounts to some kind of failure, whether in the structure of anarchism as *-ism* and collective identity or in our individual practice in relation to it. If, as Marx suggested, accumulated tradition “weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”—and I don't think we can easily dismiss the possibility—is there some way to do without?

Marx seems to have envisioned a sort of eventual clean break, beyond which the nightmare would disappear and the brains of the living would express themselves in something like a “new language.”

...the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.

There's some “end of history” stuff involved in his vision of the new revolution:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world

history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.

There's certainly something appealing, potentially freeing about the approach: "let the dead bury their dead." But in order to judge its lasting utility, we probably have to account for the sense in which it marks a *beginning*, as well as foreseeing an end. The "Eighteenth Brumaire" is not "the Manifesto," but these passage still have a manifesto-like quality, marking a moment in which revolutionary change is presumably on the verge of occurring.

We've emphasized all of the uncertainty and potential packed into the moment when Proudhon first declared himself an anarchist. We should note here that, beyond the possibilities packed into the declarations themselves, we are also witnessing there an anarchist expression unconstrained by a consciously anarchist tradition. Indeed, one of the things that tends to confuse us about Proudhon—and many of the other early anarchists—is the extent to which they not yet speaking the new language that we would inherit from them as the language of a tradition. For Proudhon in 1840 and for Marx in 1852, new things are emerging—and it is possible to imagine "forgetting the native tongue" of a pre-revolutionary world. For us, however, things look different. Not only have the language and traditions of the old world not been forgotten, but the revolutionary movements of the 19th century have contributed their own traditions, which now weigh on the minds of the living in their own way.

One reason for embracing an expansive conception of the anarchist tradition is to connect ourselves, in whatever ways we can, not just to "our end" of that tradition, but also to its earliest beginnings. If we were committed to a transformation of the sort that Marx described, then there would be very little choice but to think of our whole tradition as a matter of beginnings drawn out across centuries (or to retreat, I suppose, to some ideological fantasy about our own advances and the false consciousness of others.) And we can see the desirability, perhaps even the necessity of eventually attaining some degree of forgetfulness of the language of *archy*. The more difficult question is how to deal with the weight of specifically anarchist tradition. There doesn't seem to be any question of forgetting the language of *anarchy*, which is at once traditional and still in the process of formation. So "let the dead bury their dead" is arguably not going to suffice for us.

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For an alternative, perhaps it makes sense to turn to figures closer to our own situation. Among the elements that have seemed worth attempting to *activate* through research and commentary, the various discussions of renewing and reconstructing anarchism have often topped my own list. There was an international flurry of such activity in the 1920s, which produced the ideas about synthesis that will be the focus of next week's post, which, if not precisely remembered, is closely enough related to the emergence of *platformism* that it at least comes as no surprise. The post-'68 French discussions that produced Furth's "The Anarchist Question" are less well-known, but should, again, come as no surprise when we encounter them.

When I first encountered Furth's essay, I was immediately struck by the bold opening line: "Anarchism is a permanent obstacle for the anarchist." The course it follows is perhaps not the one we would expect, based on that beginning—and the greater value may be in the development, rather than the inaugural provocation—but I will confess that the line has stuck with me, in part because I'm not entirely certain how the remainder of the essay addresses it.

Having already present anarchist tradition as a kind of inescapable constraint on new anarchist thought, anarchism as “permanent obstacle” is no great leap. But the insistence on *permanence* is interesting, particularly given all that follows.

It rang vague bells, as well—although it took me a while to make the connection. I had stumbled on Furth’s essay after encountering his name in the pages of *Recherches Libertaires*, where he had discussed the *individualisme social* of Charles-Auguste Bontemps. That led me to a fascinating debate about renewing the anarchist tradition and ultimately to “The Anarchist Question.” Furth’s essay was striking enough to distract me from Bontemps for a while, but when I returned to works like “Synthesis of an Evolving Anarchism,” which is among this week’s suggested readings, and “Anarchism and Evolution,” it was hard to miss the ways in which *permanence* was also featured in those writings. *But what curious ways...* In the latter essay, under the header “Permanence of Anarchism,” we find the following (somewhat roughly translated for now):

...The elaboration of anarchism has never presented its views as immutable certainties. Our opponents should realize that its fundamental anti-dogmatism protects it from this nonsense...

Anarchism is revolt and freedom. Its steadfast pursuits exonerate it from its temporary mistakes. It is endlessly made and unmade. It always desires to be unfinished so that it may always be alive. In this sense, the future belongs to it; it does not stray from its path. This must be for us a reason to refrain from believing that we will see the end of the road...

Throughout the writings of Furth and Bontemps, the “permanence” of anarchism seems to be very hard to distinguish from a kind of impermanence, with all the endless making and unmaking, all the attention given to reconstruction.

This connection of change and permanence is not, of course, a new or particularly challenging problem for anarchists. We might just note it as evidence of continuity with ideas as old as Proudhon’s conception of *progress*. But before I settled down to write this final section I did run across a way of thinking about the problem that was at least new to me.

In *L’Individualisme social: Résumé et commentaires*, a work that Bontemps published in 1967, the final chapter (or *résumé conclusif*) was entitled “Pérennité de l’anarchisme” (“Perennity of Anarchism.”) Now the *pérennité* appealed to in this case is more clearly describing the persistence back through history and presumably into the future of a basic libertarian impulse, with the more explicit forms of anarchism simply being this “evolving philosophy” in a particular form. That, too, is not a particularly novel notion. But I was struck, while still wrestling with the question of permanence in Furth’s work, with this notion of *perennity*—not so much because I find particular appeal in positing anarchism as an instance of another “perennial philosophy,” but because the question that brings us to this point, a question of the persistence and periodic renewal of anarchism, is perhaps very much a question of *perennation*, of the means of surviving the harshest seasons.

And perhaps that’s a concept we can do something with next week.



The suggested readings for this week, like Furth's essay, are general descriptions of anarchism, each with some emphasis on synthesis. Beginning with next week's readings, we will be focusing much more narrowly on specific aspects of anarchist analysis.

Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers, “The True Revolutionaries” (1935)

The true revolutionaries have always been, in all times and all countries, those whose minds have been broad enough to grasp the most conflicting formulas, to extract from each of them the portion of truth that they contain and to attempt to reconcile them in a higher harmony. The “revolutionaries” are not always those whom we designate by that name: instead, these often deserve the epithet of “reactionaries,” as their acts entirely justify.

The revolutionary is the opposite of the sectarian. A sectarian revolutionary would only be a pseudo-revolutionary. There are far too many revolutionaries who have a sectarian spirit and thus prove that they are not revolutionary at all. A slogan is nothing: sincerity is everything; it is independence and character that count; it is generosity and courage, it is fidelity to the ideal that alone means something. Each day we see sad persons wrap themselves in a label in order to profit from it, place themselves in one party or another, from self-interest, and ultimately their conduct breeds disgust and nausea among their friends. Rejected everywhere, because they have been seen at work everywhere, they are wrecks who deserve pity rather than hate. To hate them would be to take them seriously; to pity them is to punish them as they deserve.

The revolutionaries are not the ones who believe they are in possession of the truth, but the ones who know that truth is everywhere and that their duty is to discover it everywhere it exists. They are not the ones who know only one means of improving humanity: violence. They are the ones who absorb a great thought, who contemplate and dream. They do not assault anyone to impose their ideas: it is on themselves that they exert their violence; they reform themselves and seek to be better. It is in their heart of hearts that they realize the great day [the revolution]. It is this bastille of prejudices that the social revolution set them to attack. It is their own will that they ask to aid them in becoming new.

That internal revolution, which is the finest effort of the individual towards truth and justice, is the integral revolution par excellence. Apart from it there is no progress. It is the prelude of the great social transformations, the crucible in which the humanity of tomorrow will be produced. Believe that it is as difficult, that it is more difficult than *revolution through violence*, and that it is much more fertile in results. To ask a man to chase passion and selfishness from his heart, to demand that he be tolerant enough to welcome every sincerity and extract their profound reality, is without doubt to demand of him an effort much greater than that of making a contribution, of listening to an orator, of insulting an adversary, of wearing a badge or defying an authority. With that internal revolution, let us begin the transformation of society. The moral revolution will give rise to more benefits than the bloody revolution of which dictatorship is the poisoned fruit.

When we speak of internal revolution, we do not intend to apologize for the ivory tower, to contemplate events with a smile, to shrug our shoulders each time the people try to shake off their chains. We simply claim that every popular movement must have a disinterested aim: it is not in order to take the place of their masters that the people revolt, but it is in order to push on toward an ideal of justice and beauty, in order to give birth to a better humanity. The true revolutionaries have always had before their eyes, not an immediate and practical aim, but a distant goal of liberty and harmony. It is not to discourage spirits, but to affirm that society does not change in a day and that for that change it is necessary to learn, study, observe and live. We do not deny the utility of an economic revolution—far from it. We desire it and desire it with all our hearts, but we subordinate it to the revolution of heart and mind without which it is not possible. We are impatient to evolve in a more just society, where each individual will realize that the maximum of happiness, but we do not believe that this happiness resides solely in

material pleasure; we believe that it must be completed and surpassed by the intellectual pleasures without which life is only a snare. While we are with the revolutionaries each time that propose to react against ignorance and selfishness, we are against them when, betraying their ideal, they appeal to ignorance and selfishness to transform society. The Revolution will be accomplished when individuals understand that it is not enough, to be a revolutionary, to obey a slogan or take up a gun to slaughter their enemy, but that they must, to be worthy of the title, possess a soul and a conscience.

Charles-Auguste Bontemps, “Synthesis of an Evolving Anarchism” (1952)

In order to be permanent, to endure and satisfy the hearts and minds of those who devote their efforts to it and make it the law of their lives, an anarchism must be established in such a way that it remains valid at all times, no matter the events and independent of the future accomplishments that it envisions, but regarding which we cannot know if or how they might come to be.

In my opinion, it must meet five conditions necessary to the activity of a life: 1) an underlying philosophy; 2) a resulting ethics; 3) an object consistent with the ethics; 4) a form of action corresponding to the object; 5) an organization that allows and sustains collective action without enchainning the individual.

Taking into account the experience acquired in forty years of observations through wars and revolutions, it is from these realistic—but not disillusioned—premises that I attempt to synthesize the lessons of that experience in a few brief formulas. Perhaps they will be useful to the young. They are chapter titles. You can add to them, subtract from them, correct them, and, above all, develop them. Their theme is eternal.

Philosophy

I. — The universe is given. We accept it as it is. We can equally consider it as immanent, existing in essence for all eternity, or else as created by some inconceivable being.

But the idea of a creator is not rational, as the creator itself could only be an immanence (no matter what the Catholic religion says), which would only pose the problem, uselessly, at two degrees.

God, then, can be or not be. Proof of God’s existence being impossible and that existence explaining nothing more than the immanence of the universe, let us consider the idea of creation as in no way necessary to reflective thought.

II. — A Morality for humanity is only valid as such if it concerns (or can concern) all men. The reference to divine pseudo-wills is opposed to this view, as the gods are divers and contradictory. Such a reference makes no sense, given that it imagine man in the image of God. Now, man could not be made in the image of God because of the similarity of his physical being and of many aspects of his psychological being with those of the animal. Even if it were only on the mental plane, there would be a similarity between God and the animal, which is absurd.

On the spiritual plane, it is no less absurd to claim to liken the spirit of a transitory being to the spirit of a God who is only conceived as an absolute.

On the other hand, the history of religions teaches us that men have always imagined some divinities imitating their own mentality and on their level. Which resolves the question: God is a creation of man.

III. — The Absolute-God being incomprehensible (if not through the anthropomorphic figures that bring it down to human scale and thus destroy it), its wishes would not be comprehensible except through the discovery of the laws of nature of which he would be the author. So it is of no direct utility to us since all research can thus begin only from nature, as a function of man and for man.

That would appear clearly when one reflects that there are problems only because men pose them.

IV. — In the physical order, what we know of the world has been acquired by the method of objective science. It is the only efficient means of knowledge. The views of the metaphysical spirit are only the paths of hypotheses. These are denied or confirmed by the analytic data of science. Reason and judgment perform the syntheses and force the religious dogmatist to take refuge in symbols.

There is probably a limit to that way of knowing. If such is the condition of man, the fables will change nothing. But we must not forbid dreams to one on whom imagination confers a faculty of illusion.

There must also be a limit to his pride at being a remarkable mammal. Man is only an effect, doubtless accidental, of natural evolutions and not a condition of the laws that rule existence.

Ethics

I. — If morality exists only in man and for man, its source is in our complex nature: instinct and intelligence, selfishness and altruism, sympathy and hostility, individualism and sociability.

A rational ethics is an attempt to reconcile these opposites through a simultaneous submission and resistance to the imperatives of nature. Biology provides us with its elements, and psychological observation completes them.

This ethics varies then with the enrichment of knowledge and the evolution of the milieu. It is a concept of life and not of death. From this virtualité variation flow two moral systems: a customary social morality, in slow evolution and of practical utility, and a morality, open to the future, particular to the individual life of a libertarian mind, constructed on the margins of the milieu, prefiguring and provoking changes within it.

II. — The present state of biology indicates an invariability of the human faculties. Man does not change. But he can change the environment, render it favorable to the manifestation of tendencies beneficial to himself and others, but hostile to harmful tendencies.

The result is the same as if man himself had progressed.

That constant receptiveness of the mind, that will be be “oneself” to the highest degree, to promote a social condition where all the “selves” find the climate of their choice, such is the constant element of the libertarian spirit.

Object

I. — The object of anarchism is contained in its ethics: To realize a life as harmonious, intense and coherent as the natural difficulties permit. To achieve it for ourselves, but in such a way that it is potentially accessible to all. To consider that life had no other end than itself. That if an imaginary hereafter had, by chance, a reality, there could be no better conduct to achieve it than to execute our life cycle at a high level through a diligent cultivation of character and intelligence.

Not to seek the happiness that depends on accidents, but to construct the conditions for eventual happiness and give ourselves joys that are matters of thought and sensibility proper to us.

II. — The sum of sorrows is divided, although unequally, among all men. To diminish the number of its causes is to diminish the portion that will be handed to us. To struggle against harm is the object of anarchism.

III. — It is most useful for a libertarian mind to learn to consider the facts and to accept the rigors they impose, in to overcome them, rather than conceal them with idealism. Idealism is a form of the simple religious spirit, an inconsistent form of timid thought. The idea, on the contrary, is a projection that is corrected by knowledge of the facts.

IV. — To promise the coming achievement, through some final revolution, of an anarchist paradise, is to lie deliberately, to recruit false disciples, strangers to the anarchist spirit, and to very quickly disappoint and lose them. The church, more skillful, has at least had to take care to situate its paradise somewhere sheltered from analysis.

Anarchism is an avant-garde, a will to truth irreconcilable with any demagoguery or herd instinct whatsoever. It works passionately for the outcast, considered as a victim; it is without scorn, but one can see clearly that it would refute itself if it recruited, without transition or selection, a mass of outcasts under the precise symbol of anarchism.

It is in the lateral organizations (syndicates, cooperatives, groups for study and social action, etc.) that the libertarian must contribute to these gatherings, even kindle and animate them, in order to then draw from them more thoughtful adherents.

Let us understand clearly. It is neither their social origin nor even their culture (which they will acquire on their own) that distinguishes the anarchists, but their character.

V. — Like everyone, the anarchist thinker makes mistakes. Knowing this, their law is free controversy, the constant reassessment of problems and of their method.

There are two vices that would ruin anarchism and are condemned by its ethics and aesthetics: dogmatic intransigence and its opposite, thought that gives in to demagoguery.

Action

I. — Anarchism is essentially a concept of life, a method of thinking about life, a means of living it; it seeks a social climate where it will be allowed to exist, even if all men should never manage to achieve it in collective organization. That explains and is sufficient to justify action in and on the social.

However, action requires conviction and constancy. The doctrine that founds it must therefore embrace all aspects of a changing reality and yet hold itself on a permanent line, situate its motives in the instant without losing sight of the future; but it is only secondarily that it will tend towards a possible, uncertain future in order that the militant is without disappointment.

In that regard, the views of the mind of the nineteenth century are wrecked by the more exact knowledge that we have of men, of the vices of their revolutions of which we have had the discouraging experience. From Proudhon to Kropotkin, what survives from our master to think anarchism is their methods of research and their freedom of mind, their profound analyses of man in society, not their ideal constructions. It is fidelity to them to rectify their outdated conceptions.

II. — The first condition of constancy in anarchism, is to be libertarian for yourself, without vulgar ambitions, for the satisfaction of feeling free in thought, of ceaselessly enriching yourself in knowledge and experience. It is to live with one's morality in oneself and for oneself, with pride in an autonomy delivered from palinodies and grimaces. It is to live for the sake of it, in a deliberate and lucid manner, according to a coherent philosophy that allows you to be "the one" without having to refuse refuse yourself to others.

The second condition — where action begins — is to arrange meeting places and publications where ideas are exchanges and natural socialibility is satisfied.

III. — On these solid bases (which build more than one bridge between communist anarchism and individualist anarchism), social action centers itself as if by necessity. It is commanded (whatever the tendencies and nuances of doctrine) by generosity, which is wealth, since it is the capacity to give. It spurs those who know to awaken thought, to teach those who do not know or who know less. From this begins an educational action that never disappoints because it is never completed.

Action is then commanded by the obligation to have an effect on the masses and, through them, on the powers that be, in order to prevent the reactions of social conservatism through which our capacities to be and express ourselves are constricted, and also to provoke ruptures, at least to force evolutions that open spaces for us.

There is no limit to this activity, which, being useful to us, happens to be useful to everyone. It leads us to intercede even within conformist organizations, with the aim of stirring up conduct and imbuing them with views that serve the liberation of humanity.

Within the syndicalist and revolutionary movements, whether they are libertarian in origin or simply professional, the same objective guides our action. It makes us seek federalist and decentralist methods compatible with the conditions of a given problem, to advise the progressive substitution, in that which concerns production, administration or solidarity, of systems of direct action for administration by functionaries, to give priority to freely developed contracts on administrative regulations. There are many occasions to prefer, in the present, the responsible man, in contact with his fellow citizens, to the fallacious guarantee of a disembodied public service or the automatism of a dehumanized rule. It is also the role of libertarian economists to promote the use of statistical science, with regard to the coordination of production and distribution, in order to mitigate the harmful effects of authoritarian centralizations.

There are numerous, immediate tasks for the libertarian who consents to act in the relativism of the shifting real, to not refuse the provisional minimum, awaiting an uncertain theoretical maximum, and not be satisfied with a doctrinal absolute that, in the final analysis, has always shown itself to be sterile.

There are two pitfalls that can doom a libertarian: to slide from intelligent expediency to a mediocre opportunism, or else, in order to guard against it, allowing oneself to be imprisoned in a theoretical conformism that destroys anarchism by leading to sectarianism and destroys the libertarian by limiting them.

I know only two safeguards against the deviations and disillusionments. The first is the free attachment to libertarian ethics, adopted in the belief that they are indispensable to our satisfaction. And then there is a very modest point of view, apparently quite down to earth and yet of great significance, namely that a man lives today and not tomorrow.

IV. — An action conceived in this way does not escape from hard failures; that goes without saying. Its successes will likely only be partial and always to be continued. Isn't that the condition of life itself? And we have known, since William the Silent, who was not a libertarian, that it is not necessary to succeed in order to persevere when the path that we have committed to is that of the only choice with which our selves are satisfied. The believer in a God has never needed his church to be triumphant to live for their faith.

Moreover, there are successes that we hardly see, but which are, unbeknownst to us, profound; they bear their fruits in time because an anarchism thus established on these bases is a permanence. It persists as a moral in each and that duration ensures its reach. Critical in the pure state and within the opposing milieus where it insinuates itself, constructive through its

philosophy and its social action by means of the lateral groups that it inspires, it is formidable to power, destructive of prejudices, of obtuse herd instincts, of enslaving conformity. It is a force.

That force is not always spectacular in its continuous effects, which are of another nature than political exploits and flashes. This is because it is the force of the quality of characters and not the brutality of the regimented masses. But it is not forbidden, quite the contrary, to act in the heart of the mass organizations and to disrupt them, so that the authoritarian policies of the leaders face difficulties, and to promote solutions marked with our spirit.

Anarchism is and must remain above all a lofty ethics, in which we could not adorn ourselves while still aspiring to the laurels of the demagogue. Every militant must, at some moment of their life, choose to be someone or something. The bad choice only matters to the one who makes it and purges the movement. “My” anarchism does not depend on the choices of others.

Organization

I could stop here the presentation of a conception that only has interest as a testimony, in that it has allowed me—individually—to continue despite so many motives for doubt and desertion.

However, I am too accustomed to debates not to know that a supplementary question quite possibly be asked me: “Can this conception, which is individual, also suit other comrades? And, in this case, how are we to make a coordinated movement?” So I respond in advance to that question with an organizational sketch.

I. — Every anarchist organization must be such that the individual retains his capacities for initiative and personal activity; that they are not forced into any action that does not meet with their free agreement, even if they are the only one opposed.

It seems that, on the basis of a common philosophy, the rule of that association should be the free discussion of existing problems and that the conclusions of these debates, transformed into a program of action concerning the point discussed, enlist only those who have accepted them. But the sense of efficacy, of reciprocity, of camaraderie and of loyalty leads those opposed,—save in cases of conscience and when it is only a question of tactics and opportunity—to not impede the experiment of the majority.

II. — Organization seems to me to be rationally constituted by specifically libertarian grassroots groups, assembled by locality or by district, without preventing the existence in the same place of several affinity groups, provided that it is specific objectives that motivate them and not, naturally, deep divergences of doctrine. These groups should also meet on the occasion of any external demonstration.

III. — These specific organizations should propose the following tasks:

a) to unite libertarians of the same tendency for the purpose of internal studies of the problems of man and society;

b) to organize for shared pleasure cultural events and events that are simply entertaining, in a libertarian spirit, free from commercial vulgarity;

c) to cultivate and to put to work in every circumstance a rigorous spirit of reciprocity and solidarity;

d) to apply themselves, through group meetings or lateral groups and by means of a word-of-mouth propaganda, to the recruiting of comrades likely to become libertarians;

e) to educate and train these recruits;

f) to take the initiative in the creation of lateral bodies not specifically libertarian (among other, groups for popular education and social action) and to choose for their realization the comrades most fit because of their skills as leaders, educators or propagandists, acting under the constant control of the group;

g) in the same spirit and with the same goal, to appoint or aid militants to enter into the most diverse milieus in order to accomplish a labor of informing them and making clarifications regarding the general framework of personal rights and the defense of liberties by which the audience for our philosophy is increased.

It goes without say that, outside of the group, the activity of a militant is free, on the condition that this activity is unambiguous and does not pretend to avoid the critical, but cordial critique of the comrades.

IV. — The local groups should ensure a link between them through regional federations and through a general federation proposing three goals:

1) to debate problems of action in congresses;

2) to coordinate that action on the regional, national and international planes, in exactly the same spirit and with the same conditions as on the local plane;

3) to designate the commissions responsible for publications and for carrying out of the decisions of the congresses.

Each group will appoint to these congresses one or more representatives of the majority and of the minority in order to represent it, but every militant could intervene in the debates in an advisory capacity, the time for speakers being divided equally among all those offering opinions.

The regional congresses will only concern themselves with regional affairs. It is the local groups themselves that would be directly represented in the general congress and regional congress alike.

It seems that such an organization reconciles the principle of the free determination of the individual with coordination in the federative form.

Action, thus established according to the method of natural association, appears to me to need no other rule than those of the conscience, subject to the individual priorities that usefully characterize, with regard to public opinion, an authentic libertarian: camaraderie, objectivity, reciprocity and loyalty.

Charles-Auguste BONTEMPS.

Voline, “On Synthesis” (1924)

I.

Legend maintains that Jesus Christ gave no response to the question of Pontius Pilate: “What is truth?” And it is very likely that in these tragic moments he hardly had the heart to concern himself with philosophical arguments. But even if he had had the time and the desire to engage in a controversy concerning the essence of truth, it would not have been easy for him to respond in a definitive manner.

Many centuries have passed since then. Humanity has made more than one step toward knowledge of the world. The question of Pontius Pilate has troubled humanity, it has made people think, work and seek in all directions, and it has brought suffering to a great number of minds. The ways and methods of the search for truth have varied many times... Yet the question always remains without an answer.

Three principal obstacles arise along the path we follow to seek and establish objective truth, no matter in what direction or in what region we hope to find it.

The first of these obstacles is impressed with a purely theoretical and philosophical character. In fact, the truth is the great existing All: everything that exists in reality. To know the truth means to know what is. But to know what is, to know the veritable truth, the essence of things (“things in themselves”) would appear to be, for several reasons, impossible at this time, and perhaps it will always be so. The essential reason for that impossibility is the following: The world would never be for us anything but the idea that we fashion of it. It presents itself to us, not as it is in reality, but as it is depicted to us by our (or more) poor, false senses, and by our incomplete and crude methods of knowing things. Both are very limited, subjective and fickle. Here is an example drawn from the domain of the senses: as we know, there exists in nature, in reality, neither light, nor colors, nor sounds (there exists only what we believe to be movements, oscillations); however, we have above all an impression of the monde consisting of light and colors (oscillations collected and transformed with the aid of our visual organs) and sounds (movements collected and transformed by our auditory apparatus.) Let us also not that a whole series of phenomena unquestionably taking place in nature elude the organs of our senses. To serve as an example in the domain of knowledge, it is enough to indicate the fact that, constantly, certain theories are rejected to be replaced by others. (A very recent example is that of the famous theory of Einstein on relativity tending to “devastate” all our systems of knowledge.) The only thing that I know immediately is that I exist (*cogito, ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am) and that there exists some reality outside of me. Without knowing it exactly, I know nonetheless that it exists: first, because if I exist, there must exist some reality that has created me; second, because some entity that is found outside of me communicates to me certain impressions. It is that reality, the essence of which I do not know, that I call world and life; and it is that reality that I seek to know as much as it will lend itself to the knowing.

Obviously, if we wanted to always consider that obstacle, it would only remain for us to say once and for all: everything that we think we know is only lies, deception, illusion; we cannot know the essence of things, for our means of knowing are far too imperfect... And on that basis, we would have to renounce every sort of scientific labor, every work in search of the truth and of knowledge of the world, considering every attempt of that sort perfectly useless and destined to never succeed.

However, in the overwhelming majority of our scientific acts, acts of thought as well as practice—if we set aside the domain of purely philosophical speculation—we hardly consider that obstacle: first, because if we did, we would truly have to renounce all scientific activity, every search for the truth (something which, for many reasons, is entirely unacceptable to us); and then, for we have certain reasons to believe that our impressions reflect all the same, up to a certain point, reality such as it is, and that our understanding comes closer and closer to knowledge of that reality, to knowledge of the truth. It is this last argument in particular, together with other impetuses, that leads us to widen and deepen without ceasing our work of research.

Taking as data, — that is as having for us a real, concrete meaning, common to us all, — our impressions and especially our knowledge of the world and of life; taking as given the milieu, concrete for us, in which we live, work and act, — we think and we seek on the bases and within the limits of that reality as it presents itself: a subjective and conventional reality.

The question of truth is equally posed within the limits of that reality. And, above all, to decipher that reality, accessible to our understanding and our impressions, as well as to pursue the continual widening of its knowable limits — this already appears to us as a problem of the highest importance.

But, in this case as well, we see loom up before us, and the path of research and of the establishment of truth, two other obstacles, of a concrete character as well.

Second obstacle. — Like life, truth is undivided. Truth (like life) is the great All. To know this or that part of the truth still cannot mean that we know the Truth (although it is sometimes necessary to go from knowledge of the parts to the knowledge of the whole). To know the truth — this means, to be precise, to know all the universe in its entirety: all of existence, all of life, all the paths of life, as well as all its forces, all its laws and tendencies, for all times and all terms, in all its different secrets, in all its phenomena and separate details, as well as in its entirety. Now, even if it was only within the limits of the world intelligible to our faculties of impression and understanding, — to embrace the universe, to know life and penetrate its inner meaning appears to us impossible at present, and perhaps it will never be possible.

Third obstacle. — The most characteristic trait of life is its eternal and uninterrupted movement, its changes, its continual transformations. Thus, there exists no firm, constant and determined truth. Or rather, if there exists a general, complete truth, its defining quality would be an incessant movement of transformation, a continual displacement of all the elements of which it is composed. Consequently, the knowledge of that truth supposes a complete knowing, a clear definition, an exact reduction of all the laws, all the forms, all the combinations, possibilities and consequences of all these movements, of all these changes and permutations. Now, such a knowledge, so exact an account of the forces in infinite movement and oscillation, of the continually changing combinations,—even if there exists a certain regularity and an iterative law in these oscillations and changes,—would be something nearly impossible.

II

To know the Truth—that means to know life as it is, to know the true essence of things.

We do not know that true life, [so] we do not know the Truth.

However, we possess some knowledge of it.

As we receive impressions of life and we learn to know it through the testimony of our senses and through the means of knowing that we find at our disposal, precisely as we run up against the obstacles indicated,—we learn, first, that life is some great synthesis, as reality as

well as personal feeling: some resultant of a quantity of diverse forces and energies, of factors of all sort.

We also learn that this synthesis is subject to a continuous movement, to incessant variations; we know that that resultant is never found at rest, but that, on the contrary, it oscillates and varies without ceasing.

To know the Truth—that would mean to embrace, know and understand the whole of this global synthesis in all of its details, in all its entirety and in all its eternal movement, in all its combinations and its uninterrupted variations.

If we know life in its details, in its entirety and in its movements, we will know the Truth. And that truth will be the resultant, constantly in movement, of a quantity of forces: a resultant of which we should also know all the movements.

We know neither the true life, nor its synthesis; we know neither its reality, nor its meaning, nor its movements. For us, life in its entirety is the great enigma, the great mystery. We only manage, from time to time, to pluck some fragments of its synthesis from the air...

We do not know the authentic truth, the objective truth of things. Not only have we still not managed to discover the truth, but we do not know if we will ever discover it. We only succeed, from time to time, in finding some isolated grains of the truth—dispersed and brilliant sparkles of precious gold, from which it is still impossible for us to form anything whole...

But—we seek the truth (or to put it better, some of us do.) We have sought it for centuries and thousands of years. We scan on all sides, in all directions—obstinately, offering all our forces to the search, painfully, sorrowfully.

And if we know that life is a great synthesis, we know, consequently, that the search for truth is the search for synthesis; that the path of truth is that of synthesis; that in seeking the truth, it is important to always remember the synthesis, to always aspire to it.

And since we know that life is a continuous movement, we should, in seeking the truth, constantly consider that fact.

III

The field of interest that particularly interests us is not that of pure philosophy and speculation. The circle within which our interests, our aspirations and our attempts principally move is the much more concrete and accessible one of the problems of biology and above all of sociology.

Seeking to establish some social conception, to intervene actively in social life and to influence it in a certain direction, we wish to discover in that concrete domain the guiding truth.

What do we do to find it?

Generally we take up certain phenomena in the given domain of life, we analyze them, we seek to know them and penetrate their meaning.

It often happens that we succeed in drawing the exact assessment from some phenomenon and that, consequently, we manage to put our finger on a coin, on a part, on a fragment of the truth.

Four fundamental errors are very frequent—and very characteristic—in these cases.

1. Human analysis is not infallible. It does not lead directly to the exact and indubitable, absolute truth. In every analysis, in every human research, we inevitably encounter, along with some scraps of truth grasped on the spot, more or less great errors, lapses, sometimes oversights

and clumsy false judgments—thus, [we make] assertions not in conformity with the truth. We generally forget that this is the case, and instead of seeking to establish and to eliminate these errors, to find and apply the necessary corrections, we disregard them or else we do still worse—we consider our errors as an expression of the truth, so that we disfigure it and distort its value.

2. Save for very rare exceptions, we are generally inclined to exaggerate the significance, sometimes very minuscule, of the bit of truth found by us, to generalize it, to make of it the whole truth, to extend it, if not to life in its entirety, at least to phenomena of much larger and more complicated order, and at the same time to reject other elements of the truth we seek.

3. We let ourselves be carried away by the analysis and a generalization, erroneous from its immediate results, we constantly forget to consider the second moment—and that is the most essential one—necessary to the search for the truth: of the true and accurate way of generalization; of the necessity,—the analysis once made and a phenomenon, a fragment of truth grasped and understood,—not to take hold of that bit and raise it to the rank of keystone, by making it the entire truth, but, on the contrary, to remember other phenomena relating to the same order of ideas, to seek to fathom their meaning as well, to compare them with the bit of truth discovered and to do everything in order to establish a correct synthesis. This problem of the second degree generally escapes us. We forget that life is a synthesis of a great number of factors.

4. We forget at each step that movement and variability never cease; we forget that there exists no apathetic truth, that in life “everything flows,” that life and truth are the dynamics par excellence. Habitually, we do not account for this factor of an extreme importance and value: the uninterrupted dynamism of life and truth. However, just as it would be erroneous to take the form adopted at a certain moment by an amoeba in motion for its constant form, it would be a mistake to suppose a similar rigidity in the essence of truth: what has just been (or what could have been) truth moment a moment ago—is not longer truth in the following moment. The synthesis itself is not immutable. It is only a resultant constantly in motion, which sometimes comes closer to one of the factors and sometimes to another, and never remains close to one or the other for long. We do not take sufficient account of this singularly important fact. [1]

The errors indicated have a particularly harmful importance pour for the domain of the human sciences, for the comprehension and study of our social life, which represents an exceptionally complicated synthesis of particularly numerous factors, the majority of which are of a special order, a movement and a series of combinations—both exceptionally complicated—of the most diverse elements (which, moreover, are far from being solely mechanical.)

It is precisely in this domain that the most serious errors most often take place. It is especially the numerous followers of the seekers of truth who are guilty of this. The mission to reexamine their “truths,” to redress their errors and make the necessary corrections later falls to others.

Here are some examples that could serve as an illustration: the definition made by Marx-Engels, and especially by their followers, of the role of the economic factor in history (the so-called “historical materialism”)—that excellent but unilateral (and consequently not precisely correct) analysis, and—the exaggerated and “firm” (consequently quite inexact) deductions that have been drawn from it; the theory of classes of Karl Marx and his followers—that analysis, just as brilliant, but narrow and insufficient (and thus erroneous on many points), and the perverse deductions that have been made from it; the “law” of the struggle for existence (Ch. Darwin and also, and especially, his supporters in the various branches of science) with all its errors and exaggerations; the unilateral individualist theory of Max Stirner (and especially of his followers) and so many others.

The economic doctrine of Marx and his theory classes, the individualist conception of Stirner, as well as the law of the struggle for existence de Darwin, etc., etc., are always admirable analyses—well directed and called to give some important results—of one of the factors, of one of the elements of the complicated and vital synthesis, but in order to approach the truth of the synthesis, all these theories are lacking one essential thing: the understanding of the necessity of juxtaposing them with the analysis of other elements and other factors, with the deductions that can be made from the results of these other analyses. They lack the desire to account for phenomena of a different order, the aspiration to seek the synthesis. We forget that real life is a synthesis of different series of phenomena; that that synthesis is moreover the moving and variable outcome of these series, series that are also constantly in movement. We lose sight of the real and moving synthetic nature of life and the necessity of a corresponding synthetic character in scientific knowledge. This is the source of the errors of generalization and deduction. Instead of approaching the truth, we distance ourselves from it.

This erroneous attitude with regard to the phenomena examined, to the bits of truth discovered, causes considerable damage to all our attempts at social construction, for they cause us to wander very far from the road leading to a precise solution of the problems that loom up before us.

Indeed, if in each truth found by us we inevitably find mixed an alloy of non-truth; if every partial truth established by us is never the entire truth; if truth, like life itself, is always synthetic and moving,—then in our constructions we approach the truth, we reckon and understand vital phenomena and processes that much more correctly and exactly to the extent that we verify more meticulously the bit of truth found, to the extent that we compare it with other phenomena and bits of truth discovered in the same domain, to the extent that we approach synthesis and that we constantly recall the essential fact of the uninterrupted movement of all things. And we distance ourselves from the truth, from a proper understanding of life, from a correct conception—that much more as we concern ourselves less with verifying, comparing and contrasting, to the extent, finally, that we distance ourselves from synthesis and the idea of movement.

It is very probable that we will never attain the knowledge of a correct and complete synthesis. But the principle that must guide us is a constant effort to approach it to the greatest extent possible.

Each time that we close our eyes to the defects and the vices of the bits of truth found by us, we distance ourselves from the result sought. The proper method consists, on the contrary, to carefully account for these errors and of seeking their correction.

Each time that we take a fragment of truth found by us for the whole and only truth, and we reject the other fragments, sometimes without even taking the trouble of examining them closely—we distance ourselves from the correct solution. The correct method consists of juxtaposing each fragment found with others, to strive to discover some always new parts of the truth and to seek to make them agree, so that they form one single whole. That is the only way that we can reach our goal.

Each time that we limit ourselves to drawing the appraisal of our analysis made from a single aspect of the question, and we forget the necessity of continuing our work of research by aspiring to accomplish its synthesis with the other aspects—we distance ourselves more from the goal, however brilliant and exact our work of analysis has been. Each time that we forget to take into account the constant factors of movement and variability, and we take the bit of truth found by us for something stable, firm, “petrified,”—we distance ourselves from the truth. The true path is to

always account for the multiplicity of factors that all find themselves engaged in a continuous movement and to seek the resultant (also moving itself) of these factors.

IV

If we would consider anarchism and its aspirations, we must also note, to our keen regret, that we find there, and at each step, the same errors, demanding the same work of rectification; that there as well we are still very distant from correct methods of seeking the truth and, consequently, from correct conceptions.

Here also our habitual method remains the same: after having found and established a certain bit of truth (often even long since discovered), we begin by closing our eyes to the errors and defects mixed in there, we do not seek to understand and eliminate them, then we begin to proclaim that bit as being a crown of creation, constant and unshakeable, we hasten to consider it as an immutable and complete truth, we forget the necessity of moving to a work of synthesis and end up neglecting to account for movement in its capacity as major function of vital development, especially in the domain of social creativity. This is also why we habitually entrench ourselves, with pettiness and blindness, in some very small nook of truth, defending ourselves furiously from the desire to enter into other corners, even [when] perfectly well lit,—and this instead of setting ourselves to work seeking synthesis embracing the work in its entirety.

I read, for example, the articles of comrade Maximoff (“Benchmarks”, in the Russian paper from America, *Golos Truzhenika*) and I see that he is concerned with establishing, in the most meticulous manner, not just the general plan, but even the most minute details to be adopted by the future social structure in the course of the social revolution. I say to myself: “All of that is very good and has already been sufficiently dwelt upon. But how does comrade Maximoff think that he can usefully stuff or pile the complicated, hectic ensemble of life, all that enormous, lively synthesis, within the cold margins of his dried-out plan made on paper?” I know that life will refuse to introduce itself into this scheme; I know that this scheme will only contain some few bits of truth, surpassed by numerous faults and gaps. And to the extent that comrade Maximoff means to make of his formula a finished thing, polished and solid, in so far as he pretend that this formula (or any other similar in its place) contains the sole and only truth, and that everything that is not that truth must be criticized and condemned,—I am, myself, of the opinion that it (or any other precise schematizing) only exaggerates the importance of the factor of organization, correct by itself and having great significance, but far from being the only factor, and imbued with certain defects for which it is indispensable to account, without which and apart from the synthesis with other factors of an equal importance it would lose all significance.

When the “anarcho-syndicalists” say that syndicalism (or anarcho-syndicalism) is the single, only way of salvation and reject with indignation everything not adapted to the standard established by them, I am of the opinion that they exaggerate the importance of the bit of truth in their possession, that they do not want to account for the defects inherent in that bit, nor for the other elements forming, in concert with it, the correct truth, nor for the necessity of synthesis, nor for the factor of vital, creative movement. I am, then, of the opinion that they distance themselves from the truth. And I greatly fear that they will find themselves in no state, when necessary, to resist the temptation to impose and inculcate by force their scholastic opinion, which the true life will refuse to accept as being opposed to its vital truth.

When the “communist-anarchists” open the question by the same process and, admitting only their own truth, immediately reject syndicalism (or anarcho-syndicalism), they deserve the same reproach.

When the “individualist anarchist,” thumbing their nose at syndicalism and communism, only admits their “self” as reality and truth, and when they mean to reduce to this little “self,” the whole of the great vital synthesis, they still commit the same error.

When I read in the article “The Unique Means” (cf. Анархический вестник / *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik*, no. 1, July 1923) that the internal perfection of the personality and the reasonable of conscious personalities in agricultural community forms the one and only truth and the only path to salvation, I think of the anarcho-syndicalists and of their “unique means” too; and I realize that all these people, instead of seeking the truth in synthesis, each peck at their little grain of millet without ever being satiated.

And if it is “makhnovists” who believe that the only true form of the movement is their own and who reject everything that is not it, they are as distant from the truth as the others.

And when I hear it said that the anarchists should only do work of critique and destruction and that the study of positive problems does not fall within the domain of anarchism, I consider that assertion a grave error in relation to the synthetic character [synthéticité] indispensable to our research and ideas.

However, it is precisely the anarchists who more than anyone must constantly recall the synthesis and the dynamism of life. For it is precisely anarchism as a conception of the world and life that, by its very essence, is profoundly synthetic and deeply imbued with the living, creative and motive principle of life. It is precisely anarchism that is called to begin—and perhaps even to perfect—the social scientific synthesis that the sociologists are always in the process of seeking, without a shadow of success, the lack of which leads, on the one hand, to the pseudo-scientific conceptions of “marxism,” of an “individualism” pushed to the extreme and to various other “isms,” all more narrow, stuffer, and more distant from truth than the last, and, on the other hand, to a number of recipes for conceptions and practical attempts of the most inept and most absurd sort.

The anarchist conception must be synthetic: it must seek to become the great living synthesis of the different elements of life, established by scientific analysis and rendered fruitful by the synthesis of our ideas, our aspirations and the bits of truth that we have succeeded in discovering; it must do it if it wishes to be that precursor of truth, that true and undistorted factor, not bankrupting of human liberation and progress, which the dozens of sullen, narrow and fossilized “isms” obviously cannot become.

I am not an enemy of syndicalism: I only speak out against its megalomania; I protest against the tendency (of its non-worker personalities) to make a dogma of it, unique, infallible and ossified—something of the sort of marxism and the political parties.

I am not an enemy of communism (anarcho-communism, naturally): I only speak out against all sectarian narrowness of views and intolerance; I protest against its dogmatic perversion and against its mortification.

I am not an enemy of individualism: I only speak out against its egocentric blindness.

I am not an enemy of the moral perfection of the self: but I do not accept that it be recognized as the “unique means.”

I am not an enemy of organization: but I do not want anyone to make a cage of it.

I find that the work of the emancipation of humanity demands by equal title: the idea of free communism as the material basis of a healthy life in common; the syndicalist movement as one

of the indispensable levers à the action of the organized masses; the “makhnovstchina” as an expression of the revolutionary uprising of the masses, as insurrection and élan; the wide circulation of individualist ideas that reveal to us radiant horizons, that teach us to appreciate and cultivate the human personality; and the propaganda of aversion towards violence that must put the Revolution on its guard against the possible excesses and deviations...

It seems to me that each of these ideas, that each of these phenomena contain a granule of truth that will manifest itself clearly one bright day, as well as faults, errors and perversions; and the exaggerations will be rejected.

It seems to me that all these granules—all these phenomena and these ideas—will find sufficient place under the wide wings of anarchism, without there being any need of mutually making a bitter war. It is enough to want [to] and to know [them] to unite and unify them.

In order to attain that goal, the anarchists must begin by raising themselves above the prejudices imported from outside into their milieu and absolutely foreign to the essence of the anarchist conception of the world and life, from the prejudices of human narrowness, from a petty exclusivity and from a repulsive egocentricity; it is indispensable that all put themselves to work,—each in no matter what sphere of ideas and phenomena, in conformity to their situation, their temperament, their preferences, their convictions and their faculties,—closely linked and united, and respecting the liberty and personality of the others; it is necessary to work hand in hand, seeking to mutually lend aid and assistance, demonstrating a friendly tolerance, respecting the equal rights of each of the comrades and admitting their liberty to work in the chosen direction, according to their tastes and their way of seeing—the liberty to fully develop every conviction. This posed, the task will fall to us to decide on forms that this unified collaboration should adopt.

It is only on such a basis that an attempt could be made at true union between the workers of anarchism, at the unification of the anarchist movement. For, it seems to me, it will only by on that basis that our antinomies, our exaggerations pushed to the extreme, our sharpness and our sourness could be mellowed, that our errors and deviations could be rectified, and that, tightening more and more our ever vaster ranks, crystallizing in living form, burning with an ever more ardent flame, appearing always more clearly and with ever greater grandeur—the Truth.

VOLINE.

[1] This phenomenon of the “constant variability of the resultant,” as well as the importance of its application to the study of the facts of human history, will be examined in detail in another work.

ON SYNTHESIS (Second Article)

In the preceding article, we stopped at the question of the method of the search for truth, the general manner of theoretically considering the problem.

We have expressed the opinion that this manner must be synthetic, that instead of persisting in a single recognized part of the complete truth, thus disfiguring it and distancing us from it, we must, on the contrary, seek to know and embrace as many parts of it as possible, bringing ourselves as a result as close to the true truth as possible. In the opposite case, instead of a coordinated and fraternal labor, expanding and productive, we will surely get bogged down in interminable and absolutely senseless disputes and disagreements. We will always fall into those

coarsest errors, which inevitably accompany exclusivism, narrowness, intolerance and sterile, doctrinaire dogmatism.

Let us now address, also in broad strokes, another essential question. Who, what forces will bring about the social revolution,—especially these immense creative tasks? And how? What will be the essence, character and forms of this whole magnificent process?

First of all, it is incontestable that the social revolution will be, in the final account, an extremely vast and complicated creative phenomenon, and that only the great popular masses, working freely and independently, organized in one manner or another, could resolve the gigantic problem of social reconstruction happily and fruitfully.

Whatever we mean by the process of social revolution, however we imagine the content, the forms and the immediate results of the great future social transformation,—all of our tendencies must reach agreement on certain essential points: an anarcho-syndicalist, anarchist-communist, an individualist and the representatives of other libertarian currents will inevitably fall into agreement that the process of the social revolution will be an phenomenon [that is] infinitely extensive, many-sided and complex, that it will be a most fundamentally creative social act, and that it cannot be realized without an intense action from the vast, free, independent and organized masses, in whatever form, united in one manner or another, linked among themselves and acting as a whole .

So what will these great masses do in the social revolution? How will they create? How will they resolve the task, so vast and so complex, of the new construction?

Will they concern themselves directly, precisely and uniquely, with building anarchist communes? Certainly not. It would be absurd to suppose that the only path and the only form of social and revolutionary action will be the construction of the communes, that those communes alone will be the foundations and instruments of the new construction, the creative cells of the new society.

In their revolution, will the masses follow exactly and uniquely the “syndicalist” path? Of course not. It would be no less absurd to think that the syndicates, and the workers’ organizations in general, would alone be called to achieve the great social reconstruction, and that precisely and uniquely they will be the levers and cells of the future society.

It would be as absurd to believe that the tasks of the social revolution will be resolved solely by some individual efforts by some isolated, conscious personalities and [by] their associations of ideas, which alone out of such unions, associations or grouping by ideological community will serve as the bases for the coming world.

It would be generally absurd to imagine that this enormous, formidable work of the social revolution—this creative and living act—could be channeled into one uniform path, that this form, that method, or some particular aspect of struggle, organization, movement, or activity would be the only “true” form, the sole method, the unique face of the social revolutionary process.

The fecund social revolution, advancing with a firm step, truly triumphant, will be executed by the oceanic masses driven to its necessity by the force of things, launched in this powerful movement, seeking widely and freely the new forms of social life, devising and creating them fully and independently. Either this will occur, or the creative tasks of the revolution will remain unresolved, and it will be sterile, as were all the previous revolutions. And if this is the case, and we imagine for a moment this whole gigantic process, this enormous creative movement of the vastest masses and its innumerable points of application, it will then appear absolutely clear that that they will move along a broad front, that they will create, that they will act, that they will

advance in multiple ways at once—ways that are diverse, bustling, and often unexpected by us. The reconstruction by the great masses of all the social relations—economic, social, cultural, etc., given also the variety of localities, that of the composition of the populations, of the immediate requirements of the character and aims of the economic, industrial and cultural life of the various regions (and perhaps countries),—such a task will certainly demand the creation, application and creative coordination of the most varied forms and methods.

The great revolution will advance by a thousand routes. Its constructive tasks will be accomplished through a thousand forms, methods and means, intertwining and combining. The syndicates, the professional unions, the factory committees, the organizations of productive workers, etc., with their branches and federations in the cities and industrial regions, the cooperatives and all sorts of connecting associations [*organes de liaison*], perhaps also the soviets and every other potential organization that is living and mobile, the peasant unions in the countryside, their federations with the workers' organizations, the armed forces for defense, the truly libertarian communes, the individual forces and their ideological unions,—all these forms and methods will be at work; the revolution will act through all these levers; all these streams and torrents will spring up and flow in a natural fashion, forming the vast general movement of the great creative process. It is through all their measures, through all their forces and instruments that the vast working masses engaged in the true revolutionary process will act. We are convinced that even the present reformist and conservative workers' organizations will inevitably and rapidly “revolutionize” in the course of this process, and, having abandoned their recalcitrant leaders and the political parties acting behind the scenes, will take their place there, will reunite with the other currents of the impetuous, creative revolutionary torrent.

This movement will not be, naturally, a simple pulverization of society; it will not have the character of a rout and a general disorganization. It will aspire, on the contrary, naturally and inevitably, to a harmony, a reciprocal liaison of the parties, to a certain unity of organization to which, as well as to the creation of the forms in themselves, it will be driven urgently by the vital, immediate tasks and needs. This unity will be a living and mobile combination of the varied forms of creation and action. Certain of these forms will be rejected, others will be reborn, but all will find their place, their role, their necessity, their destination, amalgamating gradually and naturally into a harmonious whole. Provided that the masses remain free in their action; provided that a “form” destroying all creation is not restored: power. On the thousand local (and other) conditions will depend the circumstances and the creative forms that will emerge will be rejected or gain a foothold. In any case, there will not be place for only one single form, much less for an immutable and rigid form, or even for a single process. From different localities, diverse conditions and varied necessities will arise as many varied forms and methods. And as for the general creative torrent of life, of the construction and the new unity of society, it will be a living synthesis of these forms and methods. (It is in this way that we understand, among others, a true federation, living and not formal. We believe that the icons that we quite often make in our federalist milieus, especially among the “anarcho-syndicalists,” of a uniform means, method or economic and social form of organization, absolutely contradict the true notion of a federation as a free union, exuding all the fullness and multiplicity of life, not molded, and, consequently, creative and progressive, natural and mobile, of social cells [that are] naturally varied and mobile.)

The economic essence of this synthesis will certainly be the successive realization, evolution and strengthening of the communist principle. But its constituent elements, its means of construction and its vital functions will be multiples, just as multiple as the cells, organs and

functions of the body, that other living synthesis. Just as it would be absurd to affirm that it is precisely the nervous or muscular cells, the digestive or respiratory organs that alone are the creative, active and “true” cells and organs of a living organism, without accounting for the fact that the organism is a living synthesis of cells and organisms of various types and purposes, just so it would be absurd to believe that precisely one or another method and form would be the only “true” method and form of the future social construction, of the new, emerging social ensemble.

The true social life, the social creation and the social revolution are phenomena of plurality in synthesis, that plurality and that synthesis being made up of living, mobile, variable elements. (It is, particularly, the social life [that is] currently musty, stationary and fashioned by force, that inspires in so many among us, thoughtlessly, this erroneous point of view that the revolution must advance along some specific, unique and determined path. It is as if we do not know how to free ourselves from this anemic, miserable and colorless existence. It holds our thoughts, our ideas in a vise that involuntarily mold the future. But once that modeled existence is rejected, and the sources of a vast creative movement open, the true revolution will transform social life precisely in the direction of a spectacular general movement, of the greatest variety and its living synthesis.) We must resolutely account for this circumstance, that is to say, we must no longer trip ourselves up with a single model, but to seek to count on that plurality and begin as much as possible that synthesis (without forgetting the mobility of the elements), if we want our aspirations and our social constructions to match the veritable ways of true emancipation and become a real force, called to aid these means and aspirations to be clarified and realized.

Thus, also, from the purely practical point of view, we come to note that the plurality and its living synthesis are the true essence of things and the fundamental foundation stone necessary for our reasoning and our constructions.

The answer to the questions posed at the beginning is:

The social revolution will be accomplished by the great masses with the aid of a connection and of a combined action of different forces, levers, methods, means and forms of organization born from diverse conditions and necessities. In its essence, in its character and its forms, this whole magnificent process will consequently be “plural-synthetic.”

What good then to squabble endlessly and break lances over the question, if it is the workers’ syndicates, the communes or the individual associations, if it is the “class-based organizations” or the “groups of sympathy” and the “revolutionary organizations” that will bring about the social revolution, which will be the “true” forms and instruments of the revolutionary action and creation, the cells of the future society? We see in these disputes absolutely no reason to exist. In the light of what has come before, the object of these quibbles seems completely void of sense. For we are convinced that the syndicates, the workers’ unions, the communes, the individual associations, the class-based organizations, the sympathetic groups, the revolutionary organizations, etc.,—will all take part, each in its own sphere, in proportion to their strength and impact, in the construction of the new society and the new life.

Now, it is enough to note attentively our press, our organizations, to lend an ear to our discussions in order to see that it is for this empty question, rather than for some purely philosophical differences, that a bitter struggle takes place in our ranks, that we deck ourselves out, and that we highlight by dividing in this way our forces still more, with all sorts of labels: “anarcho-syndicalists,” “anarchist-communists,” “anarchist-individualists,” etc., and that our movement is thus crushed and broken in a senseless manner.

We believe that it is high time that the anarchists of different tendencies recognize, in this regard, the absence of any serious foundation for these scissions and divisions. A great step forward toward our rapprochement will have been made when we recognize this fact. There will be one less pretext for dissensions. Each can give preponderance to some particular factor, but admit at the same time the presence and significance of other factors, recognizing, as a consequence, the same right for other anarchists to give the preponderance to other factors. It is in this way that the comrades will take a step towards knowing how to work hand-in-hand in the same organization, in the same organ, in a common movement, by each developing their ideas and activity in the direction that interests them, by struggling ideologically, by confronting their convictions in a common camaraderie and not between hostile camps excommunicating one another. To establish such relations would provide a solid cornerstone to the edifice of the unified anarchist movement.

VOLINE.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

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Constructing Anarchisms: Clarifications and Additional Tools

Given the rapid buildup of “Constructing Anarchisms,” really in a matter of days, from a proposal among friends to this joint enterprise of really unknown dimensions, it’s no surprise that some of the introductory material didn’t clarify everything that perhaps it should have made clear. *My bad*. The thing to do now is to fill in a few gaps.

What follows is a first sketch of some material that I will probably add to the print version of the project, which is coming together more rapidly than I expected. Some of it was then influenced by the discussion on this last week’s [Anews podcast](#).

One of the questions that came up on the podcast was a question of genres. Should the exploration I’ve been doing be considered *history*? or *philosophy*? And then there were questions about the function of episodes like last week’s treatment of Kropotkin and “On Order”? Finally, there were some comments-section shenanigans aimed at the perceived ideological agenda of my whole project. Not all of the responses were anything like equally thoughtful, but all of them suggest that it wouldn’t hurt to summarize and clarify some basic things at this point.



This first “quarter” has been conceived as an example. *Watch and wonder as, before your very eyes, someone constructs an anarchism!* But the point isn’t to watch and then regurgitate the very individual vision contained in these writings. Instead, it’s a question of developing a personal sense of what “constructing an anarchism” could mean, so that you can attempt something similar on your own, after our survey of anarchist history. That’s one of the reasons that I haven’t felt much need to crank down the levels of *uniqueness* in the expression or curb my tendency to move from one form of exploration to another... and another. “Constructing an anarchism” is going to start out for most of us as a kind of problem, as we struggle to figure out if that’s something we could do, want to do, etc. Given that, there may be something to be said in favor of making the example of “making anarchism our own” unabashedly idiosyncratic.

Given what I know about the people who ultimately gravitated toward the project, I’m going to guess that *uniqueness* as such is not likely to be a problem.

But there’s no point in overdoing it—and if a good deal of what I have constructed in my previous work is quirky, I like to think that it is still a question of quirky *tools*, with some real, practical applications. So let me just take the time to introduce a handful of tools that will perhaps clarify just how *I* conceive the purpose of “Constructing Anarchisms.”



The Ungovernability of Anarchism: Back in 2012, I wrote a couple of posts discussing the various senses in which anarchism (whether understood as an ideological ideal, a tradition or a movement) seemed destined to escape our best attempts to pin it down as sole property of any of the contending anarchist factions. It was intended to be an observation about the character of the *anarchism* or *anarchisms* that we have inherited (whatever connections it might ultimately have to similar observations we have made about the resistance of *anarchy* to certain kinds of definition), based in historical research. A key claim was that “Anarchism hardly had a name before it had an internal diversity that no amount of spinning is ever going to reduce to a single orthodoxy.”

The first post was treated with suspicion, as if I was suggesting that, for example, capitalists or nationalists could be considered anarchists because anarchism was “ungovernable.” My point

was very different—as some of you may have guessed from the historical episodes that I have emphasized. In the suggested readings for Week Two, I was concerned with the ways in which Proudhon’s conception of *anarchy* came to “contain multitudes.” What I was attempting to demonstrate in the treatment of Kropotkin’s “On Order” was how *anarchism* seems to have gained a similarly split character, again essentially at its origins. “On Order” is one of the first attempts to make specifically anarchist history and remains a touchstone for a certain account of anarchism’s origins, so it seems a natural place to look for a clear conceptualization of anarchism. What we find instead—the twists and turns by which Proudhon’s ideas, including that *anarchy*, are first dismissed and then drawn back in as if they were Bentham’s, etc.—is a bit of a mess as origin stories go. The sequel—Kropotkin alternating chair-whirling and the perhaps belated study of Proudhon—reminds us that the conceptualization or reconceptualization of anarchism was an ongoing process.

I’ve never want to appear too hard on Kropotkin, felt that perhaps I was being more direct than usual in the post on *an-archy* and no doubt overcompensated a bit with all the chair-whirling. These are hard balances to strike. It has seemed important to me that the anarchist communist appropriation seems at once to be something very much like entryism and, at the same time, to present no real obstacle to synthesis, beyond some historical confusions that are fairly easily rectified if people want to rectify them. It has seemed extremely useful to concentrate on this episode, as it allows us to examine essentially the whole length of the history of explicit anarchism through the dual lenses of “modern anarchism as a break with previous anarchist projects” and “modern anarchism as a continuation of previous anarchist projects” while focusing on the same events.

Those who have read any of the material for “[Our Lost Continent and the Journey Back](#),” particularly the “Mappings,” won’t have any trouble moving from the metaphor of a “doubled” anarchist history to that of modern anarchism as a kind of “braided stream.” Those who want a quick introduction to some of those concerns might look at “[Anarchism as a Fundamentally Unfinished Project](#)” and “[Anarchist History: The Metaphor of the Main Stream](#).”

The Anarchist Declaration: I’ve said that I consider Proudhon’s first use of the phrase *je suis anarchiste* as a natural starting place for the examination of anarchist history, in part because there is a richness and an uncertainty in that expression that I expect all of the possible accounts leading from it will have difficulty exhausting. And texts like “The Anarchist Tension” suggest that, at the very least, that anarchist declaration—*I am an anarchist*—is going to require some new effort each time we make it, if, that is, we intend to take anarchy and anarchism seriously.

That challenge suggests that there is a basic, constant sort of anarchist practice that involves refreshing our commitment to the anarchist project in whatever new circumstances we find ourselves in. One way, then, of “making anarchism our own” would be this ongoing reconnection of anarchistic ideas to altered contexts. And while sometimes I think that an inkling of that project leads us to reject too much specification and “wing it,” perhaps there is something to be said for some specific efforts to clarify those elements of « our own anarchism » that we expect to be most persistent.

I’m certainly not above winging it—as some aspects of this project undoubtedly show. And one of the aspects of the daily practice that emerged for me in the course of the “[Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism](#)” is that I hardly consider one of these public explorations complete unless I’ve got myself stuck or nearly so on some theoretical limb in the process. I’m conscious now of fairly constantly pushing myself to go back to basic anarchist ideas, no matter the problem I am confronting, and take my time applying them, exploring their application. I

don't suppose that it is a practice that I will feel the need to keep up forever, but it is a habit that I'm quite consciously trying to cultivate.

And maybe that's the main thing—aside from a lot of challenging tidbits from anarchist history—that I feel it would be worthwhile to share in this joint exploration.

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There are a few more items from this personal toolkit that I will probably find an occasion to share, but the next phase of that work will probably combine quite nicely with the discussion of *synthesis*.

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK FIVE READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Synthesis

We have been presenting an understanding of anarchist practice centered around the repeated reconstruction of what it means to “be an anarchist” in each new context. Proudhon claimed that “humanity proceeds by approximations”—and perhaps that’s a useful way to think about anarchism as well, whether we are thinking about the development of shared ideologies and tendencies or about the more individual process of applying anarchistic ideas to the objects of daily practice.

☞ Let’s say that *synthesis* is the element of anarchist practice that involves relating the various approximations to one another and to the developing anarchist tradition. Looking backward toward the tradition, it is a matter of establishing some *continuity* between applications, which may involve radical rethinking in some contexts, but also, we would expect, some kind of development, both in our own ideas and in collective conceptions. Looking forward, it is a question of renewing the tradition, perpetuating it through novel applications. And then there is the question of relating concurrent approximations.

What I’m proposing is a kind of two-step dynamic that we might associate with instances of *anarchist practice*. The first step is exploratory, as the lessons of prior practice are applied to novel conditions. In this step, something new is perhaps added to the developing collection of anarchist analyses and anarchist practices. The second step is synthetic, as the new application is related back to the body of prior practice, as well as to practices taking place concurrently. The novel elements are made intelligible as extensions of the existing body of practices and rendered more or less shareable by other anarchists.



There are certainly other ways to conceptualize *anarchist practice*, just as *synthesis* has been conceptualized in a variety of different ways within the anarchist tradition. Perhaps some of you will explore some of the alternatives in the later stages of this project.



Synthesis is a term with a long history in anarchist theory, going back at least to 1840 and Proudhon’s description of anarchic *liberty* as a “synthesis of community and property.” It is, of course, most closely associated with the debate between anarchist synthesists and platformists in the late 1920s. I’ll admit that I was vaguely aware of the notion of anarchist synthesis for a long time before I did much looking into the matter, in large part because the choice between platformism and synthesis is so often treated solely as a matter of how to organize anarchist federations—and that has never been anywhere near the top of my list of anarchist concerns.

Even as I began to fairly seriously research anarchism without adjectives and some of the related currents, it took a while before even the most familiar texts on synthesis held much appeal—and then suddenly all roads seemed to lead there, as I began to assemble evidence of

what I've called an "anarchistic undercurrent" concerned with reconciling the various anarchist currents. In that context, it turns out that *synthesis* was a central concern in the sense that nearly all the proponents of related notions like *symbiosis*, *entente*, *mutual toleration*, *liaison*, etc. at least had to publish their objections to the term. (The anarchist capacity for quibbling seems to be something of a constant throughout the tradition.)

I don't always love the term myself. Looking at the history of that "undercurrent," I am inclined to think that what is perhaps really needed is something like a synthesis of the various proposals for near-synthesis, while perhaps *anarchy* already serves to describe the principle by which various anarchist currents might be brought into a mutually beneficial sort of relation. In collecting the various related tendencies, I have called them "[Varieties of Anarchist Entente](#)," giving pride of place to E. Armand's favored term. Still, I am inclined to think that Voline's 1924 essay "On Synthesis" is an unjustly neglected work on the perhaps equally neglected question of *anarchist development* and, for the moment, that seems reason enough to justify calling myself a *synthesist* at times and to choose synthesis as a keyword here in this construction.



I've already [talked](#) a bit about the objections to Voline's essay. If the opening discussions of truth and life seemed to be aimed at some kind of metaphysic certainty, I might share the concerns expressed. But Voline seems to posit the question of full knowledge in order to remind us that we're not likely to experience it—and that, even if we did, our triumph might be short-lived:

The synthesis itself is not immutable. It is only a resultant constantly in motion, which sometimes comes closer to one of the factors and sometimes to another, and never remains close to one or the other for long.

That seems clear enough. So let's try to turn the corner in our analysis here, acknowledge that there likely to be a good deal that is anarchic about the practice of a developing, living body of thought, and prepare for the introduction of a new set of concepts—starting with *governmentalism*, and the related ideas like *authority* and *hierarchy*—that are quite a bit more straightforward in their elaboration and application.



This is the last week of this "quarter" with really extensive suggested readings and I expect the material for this week to inform much of the rest of the discussion. "Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: Self-Government and the Citizen-State" is the English version of a book chapter originally published in German, explaining Proudhon's theory of the state, but really giving a kind of general introduction to his project. It should provide useful context for much of the work to come. The glossary entries on "Legal Order" and "Authority and Authority-Effects" establish some terms I will have recourse to in next week's post. And "What About the Children?" and the new translation of Bakunin's discussion of authority in "God and the State" together constitute an entry into the debates about "justified hierarchy" and "legitimate authority."

**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon:
Self-Government and the Citizen-State [1]
Shawn P. Wilbur**

[The State] is itself, if I may put it this way, a sort of citizen..."—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon [2]

For more than a hundred years, *anti-statism* has been a key principle of anarchism. But this was not always the case. A search of English- and French-language sources suggests that for much of the nineteenth century, the term "statism" (or "étatisme") did not have its present meaning. In the political realm, it simply meant "statesmanship." As late as the 1870s, the American anarchist Stephen Pearl Andrews used the term to mean "a tendency to immobility," without apparent fear of confusion, and the American Dental Association considering adopting Andrews' coinage, apparently without fear of entering political territory. [3]

Anarchism emerged as a political philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century, when much of the modern political lexicon was still being established. "Individualism," "socialism," and "capitalism" all seem to date from the 1820s or 1830s, and their early histories are entangled with that of "anarchism," a term we generally date from 1840, and which was initially defined in terms of its *anti-authoritarian* or *anti-governmental* critique. Of course, the relatively late appearance of the term *anti-statism* does not itself tell us much about the history of the associated critique. We know, however, that at least some of the participants in the anarchist movement considered the emergence of *anti-statism* as both a real departure from the existing *anti-governmental* critique—and as a misstep. In 1887, for example, more than twenty years after the death of anarchist pioneer Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Frédéric Tufferd wrote:

The most incredible confusion is that between the government and the State. I am an anarchist, as Proudhon was, for like him I want to abolish government, the principle of authority in the State, in order to replace it by an responsible and controllable administration of the public interests; but I do not want, with Bakunin, to abolish the State. The word State comes from stare, to hold, to persist; the State is thus the organized collectivity. Just as the commune is the local collectivity, the State is the national collectivity which has lasted, lasts, and will last as long as the nation itself. [4]

For Tufferd, socialists faced a choice between dividing over speculations on the *nature* of the State, God, etc., or uniting around a science focused on social *relations*. As he understood the terms of the "confusion," *government* was any relation on the basis of the "principle of authority," which could, indeed, shape particular *States*, but which was ultimately separable from the State as such. The State was merely a persistent manifestation of society.

This was quite different from the view which ultimately united much of the anarchist movement in opposition to the State as such. Almost from the beginning there had been those who felt that a decisive break had to be made with existing institutions. Not all were as extreme as, for example, Ernest Coeurderoy, who claimed that liberty could not come to European civilization unless it was first destroyed by the Cossacks, but many in the movement believed that very little of the present social organization could be allowed to persist. Certainly Bakunin—the representative figure, for Tufferd, of the *anti-statist* school—held government and the State to be entwined, and both to be impediments to anarchism. [5]

Despite their differences, however, both schools of thought could claim, with at least some justification, a descent from the work of Proudhon. Their specific inspirations were simply drawn from different periods of his career. Proudhon's thoughts about the State appear, at least at first glance, to have run a wide gamut. At times, he had been its staunchest opponent, calling for its entire abolition. In 1848, during the Second Republic, he asked: "Why do we believe in Government? From whence comes, in human society, this idea of Authority, of Power; this fiction of a superior Person, called the State?" [6] Yet, in 1861 he claimed that "the State, as the Revolution has conceived it, is not a purely abstract thing, as some, Rousseau among them, have supposed, a sort of legal fiction; it is a reality as positive as society itself, as the individual even." [7] He went so far as to describe the State as "a species of citizen."

Could the State be in some sense a fiction? And, if so, could the same State also be, in some sense, a reality, a being of sorts, as real as the human individual? Proudhon answered both questions in the affirmative, and in terms which only require some clarification to render consistent. During the period of the Second Republic, he argued that the real power attributed to the State was legitimated by a false account of relations within society, and he waged an unrelenting war against that fundamental political fiction—but also against all other *governmentalist* accounts, which posited the necessity of a ruling authority outside and above the equal associations of individuals. Then, during the Second Empire, having swept aside, at least to his own satisfaction, that false account of the composition and realization of society, he began to advance an alternate account, in which he found that government and the State were indeed separable, and that the non-governmental functions of the State, though modest in comparison to those attributed to its authoritarian forms, served vital roles in society—even when the political forms of society approached *anarchy*.

Between the two periods, Proudhon himself identified a watershed corresponding to his own "complete transformation:" "From 1839 to 1852, I have had what is called my *critical* period, taking this word in the lofty sense it is given in Germany. As a man must not repeat himself and I strive essentially not to outlive my usefulness, I am assembling the material for new studies and I ready myself to soon begin a new period I shall call, if you like, my *positive period* or period of construction." [8]

Proudhon's claim was perhaps hyperbolic, since transformation was for him something of a constant process. Elsewhere, in what is perhaps a more satisfactory account, he characterized himself as "the man whose thought always advances, whose program will never be accomplished." [9] But he was quite correct in pointing to separate *critical* and *constructive* analyses, each predominating at different times in his work, which can serve us to distinguish—and ultimately to explore the relations—between two aspects of his theory of the State.

What follows is a roughly chronological examination of Proudhon's developing understanding of the State, including accounts of the two analyses already noted. The first of these is an account of *critical* analysis of the *governmentalist* State, as Proudhon presented it in a series of published debates with Louis Blanc in 1849. The second is an exploration of some of the developments that he gave to his theory of the State in his later writings—in his 1858 masterwork, *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, and in a number of other texts from the 1860s, including *War and Peace*, *The Theory of Property*, and *The Federative Principle*. Between these two studies it will be necessary to pause, as Proudhon did in his own career, for an examination of his early studies, in order to clarify the extent to which his later conception of the State grew directly from the earlier work. We'll end by revisiting the "confusion" that

concerned Tufferd, and consider the potential lessons of the largely neglected conclusions of Proudhon's second analysis of the State.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon emerged as a public figure—and launched the modern anarchist movement—in 1840, when he published *What is Property?* To the question posed in the title, he proposed the infamous response: “Property is theft!” The work was hardly a political manifesto, and it would, in any event, be some years before the anarchist movement consisted of more than a small, heterodox collection of Proudhon's fellow-travelers. Instead, it was a collection of critiques of existing property conventions, and the “Psychological Exposition of the Idea of Justice and Injustice, and a Determination of the Principle of Government and of Right,” in which Proudhon declared “I am an anarchist,” was not exactly an afterthought, but it was certainly written for non-anarchist contemporaries, rather than those who would eventually be his ideological heirs. Still, Proudhon defined anarchy in fairly clear and simple terms, as the “absence of master, of sovereign,” and declared that it was “the form of government which we approach every day.” Anarchy would come by means of a shift from rule by authority, or will, to a condition in which “the legislative power belongs to reason alone, methodically recognized and demonstrated.” Under these circumstances, “as the opinion of no one is of any value until its truth has been proven, no one can substitute his will for reason,—nobody is king.” [10] Proudhon distinguished this political order—sometimes designated by the English term *self-government*—from even those sorts of democracy for which it is claimed that “everyone is king,” as he believed that the multiplication of sovereign wills still differed from the dethroning of will in politics altogether.

Proudhon followed his book on property with others on the same subject, and soon found himself the object of both considerable notoriety and government prosecution. He was only saved from imprisonment because it was argued that he was merely a philosopher. For much of the 1840s, he did indeed concentrate on philosophy and social science, establishing himself as something of a rival to the “utopian” socialists Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux and Etienne Cabet. But events in France would eventually lead him to an active political life.

During the Second Republic, Proudhon had direct incentives to think about the nature of the State itself. In the debates surrounding the form and direction of the French republic many revolutionary options no doubt seemed possible, [11] as well as any number of catastrophic failures, and Proudhon was not only drawn into the political conversation but into the government itself, serving in the constituent assembly from June 1849 until March 1849. He proposed programs and legislation. His work on property languished somewhat, while he established the theoretical basis and eventually the institutional apparatus for his Bank of the People, a currency reform project based on “free credit.” [12] He enjoyed a wide notoriety, but faced consistent opposition on most fronts. His career as a statesman ended when his immunity from prosecution was lifted and he was imprisoned for insults to president Louis Napoléon Bonaparte. In prison, he continued to be intensely involved in the political discussion, writing books and articles analyzing the failure of the 1848 revolution, and it was during this period that he engaged in the very public debate with fellow socialists Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux on the “nature, object and destiny” of the State.

The 1849 debate on the State was a surprisingly public affair, a debate between socialist philosophers so well publicized that early in 1850 *La Mode*, a popular magazine, could publish a one-act play, “The Feuding Brothers,” which was little more than a parodic report of the debate, cobbled together from quotes in the popular. The anonymous author of the farce could assume a

fairly high degree of familiarity with the details, in large part because the French Revolution of 1848 had transformed socialist philosophers into men of state. The whole world was watching the developments within the Provisional Government of the Second French Republic, where the most important sorts of questions were being discussed among representatives whose preferred systems ranged from anarchy to the restoration of the constitutional monarchy.

Between Proudhon and Leroux, there seems to have been almost complete agreement on most of the substantive issues, although this didn't prevent them from making outrageous accusations and calling one other the most bizarre names. Between Blanc and Proudhon, however, the lines were clearly drawn. For modern readers, the most striking aspect of the exchange might be the obvious animosity between the two men. Proudhon referred to the "the avowed, cordial hatred of Louis Blanc," [13] while Louis Blanc, reprinting his contributions some years later, felt the need to suppress some passages that "was marked by too much vehemence and does not deserve to figure in a discussion de principes." [14] But there were also a clear clash of principles.

Blanc's account of the State was a progressive one, assuming an evolution through forms of "tyranny," followed by a democratic transformation to the "reign of liberty."

"What is the State?" asks Louis Blanc. And he replies:—

"The State, under monarchical rule, is the power of one man, the tyranny of a single individual.

"The State, under oligarchic rule, is the power of a small number of men, the tyranny of a few.

"The State, under aristocratic rule, is the power of a class, the tyranny of many.

"The State, under anarchical rule is the power of the first comer who happens to be the most intelligent and the strongest; it is the tyranny of chaos.

"The State, under democratic rule, is the power of all the people, served by their elect, it is the reign of liberty." [15]

At the end of its evolution, Blanc claimed, the State would be "nothing other than society itself, acting *as society*, to prevent... what? Oppression; to maintain... what? Liberty." [16] There had been master-States, he said, but in the democratic regime the State would be a servant.

Proudhon naturally challenged the characterization of the anarchic regime, but he also questioned the apparent sleight of hand by which the tyranny of the State in all its other forms became liberty when in the hands of democratically elected officials. He claimed that Blanc, and the other proponents of the State, did not really believe in a society that could act *as society*, insisting instead on the necessity of the State, which he characterized as "the external constitution of the social power." His opponents believed "that the collective being, that society, being only a being of reason, cannot be rendered sensible except by means on a monarchic incarnation, aristocratic usurpation, or democratic mandate." [17] Proudhon, on the contrary, believed that this "collective being" had a real existence, strongly analogous to that of the human individual: "in both cases, the will, action, soul, mind, and life, unknown in their principle, elusive in their essence, result from the animating and vital fact of organization." [18] This was not simply an analogy for Proudhon, but an enduring part of his social science, which he was prepared to state in no uncertain terms: "We affirm, on the contrary, that the people, that society, that the mass, can and ought to govern itself by itself; to think, act, rise, and halt, like a man; to manifest itself, in fine, in its physical, intellectual, and moral individuality, without the aid of all

these spokesmen, who formerly were despots, who now are aristocrats, who from time to time have been pretended delegates, fawners on or servants of the crowd, and whom we call plainly and simply popular agitators, *demagogues*.” [19]

In his response, Blanc did not challenge Proudhon’s account of society as a collective being, but he objected that it was incomplete: “If this collective being of which the citizen Proudhon declares the existence is anything but a collection of senseless syllable, it must be realized. But the collective being realized is precisely the State.” Altering the argument slightly, Blanc said that society might form an organized, unified body, but that it would lack unity if it lacked the State, which he likened to the human head.

The analogy was not particularly apt. We probably wouldn’t say that the human body is “realized” by the head, or that the head was the site of its unity, even if we were convinced that the State was a real “organ” of society—unless, of course, we believed that the body was unorganized without the direction of something like a soul. Proudhon seized on this element of the argument, referencing Descartes’ attempts to find a site for the soul in pineal gland.

For Proudhon, there could be no equivocation between beings capable of *self-government* and those animated by some external force or principle. Every attempt to combine the two accounts would involve a fatal contradiction, and this was inevitable in any defense of States organized according to the principle of authority. No doubt, Proudhon admitted, those contradictory States were inevitable in the evolution of society, but in the end the fiction of authority would be overcome. “*Anarchy*,” he said, “is the condition of existence of adult societies, as *hierarchy* is the condition of primitive societies: there is an incessant progress, in human societies, from hierarchy to anarchy.” [20]

The debate over the aim or object of the State simply clarified the arguments concerning its nature. According to Proudhon, the governmentalists believed that in the absence of a State society would be in a constant state of internal warfare. For Proudhon, a collection of individuals in constant warfare would simply not constitute a society. In this instance it would indeed be society which was fictive, and we might ask ourselves how this warfare might give rise to the peaceful impulses which presumably would inform the rule or “realization” accomplished by the State. The divide between Proudhon and Blanc revolved around a choice between “internal” and “external constitution” of the society. Without the “realizing” element of the State, Blanc argued, society would just be a group of elements. In response, Proudhon argued that every individual is essentially a group of elements—but that in every individual worthy of the name the principle of association or realization, the only law the anarchist Proudhon was prepared to recognize, is inherent in and demonstrated by the association itself. There is *self-government* or there external imposition, and it matters little, in the long run, whether the imposing force is vested in one individual or many, or what we call those who wield the force. It is still tyranny.

On the question of the destiny of the State and the possibilities for its reform, Proudhon had very little room for optimism. What he objected to in the State was not, according to his present understanding of the terms, an inessential part of it, but its very essence, its external position with regard to society. Some States might be more or less objectionable in their impositions on society, but the point, for Proudhon, was to cease imposing any order on society which was not its own order, derived from its own internal law. Proudhon wanted neither master-States nor servant-States, just as he wanted neither masters nor servants. As he had not yet found the grounds on which to deal separately with government and the State, that left him with no option but to reject the State entirely.

Imprisoned until after the coup d'état, Proudhon was poorly positioned to effect the course of the republic, but, like many political prisoners, he made the most of his incarceration. His debate with Leroux and Blanc had been preceded by the *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, a critical history and personal indictment of the French Revolution of 1848, and it was followed by *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, in which he sought to argue for the possibility, even the necessity of a new revolution. His anti-governmentalist critique—and perhaps his entire “critical” phase—reached its crescendo in the “Epilogue” of the latter work, in what has become one of his most famous passages:

To be governed is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so.... To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality. And to think that there are democrats among us who pretend that there is any good in government; Socialists who support this ignominy, in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity; proletarians who proclaim their candidacy for the Presidency of the Republic! Hypocrisy! [21]

This is the *anti-governmentalist* faith that he never abandoned, and the aspect of Proudhon's thought which has been consistently honored by the anarchist tradition. But the Republic was nearing its final crises in 1851, and the context for Proudhon's critique would change dramatically with the emergence of the Second Empire.

With the *coup d'état*, the legislative conversation was abruptly closed, and Louis Napoleon's regime was not accommodating to dissenting voices, rewarding them not just with censorship, but sometimes with imprisonment or exile. Like many others, Proudhon gradually adapted, or, as he put it, he “transformed.”

He had said that “a man should not repeat himself,” but the truth is that by 1852 he had probably repeated his critique to just about every audience available to him: the people and his fellow socialists, in a series of publications; his fellow legislators; the bourgeoisie, in *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*; and even the emperor Louis Napoleon, in *The Social Revolution, Demonstrated by the Coup d'État of December 2*. But Proudhon found himself increasingly limited in what he could publish in France, and fairly quickly found himself in exile in Belgium.

It would not be hard to imagine, given the events surrounding Proudhon's development, how someone who identified as an anarchist in 1840 might have come to terms with the State in the context of the Second Republic, and then come to reject it again as a result of political disappointment and persecution. We could also, no doubt, understand if imprisonment and exile had dampened the ardor of a political activist. Proudhon's evolution is perhaps a little more difficult to understand.

By 1858, he had defined the terms of his *constructive* project:

I intend to suppress none of the things of which I have made such a resolute critique. I flatter myself that I do only two things: that is, first, to teach you put each thing in its place, after having purged it of the absolute and balanced it with other things; then, to show you that the things that you know, and that you have such fear of losing, are not the only ones that exist, and that there are considerably more of which you still must take account. [22]

But this apparently mild-mannered program appeared in the midst of his *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, a massive frontal assault on the Church and continued critique of *governmentalism*, for which he once again faced prosecution—a work in which he declared, defiantly and a bit dramatically, “I am a sans-culotte”!

Without speculating unnecessarily on the factors which drove the “complete transformation” of the early 1850s, we can point to circumstances which undoubtedly played a role. Just as he was being forced into Belgian exile, Proudhon undertook a review of his philosophy, and in the course of that work quietly corrected some problems from the *critical* period.

In 1853, Proudhon published *The Philosophy of Progress*. The work took the form of two long letters to a French journalist who had asked him for a summary of his ideas, and they afforded an opportunity for Proudhon to bring together the various aspects of his previous work in a way which he had not done before. Much of the work was devoted to a consideration of “the criterion of certainty” in science and philosophy, and, to no doubt over-simplify a long and very interesting study, his conclusion was that little, if anything, was certain but *change*.

Indeed, finally pressed to explain himself, he condensed his project down to a single opposition and a single affirmation: “All that I have ever written, all that I have denied, affirmed, attacked, and combated, I have written, I have denied or affirmed in the name of one single idea: Progress. My adversaries, on the contrary—and you will soon see if they are numerous—are all partisans of the absolute...” [23]

This opposition, he believed, was a sort of skeleton key, not only to the works he had written, but to any work he might pursue:

If, then, I could once put my finger on the opposition that I make between these two ideas, and explain what I mean by Progress and what I consider Absolute, I would have given you the principle, secret and key to all my polemics. You would possess the logical link between all of my ideas, and you could, with that notion alone, serving for you as an infallible criterion with regard to me, not only estimate the ensemble of my publications, but forecast and signal in advance the propositions that sooner or later I must affirm or deny, the doctrines of which I will have to make myself the defender or adversary. [24]

This distillation of his project gave him a clear set of principles with which to set out on the next phase of his careers, and *The Philosophy of Progress* highlighted elements of his early works which might have otherwise gone unremarked. But as Proudhon consolidated his project around the notions of progress and the opposition to the absolute, some shortcomings of his early works may have presented themselves.

Arguably, some of the apparent single-mindedness of his opposition to concepts like property and the State, so admired by the anarchist tradition, was achieved by questionable terminological gymnastics. In the introduction to *What is Property?*, he contrasted his view with that of one of property’s defenders: “Mr. Blanqui recognizes that there are a mass of abuses, odious abuses, in

property; for myself, I call *property* exclusively the sum of those abuses.” [25] While this made for a bold statement, it also threatened to reduce the impact of his claim that property is theft. Even while arguing for the historical development of the notion of justice, he drew firm lines between himself and those who would construct similar accounts about property. In 1841 he distinguished his terminological approach from that of Pierre Leroux: “Thus, according to Mr. Leroux, there is property and property: the one good, the other bad. Now, as it is proper to call different things by different names, if we keep the name “property” for the former, we must call the latter robbery, rapine, brigandage. If, on the contrary, we reserve the name “property” for the latter, we must designate the former by the term *possession*, or some other equivalent; otherwise we should be troubled with an odious synonymy.” [26] However, he was unable to escape that “odious synonymy” in a number of his works, and as his analysis became more complex, he even began to exploit it, emphasizing the internal contradictions in many key concepts.

By the beginning of his *constructive* phase he had reached a point in his battle with the reigning concepts like “religion, government, and property” where he could allow them to retain their “patronymic names,” even when they assumed new forms, in order to highlight the action of progress. As a result, familiar terms may have meaning with only a family resemblance to those we know. Whether or not Proudhon himself underwent a “complete transformation” in the early 1850s, we are likely to lead ourselves astray if we do not acknowledge that at least his vocabulary was fairly substantially transformed.

In 1858, Proudhon published his *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, a work in four volumes, later expanded to six. In a series of studies within it, he contrasted the conception of justice advanced by the Catholic Church with an anarchic vision in which a vast array of interests would be balanced, without political hierarchy or governmental authority, in relations consistent with reason and science. The studies combined *critical* and *constructive* elements, with the theory of collective beings receiving a considerable amount of development.

In his early writings, Proudhon had adopted a sort of second-hand Hegelian dialectic, without having direct access to Hegel’s writings. He believed that human progress was achieved by the playing out of contradictions—which he called theses and antitheses, without otherwise conforming to the details of Hegel’s system—and he believed that when these terms were synthesized, the tensions between them was resolved. However, he had also incorporated elements of the serial analysis of Charles Fourier, and attempted to synthesize those influences in what he called a “serial dialectic.” It is safe to say that some tensions remained in his own construction, until he finally abandoned it in 1858, asserting that “The antinomy does not resolve itself... The two terms of which it is composed BALANCE, either between themselves, or with other antinomic terms.” [27] With this theory of antinomies as his guide, there was no longer any question of dramatic victories or defeats for ideas or forces. Instead, the only form of resolution was balance, and while Proudhon liked to talk about the *scales*[*bascule*] of justice, as he began to build a “true” social system by bringing more and more ideas into relation, the varieties of balance multiplied. In the work on *Justice*, the study on “Goods” ended with an incomplete catalog of more than a dozen sorts of economic antinomies to be balanced.

With no recourse to external governmental control, all of this balancing was necessarily to be achieved by individuals situated in the midst of this complex, evolving web of relationships. The interested beings would not, of course, be limited to individual human beings. In the study on the State, Proudhon reaffirmed his belief in “social beings,” on a range of scales from families and small workshops to nations and States.

He retraced the arguments of 1849, armed with a vast new body of historical data and contemporary political analysis. One brand new element was, however, featured prominently: a constructive notion of the State as another collective being. The “Small Political Catechism” which summarized the study began with the question: “Every expression conceals a reality; of what does the reality of the social power consist?” The answer was: “It is collective force.” Furthermore, “collective force being a fact as positive as individual force, the first perfectly distinct from the second, collective beings are as much realities as individual ones.” [28] This notion of collective force had been part of Proudhon’s theoretical apparatus since the work on property in 1840, where he used it to demonstrate that individual property could not emerge simply from social labor. In *The General Idea of the Revolution* he had invoked it to suggest limits on individual ownership of capital, based on whether the means of production in question would be employed individually or by some organized association of laborers. By 1849, the family and society had joined the list of collective beings manifesting one or more varieties of synergetic “force.” As Proudhon’s thought developed, the range of beings and manifestations of force to be reckoned with continued to multiply. It was perhaps inevitable that Proudhon would find *something* in all the manifestations associated with government and the State that he had to consider a reality.

The theory of the State that emerged in 1858 was still rather vague: “The State results from the gathering of several groups, different in nature and object, each formed for to exercise a special function and for the creation of a particular product, then assembled under a common law, and in an identical interest.” [29] If this State was to be understood as an individual, a “species of citizen,” there was still some elaboration to be made. Proudhon, however, was most concerned with showing that the role of the state would be “primarily commutative,” but “no less real” for that. All of the usual activities associated with states, the “works of public utility,” seemed to him to be “effects of the ordinary collective force,” with no natural or necessary connection to any structure of external authority. As examples of appropriate projects for his anti-authoritarian State, he discussed questions like general security and the provision of a circulating medium.

The work on *Justice* also presented an important evolution in Proudhon’s discussion of *reason*, the sole source of legislation in his anarchist vision. *Collective reason* emerged alongside collective force as a manifestation of collective being, and in the study on “Ideas” Proudhon described the special role that it had to play in safeguarding individual reason against the corrupting influence of the absolute. To simplify what is both a wide-ranging and occasionally puzzling discussion, we might simply observe, in this context, that as the force exerted by individuals in industry finds expression both in industrial organizations and in more strictly individual forms, the individual reason which is supposed to inform our *self-government* is expressed, if we may put it this way, by individuals as individuals, by collectives as individuals, and by individuals as parts of collectives. The anarchic *self-government* of a given society will have to be grounded in the balancing of those manifestations of reason, and the overlaps between individual and collective give us some clues to the mechanisms likely to be involved.

Proudhon himself, in talking about the “organ” of the collective reason, situated it everywhere that collective force might be found. This proliferation of *reasons* to be reckoned with perhaps served to combat the one real danger he foresaw need to protect against: “There is only one precaution to take: to insure that the collectivity consulted does not vote, *as one man*, by virtue of an individual sentiment that has become common....” [30] That danger was apparently real enough in Proudhon’s mind that, in a puzzling paragraph, he proposed a “special

magistracy” to operate as “police of conversations and guardian of opinion.” The proposal was, however, without details, and in context it is hard to imagine how this “magistracy,” whether formal or figurative, could have been tasked to do anything but stave off premature agreement. [31] In any event, if Proudhon’s most ambiguous statements raise momentary questions about his entire opposition to government, there is no lack of unambiguous declarations affirming it. “Justice alone commands and governs,” he insisted, “Justice, which creates the power, by making the balance of forces an obligation for all. Between the power and the individual, there is thus only right: all sovereignty is rejected; if it denied by Justice, it is religion.” Beyond this *self-government*, guided by justice, society was “ungovernable.” [32]

There are a number of other details relevant to the theory of the State, scattered through the sprawling work on *Justice*. In a sort of delayed response to Blanc, Proudhon poked fun at the “monstrous idea” that others had possessed of “social being:” “it is like an animal of a mysterious species, but which, in the manner of all the known animals, must have a head, a heart, nerves, teeth, feet, etc. from that chimerical organism, which everyone strives to discover, they then deduce Justice, that is to say that we derive morality from physiology, or, as we say today, right from duty, so that Justice always finds itself placed outside of consciousness, liberty subjected to fatalism, and humanity fallen.” [33]

Another study provided a positive account of liberty, suggesting that freedom is not simply the absence of prohibition or restraint, but a quality inherent to the organization of beings, which is greater or lesser to the extent that the relations between them are complex and energetic—a notion that would form part of the rationale for Proudhon’s federalism. Long sections devoted to gender roles, and the proper role and constitution of the family have earned Proudhon a reputation for anti-feminism, but even beneath the genuinely reactionary social roles proposed there is a curiously radical notion that the “organ of justice” is located in a human relationship, rather than a human individual.

Proudhon developed his theory of the state in three works during 1861. *War and Peace*, probably the most interesting of the three, was a two-volume examination of the role of conflict in human history, demonstrating the means by which a proper understanding of war might lead to a just peace. It is a difficult, sometimes perplexing work, which has led some to treat Proudhon as a militarist, despite the fact that the book ended with the declaration that “humanity wants no more war.” [34] In it we find Proudhon working out the play of the antinomies on a large political stage, dealing with the interactions of States and peoples, mixing lessons drawn from history with more observations applicable to the theory that he was in the process of constructing. [35]

The work contained important statements about justice in general: “Justice is not a commandment made known by a higher authority to an inferior being, as is taught by the majority of writers who have written on the rights of the people; justice is immanent in the human soul; it is its deepest part, it constitutes its highest power and its supreme dignity.” [36] Where individual rights are concerned “Right, in general, is the recognition of human dignity is all its faculties, attributes and prerogatives. There are thus as many special rights as humans can raise different claims, owing to the diversity of their faculties and of their exercise.” [37] These various claims, however, are limited to the specific spheres in which the faculties are expressed, and must still be harmonized through a process of balancing. It’s clear that by this period in his career Proudhon had given the conventional language of political philosophy some fairly individual interpretations. If, as Proudhon claimed, all manifestations of individual or collective force bear their “rights” within them, then what we find in the theory of rights, and the notion of

immanent justice, is really just a restatement of basic anti-authoritarian principles: equality is the basis of society and interests must be balanced.

It was in *The Theory of Taxation*, also published in 1861, that the citizen-State finally emerged. While primarily concerned with methods of public finance, the book contained a very brief section on the Relation of the State and Liberty, according to modern rights.” Despite its brevity, however, it is perhaps the most concise summary of Proudhon’s later theory of the State. The modern theory of rights, he claimed, “has done one new thing: it has put in the presence of one another, on the same line, two powers until now had been in a relation of subordination. These two powers are the State and the Individual, in other words the Government and Liberty.” He reaffirmed that the State had a “positive reality,” manifesting itself as a “power of collectivity,” issuing from the organized collective, rather than imposed on it from outside, and thus possessing rights—of the sort introduced in *War and Peace*—but no authority. He asserted that in a regime of liberty it too must be ruled, like the citizens, only by reason and by justice—because, as he put it, “it is itself, if I may put it this way, a sort of citizen.” [38] This image of the citizen-State, neither master nor servant, and located “on the same line” as the other citizens, may be the simplest characterization possible of Proudhon’s complex and elusive ideal for the State. Finally, Proudhon declared the State “the protector of the liberty and property of the citizens, not only of those who have been born, but of those who are to be born. Its tutelage embraces the present and the future, and extends to future generations: thus the State has rights proportional to its obligations; without which, what use would its foresight serve?” [39] The State was now as Tufferd described it, the thing that persisted and mediated the balancing of interests even between generations.

A third work, *The Theory of Property*, was substantially completed in 1861, although it was not published until after Proudhon’s death. It was controversial at the time of its publication, because the editors did not clearly mark their contributions to two summary sections left unfinished by the author. [40] It has been controversial for more recent readers, because it represented the final stage of Proudhon’s theory of property—a theory which evolved in some of the same surprising ways as his theory of the State. Indeed, those who knew his many writings on property should probably have been prepared for the development of this State-theory. He had hardly made his first, triumphant pronouncements about property’s defeat in 1840 when he began to make what we would probably recognize as a very early shift from *critical* to *constructive* concerns, raising the possibility that the same property that was “theft” was also “liberty,” if properly balanced by other forces,” by 1846. By 1848, Proudhon believed that “All that it is possible to do against the abuses or drawbacks of property is to merge, synthesize, organize or balance it with a contrary element...” [41] In *The Theory of Property* he was finally able to move beyond that impasse, by proposing the State as the counterbalancing power to individual property.

The work shows that he was far from having overcome all his misgivings about the State. “The state, constituted in the most rational and liberal manner, animated by the most just intentions, is none the less an enormous power, capable of crushing everything, all by itself, if it is not given a counter-balance.” [42] One of the useful powers of property was, somewhat ironically, a power to divide society, a power required because “[t]he power of the state is a power of concentration; give it freedom to grow and all individuality will soon disappear, absorbed into the collectivity; society will fall into communism; property, on the other hand, is a power of decentralization; because it is itself absolute, it is anti-despotic, anti-unitary; it is

because of this that it is the principle of all federation; and it is for this reason that property, autocratic in essence carried into political society, becomes straightway republican.” [43]

Beyond the transformation of the despotic, fictive State into the citizen-State, difficulties and responsibilities still remained. “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.”

Through the 1860s, one of the dominant ideas in Proudhon’s thought was this notion of federation, which involved the decentralization of society and the organization of the parts in a mutual, horizontal manner, without relations of authority over one another. *The Federative Principle*, published in 1863, started with the premise that both the political and economic realms were doomed to content with irreducible antinomies: “It is a question of knowing if society can arrive at something settled, equitable and fixed, which satisfies reason and conscience, or if we are condemned for eternity to this Ixion’s wheel.” [44] For Proudhon, of course, it was again a question of balancing opposing forces and tendencies, and much of the text is devoted to exploring the details of that equilibration in various arenas.

Alongside reiterations of his warning to keep the power of the State in check, he clarified what he took to be the specific role of the state: “In a free society, the role of the State or government is *par excellence* a role of legislation, institution, creation, inauguration, installation;— it is, as little as possible, a role of execution.” [45] If collective beings were to have a special role in the division of political labor, it is natural that it would involve the identification of problems pertaining specifically to the collective aspects of society, but the non-governmental implementation of solutions to such problems could only fall back on the individuals that made up the collectivity. Perpetual social progress would guarantee a permanent role for entities like the State, but should they be allowed to fulfill beyond that to which they were especially suited, the balance of forces would be upset, and the hard-won stability of society sacrificed.

At the end of his life, Proudhon had come to think of federation as the practical key to achieving and maintaining justice—understood simply as balance—in all aspects of society:

All my economic ideas, developed for twenty-five years, can be summarized in these three words; *Agro-industrial Federation*.

All my political views come down to a similar formula: *Political Federation* or *Decentralization*.

And as I make of my ideas neither a party instrument nor a means of personal ambition, all my hopes for the present and the future are expressed by this third term, corollary of the other two: *Progressive Federation*. [46]

Proudhon worked on his social science to the very end. In *The Theory of Property*, he had declared that “humanity proceeds by approximations,” positing a progress-without-end as an alternative to utopian blueprints, and he had on several occasions sketched out general “approximations” of his vision of an anarchist society, most notably perhaps in *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. His final, deathbed work, *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, [47] was of a similar character, but written, with the benefit of Proudhon’s entire *constructive* development, specifically for the radical workers who would be Proudhon’s immediate ideological heirs. It provided concrete examples of how the various elements of Proudhon’s project, including the re-imagined State, might fit together in a free society.

Looking back over Proudhon's writings on the State, it is clear that some aspects of his theory remained unfinished or unwritten at the time of his death, but it is also striking how much of what was written by this pioneering anarchist and social scientist has essentially been ignored by both traditions for more than a hundred years. There are elements of Proudhon's thought which are strikingly contemporary, including a sort of anti-foundationalism which many may be surprised to find in nineteenth works. There is also a novel approach to questions of the relationship between the individual and collective. Above all, perhaps, the importance of an adequate analysis of the institutions of property and the State, or the principles of liberty and authority, have not diminished in the time since Frédéric Tufferd confronted the socialist movement with a choice of paths. To acquaint ourselves with Proudhon is, if nothing else, to provide ourselves with long-forgotten options.

[1] Completed June, 2013. A German-language version of this essay will appear in the *Staatsverständnisse* series, published by Nomos, who hold the rights to the translation.

[2] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Théorie de l'impôt*, Paris: Dentu, 1861: 68.

[3] Bakunin was writing about "statism," or its Russian equivalent, by 1870. Joseph Lane's "An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto" was published in 1887, and in the previous year the American individualist anarchist Benjamin R. Tucker had published a partial translation of Proudhon's "Resistance to the Revolution" under the title "The State."

[4] Frédéric Tufferd, "L'Union en socialisme," *Société nouvelle* 2, No. 33 (septembre 1887): 224.

[5] See, for example, Mikhail Bakunin's "La science et la question vitale de la revolution."

[6] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Confessions d'un Revolutionnaire*, new ed., (Paris: Lacroix, 1876): 5.

[7] *Théorie de l'impôt*. 77.

[8] Proudhon, *Correspondance*, vol. 6, (Paris: Lacroix, 1875): 285–286.

[9] Proudhon, *Philosophie du progrès: programme*, (Bruxelles: Lebegue, 1853): 22.

[10] Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* (Paris: Prevot, 1841): 301–302.

[11] See, for example, Pierre Leroux, *Projet d'une constitution démocratique et sociale* (Paris: G. Sandré, 1848.)

[12] Proudhon's key writings on credit are assembled in *Solution du problème sociale* (Paris: Lacroix, 1868.)

[13] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 30.

[14] Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: Marpon et Flammarion, 1880): 235. The personal aspects of the debate occasionally allow us a glimpse of the intimate lives of the participants. In his correspondence, Proudhon includes this curious detail. "While Louis Blanc accuses me of *selling* socialism, his framed portrait serves as the companion to mine in my wife's bedroom! Could I refuse that place to the man who, despite the weakness of his deductions and his incompetence, best represents the governmental principle?..." *Correspondance*, Vol. 5 (Paris: Lacroix, 1875): 107.

[15] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 9–10.

[16] Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: Marpon et Flammarion, 1880): 236.

[17] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 11.

[18] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 13.

[19] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 12.

- [20] *Mélanges*, tome iii, 9.
- [21] Proudhon, *Idée générale de la révolution au XIXème siècle*, (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1851): 341–342.
- [22] Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, Tome III (Paris: Lacroix, 1868): 113.
- [23] *Philosophie du progrès*, 19.
- [24] *Philosophie du progrès*, 20–22.
- [25] *Qu'est-ce que la propriété*, xviii.
- [26] Proudhon, *Lettre à Mr Blanqui sur la propriété: deuxième mémoire*, (Paris: Prevot, 1841): 130.
- [27] Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, tome I (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1858): 353.
- [28] *Op cit.*, 480–481.
- [29] *Op. cit.*, tome I, 481.
- [30] *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, tome III, 119.
- [31] The suggestion recalls Proudhon's statement from 1840, where he proposed that questions of policy might be decided by the Academy of Sciences, to whom all citizens could appeal, on the basis of "departmental statistics." The proposal has sometimes been mistaken for the creation of a "Department of Statistics," presumably with authority to regulate on the basis of science, although that seems clearly at odds with the anarchistic self-government Proudhon was in the process of proposing. While the most authoritarian readings of these two passages are almost certainly incorrect, there is certainly something puzzling about them, and we know that Proudhon was not immune to proposing mechanisms arguably at odds with his goals. It was, after all, in the context of a very similar discussion of the "organ of justice" that he elevated the patriarchal family to a special place in his social theory.
- [32] *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, tome I, 495.
- [33] *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, tome III, 113.
- [34] Proudhon, *La guerre et la paix*, tome II (Bruxelles: Hertz, 1861): 420.
- [35] Lack of space prevents me from addressing some interesting material on relations between States. Readers are encouraged to consult Alex Prichard, *Justice, Order and Anarchy* (New York: Routledge, 2103) for an analysis of *La Guerre et la Paix* from the perspective of international relations.
- [36] Proudhon, *La guerre et la paix*, tome I (Bruxelles: Hertz, 1861): 199.
- [37] *Op. cit.*, 288.
- [38] *Théorie de l'impôt*, 68.
- [39] *Op cit.*, 76–82.
- [40] See Auguste Beauchery, *Economie Sociale de P.-J. Proudhon* (Lille: Imprimerie Wilmot-Courteuse, 1867.)
- [41] *Confessions*, 228.
- [42] Proudhon, *Théorie de la propriété* (Paris: Lacroix, 1866): 137.
- [43] *Op cit.*, 144.
- [44] Proudhon, *Du Principe fédératif* (Paris: Lacroix, 1868): 40–41.
- [45] *Op cit.*, 54.
- [46] *Op cit.*, 83–84.
- [47] Proudhon, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières* (Paris: Lacroix, 1868.)

Legal Order

In the anarchist context, it is common to approach the question of *legal order* by asking whether anarchists truly desire a society in which *nothing is prohibited*. This is, it seems to me, only half of the question that needs to be asked, as an anarchic society would also be one in which *nothing is permitted*. And it is probably this second aspect that is most helpful in evaluating the *antinomian* character of anarchy.

Legal order exists when society is guided by *laws, rules or principles* that are considered *binding* and *enforceable*. Legal order inevitably depends on some assertion of [authority](#) and is part of the apparatus of a legal hierarchy. The range of presumed authorities is, of course, great, but whether the basis is divinity, democracy, sanctified might or nature, the basic quality of legal order changes very little. If we understand the anarchist critique as at least in part a rejection of the hierarchical pretense of elevating some elements of society above others (either directly or as proxies for some reigning abstraction) and endowing those elements with a “right” to command, then the specific pretext for that elevation is a matter of only secondary concern.

It is also important to recognize that legal order is *pervasive*. Where *law* is in force, it tends to divide all actions into the categories of *legal* and *illegal*, *licit* and *illicit*, *permitted* and *prohibited*. So, while there are lots of obvious differences between *Leviticus*, the penal code of a given government, papal bulls, the non-aggression principle, “natural law,” etc., the systems that represent presume to pass judgment on essentially the whole of future human activity, with necessarily limited attention to contexts.

In anarchist circles, the defense of some form of *law* usually depends on the recognition that some small number of acts seem unjustifiable to almost anyone under any circumstances, but this is hardly a compelling argument for imposing a necessarily pervasive legal order, with all the recourse to authority and hierarchy that seems inseparable from it. But, to return to my first point, this insistence on the necessity of law seems to involve a confusion of the lawlessness of anarchy with some form of license, as if anarchy would remove the prohibitions, but not the permissions also imposed by legal order.

Authority: The *OED* presents a wide range of definitions, of which the one most pertinent to anarchist concerns is (II.2) “Power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience; moral, legal, or political supremacy.” The general heading (II.) is “Power to enforce obedience or compliance, or a party possessing it” and this is distinguished from the following set of definitions (III), which pertain to “Power to influence action, opinion, or belief, or a party possessing it.” Fundamental to the anarchist understanding of authority is this *power to command and enforce compliance and obedience*, since this power necessarily occupies a position “above” those subject to the authority, required and possibly compelled to obey. This is a hierarchical relationship.

A few clarifications:

Regardless of its origins, this sort of authority involves a *non-voluntary* relation between a ruling power and ruled subjects. An individual may choose to conform to the demands of authority, either through fear of punishment, shared interests, general indifference, etc., but non-compliance is not among the options open to the subject of authority.

Some custodial relations or relations of tutelage may appear to be relations of authority. The parental relation is an example where one party is presumed to have a right to command another, but the appearance of authority is arguably deceptive in these cases, as the parental right to command is generally bundled with a duty to place the interests of the child above those of the parent in many instances. Where we have a conventional right to command and a social hierarchy, but the interests of the subject of command are placed above those of the “authority” figure, we have something more complicated than authority, which is probably better understood as analogous to some form of *hospitality*.

The “power” behind authority is fundamentally one of *right*. Outside of some context where “might is right” is recognized as the basis of social order, the mere capacity to compel another does not constitute authority. At the same time, authority need not be competent to rule wisely, nor actually capable of compelling obedience. Rights and capacities may coincide, but that is arguably a different concern than whether or not authority exists. Nor is authority ultimately dependent on the importance of the rights assigned. It is, for example, quite possible to be authorized to exert powers that would never be called for.

As a matter of right, authority is specifically vested in or assigned to an individual, group, role or institution. As the right is not dependent on the capacity of the authority, neither is it dependent on the capacities or needs of the subject or on any of the various material conditions that might give a greater or lesser practical significance to the authority. The *appearance of authority* or an *unauthorized power to compel* may emerge from a variety of instances, but we must account for those *authority-effects* separately.

Authority-effect: The infamous “authority of the bootmaker,” from Bakunin’s “God and the State,” is probably the most familiar example of an instance where the uneven distribution of expertise, together with the staple nature of the object of expertise, combine to create a condition of quasi-authority, where an expert may be capable of “commanding” a situation, not because they have any right to do so, but because they occupy an advantageous position in society, thanks to the division of labor. We may be forced to take the advice of a specialist, but the source of their power to influence our decision is as much our lack of expertise and whatever exigencies we face as it is their own knowledge and skill. In a medical crisis, a doctor may be able to wield considerable power over patients without medical expertise, while in a time of good health or under circumstances where the patient has medical expertise, that power melts away. Certainly,

we don't bow to bootmakers when we don't need boots, even if sufficient need on our part may create real power that they can wield. Credentialing systems may create a slightly different sort of authority effect, particularly where they are faulty or corrupt, by increasing the possibility of the false appearance of expertise or by limiting the ability of capable practitioners to meet the needs of others.

Authority-effects are very *real*, in the sense that the combination of factors can compel obedience to just as great an extent as more formal authority, and they may continue to be a problem even under circumstances where the *principle of authority* has been rejected. But their ill effects will almost certainly be reduced as we move beyond a social model that treats authority as a foundational principle and learn to engage in anarchistic relations.

But What about the Children? (A Note on Tutelage)

It's a question again of "legitimate authority" and "justified hierarchy," and specifically of the favorite example used by those who want to leave a space within anarchist theory for those things: the care of very young children. The argument I have encountered repeatedly is that parenting is, at least in the case of those very young children, a necessarily authoritarian relation: children must be ordered about in order to protect them from hazards; parents have a duty and presumably also a right to dictate to their children; and children have an obligation to obey.

It's one of those debates that all too often comes down to: "WHY WON'T SOMEONE PLEASE THINK OF THE CHILDREN!!!" And we know all too well all the dodgy uses to which that appeal has been put. But it should also be clear that the underlying questions, regarding our relations with those individuals with substantially different capacities for self-determination, are important on their own and probably have some connection to how we organize our relations with non-human nature. So we have to try to get to the bottom of what's really at stake, despite the difficulties. Unfortunately, the terms that seem most useful to make the kinds of distinctions we would need are the very terms that seem to have been extended to encompass all sorts of potentially conflicting ideas, so we have to be try to find other vocabularies.

The general distinction that critics of all authority arguably need to make is between *the capacity to act* and *various sorts of social permission or sanction for action that include some right to command others*. It's a distinction that we make regularly: the capacity to kill another individual does not generally carry with it any right to do so, nor does the capacity to understand complex social relations itself grant any right to arrange them for others. The expert has to possess something more than mere expertise in order for there to be authority (in the strong sense) vested in them. That *something more* is social in character, and indeed structures the sort of society that can exist between individuals.

The question becomes where, in relations presumably guided by anarchist principles, that extra, social something could come from. The case of the parental relation is at least useful as a place to examine the possibilities. In order to be particularly careful, it may be useful to first address it in terms of the question of "legitimate authority" and then again in terms of "justifiable hierarchy."

There are some possible source of authority, such as *ownership* of the child by the parents, that we can probably set aside without much comment. Similarly, there seems to be little sympathy for the notion that the parental relation might be one in which might makes right. In general, even those who consider the parental relation necessarily authoritarian seem inclined to also treat it as a relation of care. Indeed, they often characterize parental guardianship as a duty, although it is often unclear to whom the duty is, or could be, owed. We'll return to the dynamic of duty and obligation. First, we should see if perhaps parental authority could just be a matter of superior capacity and expertise, and perhaps one that could make us think differently about "the authority of the bootmaker."

Certainly, one of the elements of the parent-child relation is that adults have a significantly greater experience of the world and the business of making our way through it relatively unscathed. They have capacities that are more developed in a variety of ways. If we were to assent to the notion that the difference between knowing how to make boots and not having those skills could be a source of authority, then certainly the difference between the skills and capacities of parent and child could be a similar source. The question becomes how a difference

in capacities is transformed into a right to command on the part of the more capable and a duty to obey on the part of the less capable.

Let's imagine a society of talented generalists, where skills and capacities are widely distributed and each individual is relatively self-sufficient. It is hard to imagine the rationale by which we would say that interference by certain individuals in the lives of others could be considered justified or legitimate. Perhaps the case of plucking someone out of harm's way would be the sort of exception we might note, but, in the case of individuals of equal capacities, it seems hard to characterize the act as one of authority. Under these circumstances, the intervention has to be considered one that we make on our own responsibility and if we find it was unwelcome, it isn't clear that we could justify our interference in any way that the recipient/victim should feel obliged to accept. Certainly, in a society of competent bootmakers, no particular bootmaker could be said to have much in the way of authority.

Let's consider then what happens if, in this society of competent bootmakers, one individual becomes expert. It still isn't clear that the additional capacity translates into any sort of authority. There are certainly likely to be economic effects as we begin to see specialization in a society, but there's no obvious way in which any power or right to command emerges from the scenario.

But let's consider the other end of a certain spectrum, in a society where we have a great deal of specialization—so much, in fact, that individuals are constantly confronted with the need to consult others to complete the most basic of tasks. The dynamics of the society will obviously be more complex, but it isn't clear that this extreme divvying-up of expertise provides much greater footholds for the establishment of authority, at least in the realm of principle. Here, every individual is, in theory, a potential authority when it comes to their particular specialization and a dependent in most other contexts, but in fact the complex interdependence means that all of that authority remains largely potential, since the social leverage available to each narrow specialization is minuscule in comparison to the combined importance of all the other forms of specialized expertise.

Now, in a more complex society there are more opportunities for equal interdependence to break down. That means that some of our specialists might find themselves gaining relative advantages as circumstances gave their skills particular importance. The various weapon-producers or food-producers might collude, under favorable circumstances, to transform their expertise into the power to command, but we would be hard put, I think, to find an anarchist principle to justify their actions. And I think we would have to say that the source of that possibility was more in the general incapacity of the population with regard to specific skills and the specific environmental circumstances than it was in the expertise of the individuals able to capitalize on the situation.

Obviously, we live in societies where the distribution of expertise lies between these extremes and where the existing conditions already structure which sorts of expertise have access to the power to command, whether it is a matter of commanding wealth in the market or obedience in a wide range of authoritarian institutions. But it isn't clear how our own societies differ from these extreme examples, where the question of "legitimate authority" arising from expertise is concerned. The power to command seems to emerge from just about every element in society *except* individual expertise: already existing political authority, economic monopoly, the comparative incapacity of others, accidents and "acts of God," etc. We can't seem to make the leap from "I can..." to "I may and others must..." but that is precisely the leap we have to make in order to establish some principle by which expertise itself really establishes some authority vested in the expert.

Add to these considerations Bakunin's comments on the corrosive effects of authority on expertise, and perhaps we can acknowledge we have to look elsewhere. The ultimate sanction of expertise is presumably truth, but practical truth in a developing context is not the sort of thing that stands still, so that sanction has to be renewed and tested by new study and experiment. So even if we could establish the present legitimacy of an authority based on the most rigorous sort of scientific truth, in some way that the non-expert could verify (and this is not at all clear), we have no guarantee that the legitimacy would remain as circumstances changed, while the exercise of the authority as such is itself at least potentially a break from the exercise of the practices of the field of expertise on which it is presumably based. Once crowned an expert, it is easy to stop renewing one's expertise.

When we apply these considerations to the parental relation, it doesn't seem any easier to explain why the greater capacities of the parent would alone establish a power to command or an obligation to obey in this instance than it is in the relations between adults. At the same time, there seem to be other explanations for why we might act in their defense that don't depend on either authority or even on the relative differences in capacity between adults and children. We might, after all, act to save another adult, without any attempt to establish authority or permission. We might do so out of specific relations of care or simply on the basis of our experience of what constitutes intentional and accidental behavior in our own societies. The major difference with children is that we can be fairly certain that nobody, except the child, is likely to make much fuss if our exercise of real or imagined authority seems to be "for the good of the child." And the reasons for that may have more to do with our tendency to think of children and their actions as existing within a "justifiable hierarchy" beneath adults and the ordinary workings of adult society.

The parent-child hierarchy is often cited as one of a class of educational or tutelary hierarchies. Tutelage is guardianship and in tutelary relations the assumption is that the subordinate (child, pupil, apprentice, etc.) is at least temporarily incapable of protecting themselves and their interests, so the right to exercise the power of command is based on the assumption that it is exercised for the subordinate—or at least "for their own good." Bakunin left open the possibility of exercising authority over very young children, because he understood human development as in part characterized by a progressive increase in humanity, at the very beginning of which children are effectively not yet human and need to be given the tools to take on their own development before they can start that progressive development on their own terms.

Even this may not be entirely defensible as a matter of principle. The familiar example of pulling a child back from traffic already assumes a particular sort of "adult world" in which the spaces for free exploration are dramatically limited by the business as usual of the institutions we have created. It isn't clear what could justify the busy street, in principled terms, so it is at least a little bit hard to know how that busy street contributes to the principled legitimization of the parental act.

But if we assume that, specifics aside, there will always be some set of coping skills that need to be acquired before children can assume responsibility for their own safety and development, we still have to work out just what form the tutelary hierarchy really takes—and then whether it amounts to evidence in favor of retaining some space for "legitimate authority" and "justified hierarchy" within anarchist thought.

Early in our examination, it was suggested that parental care might be a *duty*. Now, if this was the case, the parent would presumably be superior to the child because they were inferior to some other power that imposed the duty. We might certainly think of familiar circumstances,

under which the care of children is indeed dictated by law and by specific social norms, but I suspect we can also think of reasons why most of those factors which presume to dictate to the individual might not be consistent with anarchist principles or present in an anarchist society. We could also think of the duty as a duty to the child, but that puts us in the strange position of imagining a hierarchy in which the superior interest is that of a being elevated to that status by their incapacity. If there is a hierarchy here, it is an odd one, disconnected from our usual understanding of authority, since the child who cannot manage their own interests is hardly in a position to exercise a right to command.

Instead of a hierarchy, we seem to be left with one of those complicated relationships, like the guest-host relation of hospitality, where the roles are fluid and the usual rules are suspended. In this case, we have some of the forms of command and rule, but without any of the usual authoritarian or hierarchical rationales. Rather than being an exception to anarchist principles, perhaps we should understand the parental relation as a most accessible example of how anarchists principles ought to be applied in our struggle towards a more genuinely free society, characterized by more thoroughly anti-authoritarian and non-hierarchical relations.

After all, the parental relation, with all of its negotiations between the rights and needs of children and those of parents, is not the sort of thing that we intend to maintain forever, assuming that we value our children as developing human beings. Confronted with the limited capacities of the child, our action is directed toward increasing those capacities. We teach and, in those instances where our teaching has not caught up with the needs of the day, we intervene more directly. But the hope, assuming that desire to see children grow up to be independent, is that the tutelage is a very temporary thing. And child-rearing is, like every other kind of expertise, itself a matter of practice and developing expertise. The specific difficulties of negotiating rights and interests mean that it is necessarily a work of trial-and-error. There's nothing easy or comfortable about the relation, particularly for those who concern themselves with the principled critique of authority, so there's even some strong incentives to move things along and reduce the quasi-hierarchical elements of the relation.

That doesn't sound like a set of reasons to make space in anarchist theory for any more extensive acceptance of hierarchy—and perhaps quite the contrary. It would seem to me that each time we are confronted with an imbalance of expertise and the opening to authoritarian relations, the logical anarchist response would be to work, on our own responsibility, to cultivate greater, more widespread knowledge and skill, rather than accommodating ourselves to the imbalance. There will, of course, be times when we have to move forward with the limitations imposed on us by hard necessity. That was, after all, the one law that anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin would acknowledge. But the point of necessity-as-law was not to grant authority to any particular response to the inevitable, but to emphasize that we must respond. How we respond will seldom be entirely dictated by our circumstances, which is precisely the reason that our principles need to be clear, so that we can advance most effectively, given our real limitations, toward the beautiful ideal of anarchy.

Mikhail Bakunin, “What is Authority” (1870)

NOTE: This passage is generally known as part of “God and the State” (*Dieu et l’État*, first published in 1882), but it appears in Bakunin’s manuscript as part of “Sophismes historiques de l’école doctrinaire des communistes allemands,” the second section of the unfinished book *L’Empire Knouto-Germanique et la Révolution Sociale* (*The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*.)

This new translation seeks to clarify some passages that may appear contradictory in existing translations. In particular the verb *repousser*, which previous translators have tended to simply render as “reject,” has been brought closer to its literal sense of “push back” and some attention has been given to distinguishing where Bakunin uses the word *autorité* to designate abstract authority and where he refers to particular experts or authority figures.

In the preceding section, Bakunin has been discussing, among other things, the idea of God, and the section ends with his reply to Voltaire’s comment that *if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him*:

If God really did exist, it would be necessary to get rid of him.

The severe logic that dictates these words is far too obvious to require a further development of this argument. And it seems to me impossible that the illustrious men, whose names (so celebrated and so justly respected) I have cited, should not have been struck by it themselves, and should not have perceived the contradiction into which they fell in speaking of God and human liberty at once. To have disregarded it, they must have considered this inconsistency or logical license practically necessary to humanity’s well-being.

Perhaps, too, while speaking of liberty as something very respectable and very dear, they understood the term quite differently than we do, as materialists and revolutionary socialists. Indeed, they never speak of it without immediately adding another word, authority—a word and a thing which we detest with all our heart.

What is authority? Is it the inevitable power of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds? Indeed, against these laws revolt is not only forbidden, but is even impossible. We may misunderstand them or still not know them at all, but we cannot disobey them, because they constitute the basis and very conditions of our existence; they envelop us, penetrate us, regulate all our movements, thoughts, and acts, so that even when we believe that we disobey them, we do nothing but demonstrate their omnipotence.

Yes, we are absolutely the slaves of these laws. But there is nothing humiliating in that slavery, or, rather, it is not slavery at all. For slavery supposes an external master, a legislator outside of the one whom he commands, while these laws are not outside of us; they are inherent in us; they constitute our being, our whole being, as much physically as intellectually and morally. We live, we breathe, we act, we think, we wish only through these laws. Without them we are nothing—we are not. From where, then, could we derive the power and the wish to rebel against them?

With regard to natural laws, only one single liberty is possible to man—that of recognizing and applying them more and more all the time, in conformity with the goal of collective and individual emancipation or humanization which he pursues. These laws, once recognized,

exercise an authority which is never disputed by the mass of men. One must, for instance, be at base either a fool or a theologian or at least a metaphysician, jurist, or bourgeois economist to rebel against the law by which 2×2 makes 4. One must have faith to imagine that fire will not burn nor water drown, unless one has recourse to some subterfuge that is still based on some other natural law. But these rebellions, or, rather, these attempts at or foolish fancies of an impossible revolt, only form a rare exception; for, in general, it may be said that the mass of men, in their daily lives, let themselves be governed by good sense—that is, by the sum of the natural laws generally recognized—in an almost absolute fashion.

The great misfortune is that a large number of natural laws, already established as such by science, remain unknown to the popular masses, thanks to the care of these tutelary governments that exist, as we know, only for the good of the people. There is another difficulty—namely, that the major portion of the natural laws that are inherent in the development of human society and that are every bit as necessary, invariable, and fatal as the laws that govern the physical world, have not been duly established and recognized by science itself.

Once they shall have been recognized by science, and then shall have passed, by means of an extensive system of popular education and instruction, from science into the consciousness of all, the question of liberty will be perfectly resolved. The most stubborn authoritarians must admit that then there will be no more need of political organization, direction or legislation, three things which, whether they emanate from the will of the sovereign or from the vote of a parliament elected by universal suffrage, and even should they conform to the system of natural laws—which has never been the case and could never be the case—are always equally deadly and hostile to the liberty of the masses, because they impose upon them a system of external and therefore despotic laws.

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any foreign will, whether divine or human, collective or individual.

Suppose an academy of learned individuals, composed of the most illustrious representatives of science; suppose that this academy is charged with the legislation and organization of society, and that, inspired only by the purest love of truth, it only dictates to society laws in absolute harmony with the latest discoveries of science. Well, I maintain, for my part, that that legislation and organization would be a monstrosity, and that for two reasons: first, that human science is always necessarily imperfect, and that, comparing what it has discovered with what remains to be discovered, we might say that it is always in its cradle. So that if we wanted to force the practical life of men, collective as well as individual, into strict and exclusive conformity with the latest data of science, we should condemn society as well as individuals to suffer martyrdom on a bed of Procrustes, which would soon end by dislocating and stifling them, life always remaining infinitely greater than science.

The second reason is this: a society that would obey legislation emanating from a scientific academy, not because it understood itself the rational character of this legislation (in which case the existence of the academy would become useless), but because this legislation, emanating from the academy, was imposed in the name of a science that it venerated without comprehending—such a society would be a society, not of men, but of brutes. It would be a second edition of that poor Republic of Paraguay, which let itself be governed for so long by the Society of Jesus. Such a society could not fail to descend soon to the lowest stage of idiocy.

But there is still a third reason that would render such a government impossible. It is that a scientific academy invested with a sovereignty that is, so to speak, absolute, even if it were

composed of the most illustrious men, would infallibly and soon end by corrupting itself morally and intellectually. Already today, with the few privileges allowed them, this is the history of all the academies. The greatest scientific genius, from the moment that he becomes an academician, an officially licensed savant, inevitably declines and lapses into sleep. He loses his spontaneity, his revolutionary hardihood, and that troublesome and savage energy that characterizes the nature of the grandest geniuses, ever called to destroy obsolete worlds and lay the foundations of new ones. He undoubtedly gains in politeness, in utilitarian and practical wisdom, what he loses in power of thought. In a word, he becomes corrupted.

It is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men. The privileged man, whether politically or economically, is a man depraved intellectually and morally. That is a social law that admits no exception, and is as applicable to entire nations as to classes, companies, and individuals. It is the law of equality, the supreme condition of liberty and humanity. The principal aim of this treatise is precisely to elaborate on it, to demonstrate its truth in all the manifestations of human life.

A scientific body to which had been confided the government of society would soon end by no longer occupying itself with science at all, but with quite another business; and that business, the business of all established powers, would be to perpetuate itself by rendering the society confided to its care ever more stupid and consequently more in need of its government and direction.

But that which is true of scientific academies is also true of all constituent and legislative assemblies, even when they are the result of universal suffrage. Universal suffrage may renew their composition, it is true, but this does not prevent the formation in a few years' time of a body of politicians, privileged in fact though not by right, who, by devoting themselves exclusively to the direction of the public affairs of a country, finally form a sort of political aristocracy or oligarchy. Witness the United States of America and Switzerland.

Consequently, no external legislation and no authority—one, for that matter, being inseparable from the other, and both tending to the enslavement of society and the degradation of the legislators themselves.

Does it follow that I drive back every authority? The thought would never occur to me. When it is a question of boots, I refer the matter to the authority of the cobbler; when it is a question of houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer. For each special area of knowledge I speak to the appropriate expert. But I allow neither the cobbler nor the architect nor the scientist to impose upon me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect merited by their intelligence, their character, their knowledge, reserving always my incontestable right of criticism and verification. I do not content myself with consulting a single specific authority, but consult several. I compare their opinions and choose that which seems to me most accurate. But I recognize no infallible authority, even in quite exceptional questions; consequently, whatever respect I may have for the honesty and the sincerity of such or such an individual, I have absolute faith in no one. Such a faith would be fatal to my reason, to my liberty, and even to the success of my undertakings; it would immediately transform me into a stupid slave and an instrument of the will and interests of another.

If I bow before the authority of the specialists and declare myself ready to follow, to a certain extent and as long as may seem to me necessary, their indications and even their directions, it is because that authority is imposed upon me by no one, neither by men nor by God. Otherwise I would drive them back in horror, and let the devil take their counsels, their direction, and their

science, certain that they would make me pay, by the loss of my liberty and human dignity, for the scraps of truth, wrapped in a multitude of lies, that they might give me.

I bow before the authority of exceptional men because it is imposed upon me by my own reason. I am conscious of my ability to grasp, in all its details and positive developments, only a very small portion of human science. The greatest intelligence would not be sufficient to grasp the entirety. From this results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of the division and association of labor. I receive and I give—such is human life. Each is a directing authority and each is directed in his turn. So there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.

This same reason prohibits me, then, from recognizing a fixed, constant, and universal authority-figure, because there is no universal man, no man capable of grasping in that wealth of detail, without which the application of science to life is impossible, all the sciences, all the branches of social life. And if such a universality was ever realized in a single man, and if he wished to take advantage of it in order to impose his authority upon us, it would be necessary to drive that man out of society, because his authority would inevitably reduce all the others to slavery and imbecility. I do not think that society ought to maltreat men of genius as it has done hitherto; but neither do I think it should enrich them too much, nor, and this above all, grant them any privileges or exclusive rights; and that for three reasons: first, because it would often mistake a charlatan for a man of genius; then, because, through such a system of privileges, it could transform even a true man of genius into a charlatan, demoralize and stupefy him; and, finally, because it would give itself a despot.

in summary, then, we recognize the absolute authority of science, because science has no other object than the mental reproduction, well thought out and as systematic as possible, of the natural laws inherent in the material, intellectual, and moral life of both the physical and the social worlds, these two worlds constituting, in fact, only one single natural world. apart from this legitimate authority, uniquely legitimate because it is rational and in harmony with human liberty, we declare all other authorities false, arbitrary, despotic and deadly.

We recognize the absolute authority of science, but we reject [*repoussons*] the infallibility and universality of the representatives of science. In our church—if I may be permitted to use for a moment an expression which I so detest: Church and State are my two *bêtes noires*—in our church, as in the Protestant church, we have a head, an invisible Christ, science; and, like the Protestants, more consistent even than the Protestants, we do not wish to suffer a pope, nor council, nor conclaves of infallible cardinals, nor bishops, nor even priests. Our Christ is distinguished from the Protestant and Christian Christ in this—that the latter is a personal being, while ours is impersonal; the Christian Christ, already fully realized in an eternal past, presents himself as a perfect being, while the fulfillment and perfection of our Christ, science, are always in the future: which is equivalent to saying that they will never be realized. Therefore, in recognizing no absolute authority but that of *absolute science*, we in no way compromise our liberty.

I mean by this phrase, “absolute science,” the truly universal science that would reproduce ideally, to its fullest extent and in all its infinite detail, the universe, the system or coordination of all the natural laws manifested in the incessant development of the world. It is obvious that such a science, the sublime object of all the efforts of the human mind, will never be realized in its absolute fullness. Our Christ, then, will remain eternally unfinished, which must considerably moderate the pride of his licensed representatives among us. Against that God the Son, in whose name they claim to impose their insolent and pedantic authority on us, we appeal to God the

Father, who is the real world, real life, of which their God is only the too-imperfect expression, and of which we, real beings, living, working, struggling, loving, aspiring, enjoying, and suffering, are the immediate representatives.

But, while rejecting [*repoussant*] the absolute, universal, and infallible authority of the men of science, we willingly bow before the respectable, but relative, very temporary, and very restricted authority of the representatives of special sciences, asking nothing better than to consult them by turns, and very grateful for the precious information that they should want give to us, on the condition that to receive such information from us on occasions when, and concerning matters about which, we are more learned than they; and, in general, we ask nothing better than to see men endowed with great knowledge, great experience, great minds, and, above all, great hearts, exert over us a natural and legitimate influence, freely accepted and never imposed in the name of any official authority whatsoever, celestial or terrestrial. We accept all natural authorities and all influences of fact, but none of right; for every authority or every influence of right, officially imposed as such, becoming straight away an oppression and a falsehood, would inevitably impose upon us, as I believe I have sufficiently shown, slavery and absurdity.

In short, we reject all legislation, all authority, and every privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even that arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can only ever turn to the advantage of a dominant, exploiting minority and against the interests of the immense, subjugated majority.

It is in this sense that we are really Anarchists.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

Constructing Anarchisms: Vital Things

“Let us not overlook vital things, because of the bulk of trifles confronting us.” — Emma Goldman, “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation”

Let’s get a bit topical, if only for a few moments, and address the events of the last couple of weeks. I think there are lots of interesting discussions to be had about the shortcomings of democratic institutions in general, the influence of fascism on US politics, etc. This could easily be our lead-in to the discussion about the defining features of *governmentalism*—and we’ll undoubtedly cover some of that ground. But I’m drawn at least as much to the pious nature of the responses from both right and left, the appeals to the “sacred” nature of the Capitol and the invocation of *tradition* against whatever it is that just happened.

My own background as an “Americanist” (in the scholarly sense) and as the descendant of early colonists tend to direct my own analysis and critique away from the patriotic “this is not us” and the radical emphasis on “the fascist creep” (etc.) and toward a recognition of what is all too familiar in this latest resurgence of *nativist* and *theocratic* tendencies. Loose talk about “witch hunts” is obviously deflection or projection, coming from the defenders of Trump & Co., but it certainly resonates with the general atmosphere of *moral panic*, which is about as *perennial* an element as we could hope to find in “the American political tradition.”

We’ve been having these freak-outs as long as there has been an us to have them. We have built conspiracy theories around antinomians, Quakers, witches, freemasons, foreigners (usually just more recent immigrants), etc., etc. almost from the moment that Europeans came to North America in any great numbers. And, of course, we have fought over what to call the upheavals for most of that time as well. But perhaps we can forego a discussion of whether “moral panic” is really a thing for now and just recognize that there are ways of thinking about *tradition* in the political life of the United States and the colonies that preceded it in the context of which the recent events in Washington, DC are hard to dismiss as alien.

That way of looking at things might lead us to recognize that the difficulty we have in distinguishing anti-government sentiment and purely political activism, particularly among right-wing elements, arises in large part from the fact that the wild agitation is just as traditional as the games played with governmental procedure. This is, in important ways, who “we” have always been, but with the elements displayed in unfamiliar (or at least recently unfamiliar) proportions and on an unfamiliar scale. Tendencies that have, for the most part, been kept in check—while still shaping US politics, to some degree, decade after decade—find themselves comparatively unchecked.

It’s been difficult in recent years, particularly as the astonishingly empty references to constitutional “originalism” have become fodder for comment-section debate, not to think about the little that my generation learned about governmental organization—and how completely it seems even that little bit has been forgotten. What I recall more than anything was an emphasis on “checks and balances.” The genius of “the American system” was presumably its ability to contain a considerable amount of conflict and channel it in generally positive ways.

That really worked out relatively well for a good long time—things being, of course, very relative, particularly for anarchists. Lately, however, not so much...

It turns out that the governmental apparatus is much like any other machine: abuse it and fail to maintain it for long enough and it’s likely to break down. But the breakdown we are witnessing seems to be quite complex. It is not just that the rules of law and governmental

procedure seem to have been increasingly used in ways that threaten their continuing function—witness the emphasis on filibusters, walk-outs, preemptive legislation to head off reform, legal attempts at voter suppression, etc.—but also that the guiding rationale that should have made citizens sensitive to the possibility of this kind of abuse and vigilant against it—surely an integral part of a well-functioning political tradition—has been similarly neglected, abused and largely forgotten. In some cases, it has been quite directly rejected—though almost always in the context of some thoroughly revisionist appeal to “the American political tradition,” “the intention of the founders,” etc.

We get a bit numb to this stuff, but it wasn’t all that long ago that we watched the Trump administration try to break with the “nation of immigrants” narrative, essentially stripping the Statue of Liberty of a familiar role (“New Colossus,” “Mother of Exiles.”) Treating the “tired and poor” as “not the best people” is arguably the clearest testimony we’re likely to see to the diminishing expectations about American “greatness.” But the ease with which the change was made, as a matter of bureaucratic detail, and the lack of real resistance to it from “patriots” have to be considered striking. When, in the wake of the January 6 events, we are treated to a bipartisan chorus about all that is “sacred” about the US government and its monuments, we have to understand that even the symbolic aura clinging to the various representative structures is not necessarily what it was even just a few years ago.

I don’t want to waste too much time discussing the circumstances that encouraged “patriots” to show their dedication to the constitution and fair elections by reenacting the British side of the Battle of Bladensburg. I’m not all that concerned, for the moment, about the process by which “patriotism” has come to so often mean nativism and the Americanism of the Know-Nothings, the John Birch Society and the Klan. It’s enough to note that popular perceptions of “the American political tradition” have undergone changes that not only make these things possible, but also almost completely eliminate any checks that that tradition might have imposed on what now passes for “democratic practice,” instead now at least potentially supporting the most unlikely abuses.



If stuff is important to your project—even if its fairly abstract stuff—you should probably take care of it. This doesn’t seem to be a principle subject to much debate. The question, as we move back to the question of anarchism, is the extent to which the forces transforming American politics at the moment should be a concern for anarchists. It would be nice to think that we’re looking at something that is just a GOP problem or just a political problem, but, however much we sometimes like to think of ourselves as “in the world, but not of it,” it’s hard to be so sure that we are not creatures of our era.

Anarchists pride themselves on the fact that ours is a *living* tradition, a body of thought not reducible to some particular utopian scheme or fixed ideology. Sometimes, no doubt, we overstate the case, but in any event there seem to be reasons to think that, as appears to be the case with American democracy, fluidity does not always translated into resilience or constancy in the pursuit of particular goals or ideals.

If we were to make the best case for a resilient democracy, we would probably point to the combination of democratic ideals—including “liberty and justice for all”—and democratic mechanisms, with both evolving in response to the indications of the other. In a functioning *anarchy*—assuming it makes sense to talk about social relations in those terms—we might

expect to see something similar, if undoubtedly quite a bit more fluid and probably much more complex. Norms and institutions would emerge, adapt and find themselves abandoned as they succeeded or failed to resolve real, present problems within the limits of anarchist expectations. And anarchist theory—whether of a formal nature or simply existing as the “common sense” of anarchist societies—would almost certainly shift its references and emphases in accordance with the lessons of anarchist practice. *Stable, resilient anarchy*—if I can be allowed that slightly provocative phrase—would probably again be a matter of checks and balances, though obviously not of a formal or governmental nature, as that “common sense” and various common practices helped to create a different kind of social fabric.

The question, perhaps, is whether the existing anarchist milieus, within which there no shortage of passion and a good deal of more-or-less useful theory-talk, but perhaps a real lack of opportunities to test out ideas in varied forms of practice, are more or less vulnerable to the kinds of problems we are witnessing in mainstream political circles.

When we see *nativism* capture the space previously reserved for a different sort of *patriotism*, we can look at the history and say that both inclusive and exclusive visions of “American democracy” have been perennial, as have theocratic visions and visions based in a clear separation of church and state. And we have to acknowledge that there has been an ongoing and ultimately effective work to keep what had been the more marginal visions alive and viable through the periods where they did not find particularly fertile ground in the political mainstream. When we look at the embrace of centralized “big government” by factions that had once clung—and in some contexts might still cling—to political theories centered on county sheriffs and “sovereign citizens,” it’s not too hard, I think, to quickly begin to see the ways in which ideology and even religious beliefs can rapidly transform in the face of altered practical opportunities.

If you wanted another context in which to test Voline’s notion that, in practice, the ideas of movements are often sacrificed to the demands of partial struggles, I suspect that nominally “Christian” political movements might provide some interesting data. We know how rapidly the content of “Christian” political demands has changed and how little biblical support many of those changes have had. We don’t always know if the authors of “Christian” political programs can tell the Old Testament from the New or the New Covenant from the Old, but that’s really just another sign that Christianity and the politics it has inspired are still evolving—for better or for worse.

The interesting thing about Christianity, of course, is that the stakes are presumably quite high: everlasting life, eternal damnation, etc. So perhaps the fact that the core doctrines of Jesus have presumably led believers to focus on concerns like white identity, the wealth gospel, the Enneagram and such, as well as driving murderous policies and wars, is one that we can consider when we’re trying to assess the utility of Voline’s vision of *synthesis* for anarchism.

It’s certainly the kind of thing I think about when, in the course of anarchist debate, I find anarchists unclear about the nature of *anarchy*—or even resistant to any kind of serious engagement, often in the name of practical concerns. I’m all for practical application—but of what, if not some fairly clearly developed notion of anarchy? I’m suspicious of the approaches—chief among them, I’m afraid, the anarchist embrace of “pure” or “direct democracy”—where the ideas that can be associated with anarchism seem to be constrained by visions of “reality” or “necessity” that appear to exclude meaningfully anarchistic relations from the git-go. When I am told—as I have been quite recently—that approaches of that sort are within “the mainstream of the anarchist tradition,” it’s hard to say in any decisive way that that is not *presently* the case.

This is, in fact, part of the reason that I have defined *tradition* as I have, designating with the term the full range of plausible present possibilities—no matter how regrettable some of those possibilities might seem to me and how at odds with the bulk of the anarchist literature they might appear.

If stuff is important to your project—even if its fairly abstract stuff—you should probably take care of it. That has to mean, I think, taking care of the anarchism that we have, rather than the anarchism we wish we had or might have had. We can “make anarchism our own” by applying elements of the tradition to our particular circumstances—and perhaps “activate” elements in the process. We can “make our own anarchism” by clarifying our sense of various anarchistic elements and how they fit together—and perhaps better prepare ourselves for some more ambitious intervention. But I think we have to recognize that, if there is such a thing as *anarchism per se*, it is a product of *collective reason*, something unable to exist all in one head, subject to forms of adaptation that would be hard to safely separate from the general shifts taking place in the culture around us.



This is, I recognize, a somewhat different kind of writing than much of what has appeared so far. But it does seem like this is a moment with at least some potential lessons for anarchists—even if so much of what is going on around us is in many ways not a fight we are particularly well prepared to take part in—and as it has seemed possible to mark it without taking us too far afield from the project at hand, that has seemed like the thing to do.

The admonition of Emma Goldman, to “not overlook vital things, because of the bulk of trifles confronting us,” plays for me in a couple of different ways. There is the matter of the life of traditions—and of the alternatives that haunt them, much as Paul Virilio has talked about characteristic *accidents* that haunt particular systems. Seeing the forest for the trees is a skill I think we have to cultivate, in the face of so much constant distraction. But I think it is also important to recognize that the focus on what is presently practical does not always keep us focused on what is most vital in our projects. Daily life being what we know it to be in a world dominated by archic and exploitative relations, lots of the problems we’re compelled to address are still trifles alongside the vital relations we strive for.

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK SIX READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Governmentalism

Governmentalism—*Archy*, particularly in the political realm; the organization of social relations according to the principle of authority or governmental principle, as well as the ideology that holds that form of social organization as superior or necessary. *Governmentalism* was the target of anarchist critique in the era before the emergence of *statism* as a primary concern.



Each of these concepts allows us to position ourselves in particular ways in or against more familiar frameworks. With *synthesis*, I've made an effort to breathe some new life into a debate that has featured in modern anarchist consciousness, but just barely. With *tradition*, it's been a question of trying to conceptualize an inescapably fuzzy thing—which some of us undoubtedly resist recognizing—in a way that is at least a bit clearer and arguably quite a bit more useful. With *governmentalism*, it's a matter of placing an even less familiar term, archy, in the context of a developing anarchist vocabulary, a history with at least is fair share of surprising episodes.

We've already addressed the comparatively late emergence of *anarchism* as an anarchist keyword. It turns out that *statism*—and *anti-statism*—emerged at roughly the same time, after several decades during which *governmentalism* served as a main target for anarchist critique. Frédéric Tufferd's essay on "Unity in Socialism," which we will read for its treatment of the concept of *aubaines*, documents some of the conceptual and terminological shift—although this is probably no need to rush off and read it now. Those interested in the more peculiar aspects of *statism*'s late and somewhat difficult birth might find themselves better rewarded by the brief tale told in "[Statism: It's not just for dentists anymore...](#)" And then my essay on "[Self-Government and the Citizen-State](#)" provides a fairly extensive case-study on the uses of the contested terms in Proudhon's work.

Ultimately, I'm inclined to think that the emergence of *statism* as a keyword and the subsequent comparisons of *state* and *government* ought to have been source of increased clarity in anarchist circles. Whether that was actually the case is, of course, open to debate. But I know that as I began to try to account for the various currents of anarchist thought, wrestling with the distinction between *anti-governmentalism* and *anti-statism* led me to recognize other defining oppositions, such as the *anti-monopolism* of Tuckerite individualism.

It is an extremely common refrain in modern anarchist discussion that anti-statism does not describe the full program of anarchism, either because it does not explicitly include anti-capitalism or because it does not include other struggles, such as those against patriarchy, colonialism and its effects, white supremacy, etc. My appeal to *archy*—understood in roughly structural terms—is an attempt to pose a concept uniting all of the things that anarchists oppose *as anarchists*. But, for better or worse, practical opposition generally means tackling some specific manifestation or another, however vital a more general understanding is to directing our practice. And, as we are presently involved in a project that involves searching through the anarchist past for bits we can use to construct modern theory, we probably need to be just as

capable of recognizing the particular emphases of past manifestations as we are of engaging in synthesis.

Virtually every manifestation of anarchist thought and practice that we encounter in our historical researches will have been centered around and driven by some narrower set of concerns than the *an-archy* I have proposed. So we need to be attentive to and patient with the wrangling over *state* vs. *government* and clear when other terms entirely are dominant.



We also need to be able to invest similar levels of attention and patience to the debates that have arisen and still arise when it is time to break down these archaic principles and institutions into their constituent parts. We need to be able to talk about *law*, *authority*, *hierarchy*, *rule*, etc. in ways that acknowledge the pure babel of senses given to those terms—if only long enough to make better sense of things. This is, of course, often easier said than done, in large part because, unsurprisingly, societies based on hierarchy and authority have found an almost endless number of ways to extend the definitions of those terms, naturalizing them in the process. The success of that tendency can, I’m afraid, be measured by the currency of notions like “legitimate authority” and “justified hierarchy” in at least some anarchist circles.

The three readings on *authority*—my retranslation of the key sections from Bakunin’s “God and the State,” the polemical analysis of “But What About The Children?” and the glossary entry on “Authority and Authority-effects”—are probably more than enough to introduce the uninitiated into the twists and turns of those debates. I encourage folks to devote some attention to those readings, if only because our opportunities to address any key concept—except *anarchy*—in quite so much depth will be limited.



The readings for next week, selections from Proudhon’s “Principles of the Philosophy of Progress,” are primarily concerned with the theories of *collective force* and *collective reason*, which we’ve already touched on in passing. There is a good deal of attention to the anatomy and physiology of “collective beings”—and it may be helpful to recall some of the details from “Self-Government and the Citizen-State” when reading those sections, as the questions are really about “external constitution” or the necessity of every social body to have “head” that “realizes” and controls it. Rather than balk at the notion, as may be natural for anarchists of at least some tendencies, I would encourage readers to consider the novel, potentially monstrous, perhaps acephalous configurations of non-governmental unity-collectivities. And I may return to some of my semi-heretical musings on Stirner and self-creation, in this new context, in my second post of the week.

Again, what is probably most important at this stage is to make the most of the opportunities to engage with unfamiliar anarchist conceptions.



And that same spirit may serve readers well in considering the shortest, but arguably not the least radical of the weeks readings: the glossary entry on “Legal Order.” Learning to think about

anarchy as a condition in which “nothing is permitted” has, I think, been one of the most useful exercises I’ve put myself through in recent years.



A caution: “Principles of the Philosophy of Progress” is drawn from Proudhon’s manuscripts. It has been published in French, but at the time when I first encountered it the only way to read it was to wrestle with the scanned manuscripts or to work with partial and often undependable typescripts produced by past researchers. I would be lying if I said I haven’t grown to love that kind of research, but it can certainly be daunting. And the unfinished nature of the text should be obvious. Proudhon, who was famously meticulous about preparing manuscripts for publication, never worked his magic on this one—and the particular account of collective force contained here is comparatively early in Proudhon’s career, having probably been produced within a couple of years of the published *Philosophy of Progress*. What that means is that we can revel in all that is fine and suggestive in the work—assuming it hits us that way—but we can’t treat it in the same way that we would a finished text.

Perhaps, once again, the appropriate strategy is to treat this week’s reading as a kind of skill-building exercise and consider the experience of grappling with the text as important as the specific insights that might be drawn from it.

P.-J. Proudhon, “Principles of the Philosophy of Progress” (selections)

PRINCIPLES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF PROGRESS

I.—THE CONDITIONS OF EXISTENCE.

Man is made up of parts called members or organs. What makes his reality is the *animistic* [*animique*] gathering of these organs into a whole that, as long as it lives, is called a *person*.

In the same way, a society is made up of parts that are persons or aggregations of persons. What establishes the social reality is the intellectual consent of these persons and aggregations in an ultimate whole that we call, as long as it endures, company, association, municipality, city, people, etc.

It is thus with all the existences that we can observe: they are always conglomerations of organisms or societies, formed of simpler parts, according to some unifying law.

1.—I generalize from this observation and I say: Every perceptible existence, from a grain of sand or drop of water to man and society, invariably and necessarily possesses the double character of unity and collectivity. So I have a right to consider the two terms as correlative and inseparable, as much in their nature as in their logic, and I define the being as a group.

The idea of a simple being is contradictory. Atomism is a fiction. For the same reason, substance in itself, prior to all phenomenality, is only a metaphysical notion: it does not exist.

2.—Every being, which is to say every group—or to remain within the terms of the definition, every unity-collectivity—by the very fact that it is a plurality of elements assembled according to a law, manifests an internal, radiant energy, capable at least of maintaining the unities that make up the group.

I generalize further, and I say: Existence implies force. These two ideas, like those of unity and collectivity, are correlative and inseparable, in nature as in the understanding. An existence without force is a contradiction. A force without a group that sustains, represents and produces it, is, like substance in itself, a chimera: it does not exist.

3.—All beings, by virtue of the personal, radiant energy that constitutes them, attract and repel one another reciprocally, tend to unite to form other groups or to be absorbed and dissolved, through the centralization and dispersion of their forces. This is an empirical fact sufficiently demonstrated by molecular attraction, the phenomena of vegetation and life, and History...

I generalize once again and I say: Creation is the ascending movement of existences; the chain of beings has no end: the universe, always changing, is eternal.

4.—There is then, for every being, two manners of manifesting its existence, and it could only have two: its composition, and its action.—Action, in certain beings, becomes thought and speech.

Let us apply these principles to the study of economic phenomena.

II.—THE FORCE IN THE SOCIAL BEING.

1.—There exists between men a tendency or attraction that pushes them to group and act, for their own greater interest and the most complete development of their individuality, collectively and as a mass.

What is the principle of that tendency? The same as that of the attraction between all beings: It is a property and a condition of their existence (n. 2); it is impossible to know more of it, and consequently senseless to ask more. Let us limit ourselves to reasoning from the point of view of the aim.

The tendency to group, fatal in some species, free and reflective only in our own, in all our most precious faculties, is a fact. The philosophers and naturalists, considering it in its mystical and superficial expression, have called it attraction or instinct of sociability, sympathy, devotion, patriotism, charity, fraternity, humanity, etc. They have seen in it one of the hallmarks of our destiny, the basis of justice, morals and religion itself. They have not gone further. The useful side, the economic and productive power of the human group, independent of the work of the individuals, has completely escaped them. For all of them, as for the economists, the social instinct has remained a sort of platonic love, a budding idea that has never been expressed and realized. There, in fact, the evangelical work has stopped, and there moral philosophy has broken, both powerless to resolve the complicated problem of human relations, and, on the highest questions of public and private right, reduced to appeal to divine authority and the reason of State.

2.—It is up to our century, to the positive and precise genius of modern societies, to study the social instinct in its practical development, and follow it in its speculative, moral and industrial manifestations.

From the formation of individuals into a group there results a force, numerically equal to the sum of the individual forces that make it up, but which is, by virtue of its unity, very superior in its application, and which must for this reason be considered as the soul of the group, its own essential energy, its life, its mind. So that the individual—sensitive, intelligent, active and free—being taken for an elementary unity, the various groups in which it can enter form so many unities of a more and more elevated order, endowed, like the individual, with sensitivity, will, intelligence and action.

Thus, alongside the individual man arises the collective man, which is certainly something other than the sum or addition of the individual energies that form it, but, which, converting all these energies into a higher energy, *sui generis*, has the right to be treated from now on not as a being of the mind, but as a real and veritable person. Such is the immense fact, principle of supernaturalism, which must in the end set the economic science on its certain base, and which I will attempt to summarize.

III.—SIMPLE COLLECTIVE ACTION.

3.—The collective force is generally recognized in every action that surpasses the scope of an individual force, working as long, and with the aid of all the tools and instruments that you might want.

One man, with a plow and some oxen, can turn over one acre in a day: ten men, with ten plows and ten pair, would work ten acres in the same amount of time. There would be time saved

relative to the surface works: but as each plow can be considered as working for a simple individual, as each plow can, in ten days, accomplish the work of the ten, while there may be concert, community or exchange of services, there is no collectivity.

Just so, one businessman, disposing of material that he has purchased and workers that he has hired, can, in three months, build a fine looking country house. There again, there is time to be saved by the promptness of the construction: nevertheless, we can conceive that, in a pinch, the same individual could exercise in turn all the functions of stonecutter, mason, carpenter, etc.; and in time build his house by himself alone. We would see in the first operation rather an effect of exchange than of collective force. There again, we do not recognize the group.

Economy considers separately, as distinct principles and special forces, exchange and community, observation, etc. It does not confuse them with collective force. (See *The General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century*, Ch. III and VI.)

But here is where we will see it appear: let us begin with the simplest cases.

A man, of middling strength, can easily carry, for 60 feet, a burden of 125 kilograms. Let that man repeat that operation a thousand times in a row and he will have transported a whole boatload on his shoulders.

This is how the dockhands proceed in the ports. But let it be a question of a block of 2000 kilograms: individual strength becomes powerless and if it is reduced to its own means the block runs the risk of remaining in place forever. For such a great effort, a group is required.

One worker was able, in the past, over time, to cut and sculpt the obelisk of Luxor in the quarries of the Thebaid. In order to accomplish the loading, the transport to Paris, the unloading and the erection of the monolith, a squadron commanded by an engineer, obeying his words like a single man, was required.

A gravedigger can dig a hole in the sand, erect a beam there and then, after filling the hollow and stuffing the empty space by reversing the excavating, begin the same work again until he has moved around a surface as great as Notre Dame. The same individual, if it were a question of a piling in a river, sinking some oak stakes, six meters in length and 0.80 centimeters around, there by hammer blows, would never come to the end of the task. Here, the action of the group is indispensable.

A boater could, by multiplying his voyages, transport a cargo of 1000 tons from Paris to the Havre. He could never, with his little boat, transport the same mass from Calais to Dover, although the distance is much less. To contend with the ocean requires nothing less than a large ship, and consequently the effect of a group.

We can multiply infinitely these examples that modern industry presents at every step.

4.—Collective force is thus something other than the sum of the individual forces of which it is made up: I add that in the application it is, by virtue of its unity, greater than that sum.

A man, whose muscular strength, in all parts of his body, is equal to six times that of an individual of average vigor, would not only render as much effective labor as six men, but in a struggle he would lay them low. The reason is that, being able to deploy on each side a superior power, or to oppose a superior resistance, he crushes his divided adversaries in a mass.

This is the image of the group: its strength or force, numerically equal to that of its components, is more than equal in its unity to all together specifically. The military men know it well, their whole science consists, through progressions of attacks and retreats combined, in breaking up the enemy mass so that they can oppose everywhere a greater force to lesser forces.

A warship with 100 cannons will chase off 500 fishing boats; a steamer with a force of 100 horsepower, giving the same service as a crew of 100 horses, will be much superior to them with

regard to general costs and risks; a large agricultural operation will give, for the same amount of land cultivated, finer and more abundant products, and at lower cost, than would a dozen little farms. The mechanical arts abound with facts of this nature: the Creusot steam hammer, which represents in weight two or three hundred times the big hammer of a blacksmith, produces more effect in a single fall than two hundred blows struck by a worker; the work of a mechanical saw offers more precisions than if it is used by a half-dozen arms; the sound created by one hundred singers in unison is truer than each of the individual voices.

These facts, which each can multiply as they please, suffice to establish the reality of the collective force, of that force that the economists have forgotten even to mention in their books, and that still, by its innumerable applications, its transformation, its political, moral, religious and intellectual consequences, dominates science and governs civilization.

IV.—OF COMPLEX COLLECTIVE ACTION.

Everyone has read, in A. Smith, J.-B. Say, and others, the marvelous results of that force; but what few people have noticed, no doubt, is the technical inexactitude with which these two masters of the science explain its nature. They have not seen that what they call division of labor or separation of industries is only an application, in reverse, of the collective force, so that the same scientific demonstration suits them both. And because they have not seen it, not only have they been led to omit from their treatises the initial force, which is the agglomerated force, but they have understood nothing in the theory of the one they wanted to set out, the force of division.

As that question is serious, essential in science, I must, by a rapid discussion, furnish the proof of what I have claimed.

7. I begin by citing A. Smith:

“Let us take, for example, a manufacture the object of which appears frivolous, but that has merited more than once that we have noted the details with a sort of admiration, I mean the fabrication of pins. Let the most industrious worker, but still a novice in their trade, wish to give himself up to it, he could perhaps manage to make in a day only a single pin, and certainly not as many as twenty, so diverse and multiplied are the labors demanded by a pin! He thus needs to divide the labor, first separate this trade from all the others; he must then follow, with all the details that they demand, so many individual trades; then finally he must create, to speed up the whole of the work, the play and movement of the machines: such is, in fact, that art today. One man draws out the brass wire, another straightens it, another cuts it, farther along one sharpens the point, and then one prepares the end that must receive the head. To shape that head requires two or three distinct manipulations; to place it is a new occupation; to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade to line them up on the paper. In the end, eighteen operations make up the grand art of making a pin.

“In several manufactories, these eighteen operations are almost all executed by different hands. However, I have seen one manufactory of this sort, which employed only ten men, some of whom, consequently, performed two or three distinct manipulations. The establishment was poor, and as a result poorly provided with the necessary machines; but their zeal sometimes made up for it all, and the common labor gave them about twelve pounds of middle-sized pins each day. Now the point being made up of four thousand pins, it follows that more than forty-eight thousand pins came each day from the hands of ten persons, and that each of these workers,

doing a tenth of the general labor, must be considered individually as the artisan of four thousand eight hundred pins per day.”

Now here is the example supposed by J.-B. Say:

“The division of labor seems to have been pushed even farther in the fabrication of playing cards. It is not even the same workers who prepare the paper of which the cards are made, nor the colors with which they are printed; and by only paying attention to the single use of these materials, we will find that a deck of cards is the result of several operations, each of which occupies a distinct series of workers, male or female, who always apply themselves to the same operation. It is different persons, and always the same, who skim off the lumps and blockages that are found in the paper and harm the equality of thickness; the same who glue together the three sheets of paper of which the cardstock is made and put them in the press; the same who color the side destined to form the back of the cards; the same who print in black the outline of the figures; other workers print the colors of the same figures; others dry the cardstock at the stove once it has been printed; once they are printed, other are occupied smoothing them on both sides. It is one particular occupation that cuts them with equal dimensions; it is another to assemble them to form packs; another still to print the wrappers for the packs, and yet another to pack them; without counting the functions of those persons responsible for sales and purchases, for paying the workers and keeping records. In the end, if we are to believe the people in that trade, each card, one little bit of cardstock that will fit in the hand, before being in a saleable state, is subject to not less than 70 different operations, which could all be the object of the labor of a different sort of workers. And if there are not 70 series of workers in each card factory, it is because the division of labor has not been pushed as far as it could be, and because the same worker is responsible for two, three, or four distinct operations.

“The influence of the division of occupations is immense. I have seen a factory for playing cards where thirty workers produce 30,500 cards each day, that is to say more than 500 cards per worker, and we can assume that if each of these workers found themselves obliged to do all the operations by themselves, and even supposing them practiced in their art, they would perhaps not finish two cards in a day and consequently, instead of producing 15,500 cards, they would only make 60.”

It is thus that two of the founders of political economy accounted for the division of labor and its effects: I will later rectify what is false and puerile in their account.

8. But, what is, according to A. Smith and J.-B. Say, the reason for that prodigious multiplication of one single product, by a wisely combined division of labor?

According to the two writers, that reason, or that cause is triple: first, there is 1) the dexterity acquired by each worker, in a simple and often repeated operation; 2) suppression of the loss of time that workers make, in passing from one occupation to another, changing place, position and tools; 3) finally, the use, for each divided function, of the most expeditious procedures, that is to say of machines, which are only truly advantageous in the large establishments where the abundance of work allows its division.

A. Smith, after having signaled these three causes of the fecundity of the division, adds that the principle of that division is the need for the exchanges; and as soon

9. Now, it is false that in the trade of the pin-maker, a single worker cannot come to produce 20 pins in a day; it is false that in the industry of the manufacture of cards and tarots, the same worker could not, at the same time, produce more than two cards; and Smith and Say, admiring the effects of the division of labor, have ended up not really seeing a thing there. It is even more false that the dexterity acquired and the suppression of the losses of time, of which I do not deny

the merits, are the causes of that great fecundity: as for machines, they form a separate category in science, they should not figure in a theory of the division of labor. The advantage that results from the machine is one thing; that which results from the division of labor is another: the duty of the two professors was not to confuse them.

10. To believe A. Smith and J.-B. Say, who have only sought to imitate it, the division of labor will only exist where there se remontre as many specialties, of workers as the labor to exist can be subject to fractions. It is then from that opinion that the tell us, the one that a worker laboring in isolation could not manage to fabricate 20 pins, the other that this same worker could not make two cards in a day. And the others who have followed them have all taken the thing seriously: it is accepted as certain in political economy that the same individual who can produce 4800 pins in a day, when he labors lui 10e, in a workshop where the chore is distributed, could not produce 20 of them if he was alone.

It is, however, notorious, and known to the least of the workers, that in all industries the division of labor can receive its application, whether by a single worker or by a group. A. Smith himself suggested it when he reports that in the workshop visited by him only ten persons executed the 18 operations of the pin-making industry, which supposes that some of those persons executed several of them. And J.-B. Say confirms it, when he adds that at the card-making factory, 30 workers are sufficient to make 70 distinct manipulations.

11. The division of labor, for the individual as for the group, consists of, for example, instead of executing, successively and without stopping, on one pin or one card, the 18 or 70 fragmented operations of which the fabrication is made up, executing them simultaneously on several.—Assuredly, by following the first of these methods, a worker would not produce 20 pins per day; he would consume himself, at that ridiculous task, in powerless efforts. But if he distributed the manipulations intelligently, then, instead of a few units he would produce thousands; and if my intelligence counts for something alongside that of A. Smith, I would say that if there was seen one factory where 10 persons produced, by the division of labor, 48,000 pins per day, I knew myself a pin-maker who, thanks to the same division, working all alone, lived by his trade.

12. So what is the division of labor, so badly understood by the economists that this single rectification ruins their whole system?

It is the art for the laborer, individual or collective, of attacking a function, too difficult in its totality, or too complicated, or too meticulous, of attacking it, I say, in its elementary parts, in such a way that the mind and body of the laborer who, formerly, finding themselves overwhelmed by it, could now deliver themselves from it with a superior force.

Thus, in the division of labor as in the collective force, the principle is the same: it is to always attack a lesser task with a greater force. While, in one case, the laborers, individually too weak, form into groups, in the other they break, as it were, the bundle of their operations, in order to take them up again, with more advantage, in detail. What the group, with its immense power, is in comparison to a mass inaccessible to the individual, that one becomes vis-à-vis some fragmented operations, the ensemble of which makes up its industry.

13. Let A. Smith and J.-B. Say pretend then that the sometimes fantastic dexterity that the worker acquires then in a fragmented operation exclusively repeated; the economy of time obtained by that specialization of laborers, and the more advantageous use of machines in a large enterprise, should be counted for something in the results of the industrial organization, it is not in my thought to deny it. I would simply observe that these facts, in which they think to find the cause of the results of the division of labor, are themselves effects of the collective force.

That is what I will demonstrate.

V.—OF COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION

14. Whoever says organization says analysis and synthesis, indissolubly united. Whoever says organization of labor, then, says 1) decomposition of the labor into its elementary or constituent operations; 2) recomposition of those same operations into a single action.

The organization of labor exists from the beginning of humanity; I mean since the day when the human species becomes industrious. It would be strange that anyone who have the pretension, in this matter, of having discovered anything. But if socialism has fallen too often into the folly of fabrications, Economy, from its side, has been no less wrong in refusing to open its eyes and see the facts, in presenting its ignorance as dogma.

15. Industrial organization consists of the combined use of two forces: the collective force and the division of labor. Let us again take up the example of A. Smith.

It is proven, although the conscientious and diligent investigator says the contrary, that the division of labor exists as much for the solitary laborer as for a large workshop: it is by that division that he manages to multiply his products in sufficient quantity to make a living. Without it, his efforts would come to naught; he would only produce trifles.

Now let us conceived, as A. Smith and J.-B. Say have laid it out so well, a workshop arranged in such a manner that each of the individual operations in which the function of the worker is divided are performed by a special worker, and we will see a new fact produced, and, as a result of this fact, some superior results: this fact is a new application of the collective force.

In the examples above, No. 3, the use of the collective force is simple, all of the individuals form the group identically executing the same task. In the workshop where the divided work is also divided, that use is complex: each of the laborers who make up the group executes a distinct operation.

The result of that combination is known: A. Smith and J.-B. Say analyzed it very well. The worker who, instead of successively passed through all the parts of his industry, always performed one, will become proportionally more skillful in that one;—there is for all less loss of time; finally, the machines, which one can consider as automatic workers, working in a more continuous manner, which increases the revenue from the capital that is in use there. For all these causes, production is noticeable increased, and while the worker, laboring outside that combination, could produce, with the same division of labor, the use of the same machines, and the same diligence, only 3000 pins a day, in the organized workshop he will produce 4800. The profit is thus more than an additional third: this third, being a true discovery of genius, it is not, as I have said, to the division of labor that we must attribute it, but to the collective force.

16. All human labor tends to be organized more and more on that principle of the collective force and divisional force combined. It is this tendency that constitutes the economic movement of our century, a movement so formidable that it absorbs and converts all the others. It is for this reason that modern society separates itself definitively from ancient, catholic, feudal and barbaric society, where the industrial production, being unproductive, generally followed the example of agricultural production, given over from time immemorial to simple, individual labor.

Today, everything is subject to the law of organization. Already, in England, agriculture is industrialized, managed, not only by the division of labor, as with all the peasants, which the succession of the seasons is sufficient to command, but by the use of machines and collective force. Sooner or later, the English system will extend everywhere: then large-scale cultivation

could unite with parcellaire possession, and the revolution foreseen by socialism, the revolution of property that draws along with it all the others, will be accomplished.

17.—But the most serious consequence, in the eyes of the philosopher, of the combined use of the divisional and collective forces, is the de facto solidarity that this use gives rise to among the workers, and as a result the guarantee of rights that it calls for.

It is obvious, setting aside some interests of capital, which must not concern us here, and some privilege of the businessmen, whose initiative desires a remuneration, that the worker enmeshed in this organism, which reduces them to the role of a simple cog, barred from their liberty by their admission into the workshop, enchained, if we can put it that way, by their own cooperation, cannot be left without compensation. The freedom of movement that they lose of the one hand must be found again elsewhere; the intellectual inertia to which their specialty condemns them must be recovered in a higher combination. It is in vain that Economism opposes to the degradation of the hardworking masses the wealth of a progressive society; it is in vain that it invokes against these damned souls of civilization the necessity of its alleged principles, and that it offers them the consolations suggested by a hypocritical religion. There is no right against rights, no necessity that stands against justice, no religion that demands the mass to die of starvation in order to fatten a handful of the elect.

VI.—DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECONOMIC FORCES, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

18. In a recent publication (*The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, Ch. VI) I have given the name of economic forces to certain principles of action that, like the working group and the industrial division, have the effect of increasing the productivity of labor, and, for the same expense in time and costs, multiply wealth more and more. Among these principles or forces I have especially distinguished exchange, the principal agent of which is currency and credit.

19. Although, in order to make an exchange, at least two people are necessary, a buyer and a seller, and although commerce, which is a series of exchanges, or the mass of all exchanges, implies an idea of plurality, still we could not confuse commerce or exchange with collective action, nor derive it from that action: they are essentially distinct things.

In the working group, there is a gathering of forces for one aim and in one single direction; in exchange there is an increase of forces, a permutation of products, supposed to be equal among themselves. It is neither a convergence, as in the organized workshop, nor an inversion, as in the division of labor; it is a reciprocity.

20. The same observation can be made regarding credit. Although, like exchange, it supposes the intervention of two persons, a borrower and a lender, it cannot be assimilated to the group, since the stake-holding parties are in opposition. Doubtless, by placing ourselves in a humanitarian point of view, we can say that they contribute, each in their own manner, to the general wealth, the first by the loan of their capital, and the second by the use that they make of it. But, these two persons do not cooperate in the creation of a common wealth, since the capital loaned must be completely returned, and the interest is deducted from a new production, in which the creditor does not really participate. It is still, as in exchange, not a collective action, but a reciprocity.

Credit and exchange are thus two principles apart, two special forces of production, which must be studied by themselves, and whose theory truly has nothing in common with the collective force.

21. But the collective force or the principle of grouping can be applied to commerce and to credit, just as to industry: then it communicates to them an extraordinary power, at the same time that it profoundly modifies their character.

The Orientals have still changes nothing of the primitive and immemorial practice of commerce. According to the accounts of travelers, each merchant in the Orient has the habit of holding only one sort of merchandise: one sells perfumes, and another pistols; this one sells jewels, and that one spices, etc. These diversely stocked shops, where we are in the habit of finding gathered, as in small bazaars, the most diverse objects, are unknown to them.

However, it is obvious that a diversified commerce offers much less risk, plus compensations, more guarantees of profit, than a commerce reduced to a single article: it is only in those rare cases of fashions and of monopoly that commercial simplicity can be undertaken with some security. It is in the commerce of buying and selling as it is in the commerce of transport. What would we say of a messenger who, providing the service from his village to the city, purported to limit his commission to the transport of pepper or tobacco alone? We would say that this man was mad, that he would bankrupt himself, and we would have to reason with him.

Thus, the multiplicity of operations in commerce is a law.

22. But, what is that multiplicity, in itself? A group effect? The merchant who, in his boutique, offers a most varied collection of merchandise to the connoisseurs, is nothing, at base, but the representative of the thousand different industries whose products he keeps, and who, instead of each maintaining their correspondent in the place, make use, for the delivery of their merchandise, a common intermediary. In short, that alleged mercantile individuality that we call a trader is a company.

Now, if Commerce, in order to be done, in order to be accomplished with ease, speed, exactness, economy and profit, must be done by companies; if exchange inevitably demands for all the interested parties a collective action: a whole series of obligations, between the producer and the merchant, between the merchant and the consumer, obligations analogous to that that rule the Entrepreneur and the *parcellaire* worker, will emerge from the commercial relations and call for the attention of the legislator and jurisconsult. The civil code and the code of commerce have said nothing, or nearly nothing, more than the economists: does it follow that the practical reason must rest eternally on the faith of the practitioners and the verbiage of the obscurantists?...

23. What is currency? It is the instrument or intermediary of the exchanges, responds J.-B. Say; as a result, the common denominator of the merchandise.—Very well: but who has created that instrument? Who is its author, its inventors?—Everyone, and no one, responds the economist, according to Aristotle. The Greeks gave money the name of *numisma*, *nomos*, law, convention, usage, because it serves commerce, not by virtue of authority, but by virtue of the tacit and universal consent of the people.

Money is thus the product of the force or, more exactly, of the thought of the collective will. It is the collective thought that has made of that strange merchandise that no one consumes and all seek, the type of venality and circulability, the symbol of wealth, and the common term for all values. It is not only gold, silver or copper that we possess in it; it is public faith, the irrevocable oath of the people. It is for this reason that it seems to men to have something divine about it, which, at all times and in all places, has made it worshiped. Neither Jupiter made visible for the statue of Phidias, nor Venus made manifest in the masterpiece of Praxitèle, nor Christ represented by Michaelangelo appear to men as present, as sublime, nor exerted as marvelous a power, as the Genius of Humanity, symbolized in a bit of coinage. And the civilized nations

generally agree to make the fabrication of currency a prerogative of the State; the Hebrews had only one temple where it was permitted to sacrifice and we have only one mint.

24. It is above all in the operations of credit that collective force accomplishes its miracles. Let us first consider Insurance.

We understand that one proprietor insures another: the operation has nothing contradictory about it, nothing impossible. But if the operation stopped there, and for that single insurer you gave one a single assure, what would follow? That for a petty profit, 2 for 1000 for example, the insurer would incur an enormous risk. In a century, he would only collect a poor revenue, and in the course of that century, he could be ruined ten times. After 500 years, he would only cover the value of the property insured; now, it is more than probably that in 500 years he would have suffered at least one accident, which would make him lose all.

Let us make the group step in: that can take place is several ways.

1) Let the insured become in their turn the insurer of the property of the one who insures them; and let the two gather, two insurers = two insured parties, establishing for that purpose a society, a new moral being, responsible for the accidents, and supported, for the cases of reimbursement, by the two members; the risk and consequently the loss, like the profit, will be divided in half. Instead of two associates, let there be 10,000, or 100,000, and the total of the premiums paid each year will be sufficient to cover all the accidents, but still give the society a profit. This mode of insurance has received the name of mutual insurance.

2) Alongside the mutualist societies there exist insurance companies where a small number of capitalists, speculating on the probable, and more or less considerable, profit that will be given by an insurance business founded on large enough bases, make themselves, at their own risk and peril, insurers. The advantage of these companies is that, in reality, they do not need actual payments from the portion of their shareholders, and that the capital on which they are established does double service, on the one hand as a loan in commerce or investment in the State, on the other as backing of the insurance business. Now, from whatever point of view one assumes, that the insurance is composed of the totality of the insured, or that it is taken en dehors; that one considers the double product of a capital engaged at once, here as backing and there as loan, or else the decreasing and sometimes nulle quality of the annual cotisation of the mutualists, the operation does not differ essentially and the principle remains the same. It is always the collective force that, directly and by itself, or else indirectly and by a substitute, comes, by a slight sacrifice, to annihilate the risks of property and extinguish the lightning with which a blind heaven threatens at each moment to set the world ablaze.

25. I have no intention of taking a side between the free insurance companies and the mutualist societies; still less do I have a fixed opinion of the plan for a general organization of insurance by the State. I believe, without prejudice, that here, as in so many other cases, individual initiative, though operating on a collective force, can be useful, and I see no inconvenience in the commerce in insurance continuing, as before, to remain free. I would only ask whether the existing legislation, which sees in insurance only a contract between individuals, is perfect. If it is not true that in principle the insured being their own insurer, and the insurance entrepreneur doing nothing consequently than se subroger, moyennant caution, the rights of their clientele, isn't there an occasion for the legislator to stipulate in favor of that one some guarantees against the haggling, unexpected deductions, disputes in bad faith and interminable trials that often accompany the repayments from accidents, and make insurance an immoral industry?

26. The development of credit, although less rapid than that of insurance, has had the same cause.

For a long time, the loan for money, like the loan for use, a contract between individuals, in which the risk of non-repayment, whatever guarantee is furnished against it by mortgage, was nonetheless incurred by one single person, the lender. So, as remuneration of that risk, we have seen the interest stipulated by the loan contract vary from a minimal fraction of the capital loaned to the whole amount, and even more, of that same capital.

The application of the principle of collectivity changes all the conditions of credit.

27. A banker operating on his own capital draws from it an average revenue of 6% per year. The credit that he gives to his clients, in return for the delivery of their values, is individual and simple. If he has 10 million engaged in this commerce, his revenue is 600,000 francs. I have never contested the legitimacy of this revenue.

In the place of this banker, let us suppose that the traders who make up his clientele, coming together, each contribute a sum proportional to the total of their annual discounts, and form among themselves a bank company functioning for their own service, with a capital of 10 million francs. Things will go on as with insurance. Each of the clients of the former banker, becoming, through the partnership into which they have entered, at once creditor and credited, and consequently having a right to a portion of the products of the bank proportional to their contribution to the fund, a stake representing the average of their current account, two things occur: 1) The dividend to receive coming in deduction from the sum of discounts to pay, the interest on the discounts is reduced progressively by the shareholders. 2) At the end of 18 or 2 year, they will be in fact returned in their advance; what's more, supposing their circulation to be always the same, they will be assured the discount of all their values for a sum paid once, perpetually at $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}\%$, even at zero.

28. Instead of a limited partnership [*commandite*] of ten million francs, formed by some thousands of Parisian traders, let us suppose a society formed by all the traders in France, with a capital of 500 million francs: the effect of the collectivity would be still greater. As it is in the nature of currency to circulate, not to amass, the sum of the subscription for each trader would diminish as the number of subscribers increased, so that for a minimal sum, which would not even equal the total of the discounts paid annually by each at a rate of 6%, the commercial interest that they paid would be paid for in perpetuity.

29. Now, just as by virtue of the mutualist or collective principle that regulates insurance there have formed special companies of insurers, operating at their own risk, and with their own capital, just so there has formed at Paris a banking company that, with the help of a first stake of funds, and with the privilege that the government has granted it to issues notes to the bearer, has succeeded in realizing in fact, but for their exclusive profit, this vast *commandite* of 500 millions, and to thus centralize all the commerce of the country. It is the Bank of France. The cash on hand of the Bank of France is from 5 to 600 millions, of which at least three-quarters have been lent it, free of charge, by the nation, against that sort of receipt that we call banknotes.

30. So I ask, as I just did regarding insurance: Why is the Service of free prestation rendered by the public to the Bank, not rendered free, in turn, to the public?... I have addressed this question to the economists and jurisconsults so many times that it becomes tiresome for me to repeat it. One last observation only.

The events of the last 18 months have pronounced against my detractor, Mr. Bastiat, speaking in the name of all the economists and myself.

The remuneration of credit, which it is practiced between individuals, is legitimate: I have solemnly affirmed this in my controversy with Mr. Bastiat.

But the legitimacy of that remuneration preclude free credit as a possibility, and even already one that has been realized: the proof is the free prestation of 600 millions that the French nation made to the Bank, and an additional proof is the decree of the President of the Republic, who, implicitly recognizing that service, imposed on the Bank a reduction of interest from 4 to 3%.

31. Let us cite, on the question of credit, one more example.

[...]

[37-40: numbers skipped in manuscript]

VII.—THE COLLECTIVE REASON.

The social body is known; it remains to reveal the social mind: After physiology, psychology.

41. We have shown, directly and with facts, the difference between individual and collective action, and we have concluded from that difference in actions the difference in their courses or the forces that produce them: individual force and social force. And as there is no force without a group or being within which it resides and from which it emerges, we have concluded anew, from the manifestation of the two forces, that these two beings, the individual and society, are equally real.

We have demonstrated now, and always by facts, that in every existence action is synonymous with expression, speech or word, and that word is synonymous with thought. So that, as we have already recognized, in Society, a collective action, a collective force and a collective being, we must also recognize there a collective speech and a collective thought, distinct from individual thought and speech.

In other words, human Society being, by virtue of its unity-collectivity, a positive being or reality, endowed by virtue of that reality with force and capable, by virtue of that force, of action, we will also find it, by virtue of its action, capable of thought and feeling.

42. What! It will be said; Society considered as moving, feeling, thinking and willing individuality! A reasoning being treated like a person! What madness! Where then is this being? Where are its organs, its hands and feet, its organs, its hand and feet, its heart, its mouth, its brain? How is it that it moves, feels and reasons?

Coarse, superstitious men! Tell me yourselves, what is the portion of pulp in your brain that thinks? What is the gland that centralizes the sensations that come from outside, compares them, combines them, and extracts ideas and judgments from them? Which then controls the organism, sends its orders to the nervous extremities, and says to the muscles: execute my law? What is, in that machine, the motor, and what is the body to be moved?

These are questions without solutions, or rather absurdities, that come down to this: What weights in matter? What is it that grows in the grass, that gleams in the metal, that wets in the wave, that rings in the bell, that vibrates in the piano string or the organ's pipe?...

In the human body," Hippocrates said, "everything conspires, contributes and consents," consequently everything acts and thinks. There is no beginning, nor end, nor domination, nor obedience, nor principle of force, nor principle of inertia. Everything is action and reaction, and from that action-reaction of organs on one another, is born the force of the group, which in living beings is always translated, more or less, into thought and speech. So what is astonishing about

that? What! An organism of flesh can think and speak, and an organism formed of beings could not think?

43. But I know what stops you. You want to know if the dualism that we are accustomed to conceiving and accepting in order to explain the phenomena of life and mind in men applies equally to society, if, in short, society has a soul. If so, is it prior to the social body and does it survive after it. Where was it before the society was formed. What becomes of it when the society is dissolved?...

44. So let us speak us speak of theology or psychology, for it is all one. That language is as good as any other and I do not want to bother anyone.

Well! God who has given attraction to matter, even if that matter was formed of manure or mud; God who has endowed the plant with life, even if that plant was the euphorbia or the upas; the animal instinct and intelligence, even if that animal was a toad or a viper; God who has willed that the amorous coming together of man and woman should give birth to a child, even if that man and woman were united by adultery or incest, and that the child should have a soul, even if that soul be that of the Antichrist God, who, in short, has imposed on all beings some universal, irrevocable laws, without , without distinction of worthiness or unworthiness, without consideration of destiny or aim; God has also willed that everywhere that there is a relation of parties, combination of elements, centralization, harmony, a group, finally, there will be a force, and that force will contain a latent or free form of thought.

The truth of that proposition results from the very definition of thought: thought, [in French, *pensée*,] from *pensare*, *peser*, means force. The Latin *cogitatio*, which corresponds to the French *pensée*, from *cogitare*, to act as an ensemble, comes from the same view, and it also implies the idea of force. Thought is the work of force.

45. Yes, everything in nature thinks; everything has its soul, as the psychologists say, more or less elevated in the hierarchy of souls, from the stone up to the man, and the Universe also has its great soul, and its non-mute thoughts: *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei* !["The heavens recount the glory of God," Psalm 19 (18), 1.] And everywhere that two or more men are grouped, their souls unite, lose themselves in one another and produce, through their fusion, a God: *Ibi sum in medio eorum*! [From Matthew, 18, 20, *Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum* ("Let two or three be gathered in my name, and I am in their midst.")]

It is impossible to speak with clarity and reason about the nature of beings, of their composition, their laws and development, without supposing in the heart of each group, a force of cohesion, a relation of similarity, a law of composition, an essence, a SELF [*moi*] makes it so that the group is one, is defined, is distinguished from what surrounds us, and is established as an individual. It is the profound sense of the famous phrase of Descartes, which he was only wrong in not extending it to all beings, without exception: I think, therefore I am! This is not a new beginning of mythology and fable; it gives the higher reason of the mythology, unknown or poorly understood until now by the so-called psychologists.

46. What gives us a false idea of the animism, and makes it so inconceivable in society, is that we always take as a condition of this animism a visibly imperfect organization, the animal organization. In man, for example, each animal or vital function has its exclusive and special organs: vision is by the eye, locomotion by the nerves, hearing by the ear, affections by the chest, memory, imagination, comparison, meditation by the brain, without there being any possible permutation of function between the organs.

This specialty, which is nothing other than the application of the fundamental organic law of human economy, leads us to very different conclusions. Some see it as proof of the essential and

substantial difference between soul and body; the others find in it the demonstration of the assertion that each organ has its own life and its function, its instinct, its soul, and that since there is no more reason to grant a soul to each organ than to the whole; we must conclude that there is no more for one than for the other.

But let us conceive of an organism, whose members, thinking for themselves and mobile, are capable of exchanging their services, and of fulfilling in turn and indifferently all the functions of the Being: this being will obviously be superior. Its strength could always be due to its mass, or to the number of its units, but its life will no longer depend on the conservation of such or such unit; it won't have parts like us that it can lose with impunity, like hair, nails and beard, and others whose preservation is essential to it, such as the heart, lung, or brain.

We will see that this is precisely the existence of society and its animism. — Beforehand, we have to note its thought and recognize its ideas.

47. Let us conclude then, and let us accept this general psychology, which is nothing, after all, but the summary of our experience.

a) Thought, in every being, is proportional to the organism, and of the same quality as it.

b) Thought follows the modifications of the organism, rise and fall, are born and disappear with it.

c) All beings forming together an infinite series of genera and species, of larger and larger groups, and of smaller and smaller unities, each organism can be considered, and considers itself, from four different points of view, which are the cardinal points of its thought and existence:

1) in relation to the Universal Cause, to the Movement that embraces everything

2) in relation to external groups

3) in relation to itself, and to its own special essence

4) in relation to the groups of which it makes a part, and in which it is included.

d) It follows from this that every thinking group or organism is susceptible to four sorts of thoughts:

1) those that come to it from movement, which we call conceptions or notions;

2) those that come to it from external organisms or from the objects that surround it, which we call intuitions or images;

3) those that come to it from its own constitution, which are the affections, passions or instincts.

4) those that come from the group of which it is a member, which are mores (its rights and its duties.)

e) The thinking organism is capable of forming concepts, of having ideas of time, space, substance, cause, movement, tendency and finality, like those of atom, monad, instant, point, rest, and inertia, because it is a unity; it is by virtue of these concepts that it raises itself toward the ideal, which is only the perfection of the unity.

It is capable of receiving impressions or images, because, like the glace that reflects objects, as long as it is not broken, it is a unity.

It feels the need to act because it is a force, and because that force acts, reacts, or suffers by virtue of its unity.

f) The Being, by the labor of the force that it created, thus conceives the infinite, but without understanding it;

It sees the objects, and studies them;

It feels its activity and passivity, and, while yielding to them, tends to make itself their master;

It works out its mores, and, while yielding to them, tends to make itself their master;

Conception, intuition, activity or passionality, divination, are the four forms of the thought of the being; science, liberty, justice, ideal are its four ends.

g) So the being knows itself, a priori, since it knows what appeals to it, by virtue of its unity. By the mere fact that it is a unity it knows its attractions, it wants to satisfy them, and it is carried along by them. It also has the a priori notion of the infinite, or of the one, and that notion, applied to the various objects revealed by the senses, is enough for it to prove all concepts.

That is why psychology, like pure mathematics, is possible a priori; and why there is no theory of art, since art, like love, is an innate thing and all that can be said about it is that it is proportional to the education of the individual and the environment in which they live.

h) But being does not know itself, a priori, either as a plurality or as a fraction. In other words, it does not know, a priori, the compositions of its organs, nor that of the higher group of which it is part; in order to know them, it is obliged to observe them as things external to itself, as objects. The reason is that the being knows nothing a priori except by virtue of its unitary essence, and that in order to know itself a priori, as an organism or a fraction of an organism, it must know itself as a multiplicity, by analyzing and destroying itself, which would entail a contradiction.

This is why each part must have its own anatomy and why, reciprocally, the law of each part imposes obligations on the organism, on pain of mutual destruction.

i) The law of the organism is binding on each part, and reciprocally the law of each part is binding on the organism, on pain of mutual destruction.

k) Liberty and Justice, for the individual and for the social body, consist in the complete fulfillment of these two laws. On this condition, they merge: *Summa libertas*, *Summa justitia*.

48. Thus, with the exception of: 1) the self, that is to say the unity, the same, the unique category of all conceptions; 2) its passionality, which produces, depending on the objects to which it is applied, passions, affections, appetites, inclinations, sympathies or instincts... which it feels immediately; the being does not think, does not know anything that does not come to it from outside, either from lower objects, or from the higher being of which it is a part, and which is society.

On one hand, the sentiment of the self, the same, the one; the idea of indivisibility and that of the infinite;

On the other, the feelings of the passions are innate in the Being: they are the being its: simply because it exists, it possesses them, and cannot not know them.

As for all the other ideas, they are not innate, but imprinted, suggested, or revealed: they are first of all the impressions of objects; the categories of understanding, resulting from the application of the notion of infinity, of the self, of the one and of the same, to external phenomena; they are also the passional categories resulting from the application of our activity to external objects; finally, there are the moral categories resulting from our relations with our fellow human beings and from the society which we naturally and spontaneously form with them.

49. Every idea, regardless of its origin and nature, is the expression of a reality, which it defines and represent; and we have here, through the theory of the formation of ideas, the proof so often sought of the reality of external beings.

In fact, just as inner feelings reveal to us and guarantee to us, in an unmistakable way whose negation would imply contradiction, the reality of our own existence, just so the reality of external objects is proven by the images that we receive. Here is the demonstration.

1. The Being is a group.
2. The group is a unity-multiplicity.
3. To have the idea of a group is thus to have the idea on a unity-multiplicity.
4. Now, the thinking Being can only acquire the idea of a multiplicity a posteriori, and not by itself, since that would be to analyze and destroy itself.
5. Thus, the groups, the ideas of which are received or perceived in the understanding, are external to the mind.
6. Thus, if they are external to it, they are real, since the highest reality that we can conceive is the group.

Thus the metaphysical concepts—born of the application made by the self of the notion of unity or of the same, which is in it necessary for phenomena—reveal to us the animate or thinking reality and, by analogy, the cosmic infinity.

The images reveal to us the reality of the creation.

The passions, form of our passional activity that we could call categories of sensibility, reveal to us the reality of the human essence, and our own personality.

Customs indicate the reality of the Social Being.

So that we have now, as guarantee of the reality of that being, three sorts of proofs:
the ontological proof, by which the being is affirmed everywhere that there is unity,
composition of parts or a group;

the economic, psychological or mechanical proof, which shows us that being in the exercise of its strength, in its action;

the ideological proof, which reveals to use the ideas that it generates by itself, affirms its necessary reality.

51. What, then, is the collective or social reason, as opposed to individual reason?

It is the set of ideas that the social group spontaneously generates, as an expression of its nature, through its formation, action, development, preservation, and tendency towards perfection and well-being.

These ideas are the juices of the individual, to whom they reveal themselves as the group progresses, but they do not come from it; it does not possess them a priori; it is by itself incapable of producing them.

At the same time as they imbue the human understanding, they penetrate the conscience, so that they immediately become a superior commandment, which, expressed or implied, with or without the declaration of the legislator, is soon translated into the uses, constitutes morality or manners, and is the basis of public respect, that is to say of RELIGION.

VIII — THE IDEAS OF THE COLLECTIVE PERSON

[...]

Application of the principles of collective force to the State.

Let us apply these principles to the largest of the manifestations of the collective force, to the largest of all the groups: the State.

Just as men tend to group together in order to multiply their strengths, so peoples tend to establish themselves in Government, in defensive and offensive organisms, with the aim of insuring their liberty, their security, their labor, their property and the well-being of their women and children against every attack, from nature or from men, foreign or domestic.

Such is the aim of governments: on this point all the authors are in agreement. But what no one has seen is that the State is consequently a purely economic principle, independent of any notion of authority, sovereignty, hierarchy, aristocracy, priesthood, divine right, etc.; it is that the theory of the State, as a consequence, ceases to be in the domain of arbitrary will, revelation and swords, and that it falls exclusively within that of the theory of the production, distribution and consumption of wealth.

This is what we have to note first, through reasoning and facts, before passing to a place or reorganization.

Thus, as in Economy properly speaking, and for that which concerns the conditions and fortunes of the citizens, the equilibrium of fortunes depends on the just division of the products of the collective force and on the reasoned and freely agreed upon participation of everyone in its direction and use, just so, in politics, let us pose as axioms:

1. That the Government, or the collective force of the whole Nation, being the product of all the citizens, belongs equally to all the citizens.

2. That by virtue of this principle, affirmed in all eras, although we understood the reasons badly, the political power has always tended to distribute itself among the greatest number possible.

3. That the guarantees of liberty and well-being, the stability of states, the order of societies, and the peace of nations are generally in direct proportion to the number of the participants in authority.

4. Finally, that the political order would be perfect, unassailable social equilibrium, if we could make it so that all those who participate in the formation of the national sovereignty, as well as the collective force, became at the same time sharers and usufructuaries of the authority, in other words, effective and active parts of the Sovereign.

[...]

Never would democracy, starting from the innate good of government, dream of destroying what it calls the great body of the State, a body that is essentially aristocratic, and replace it with some popular bodies. Now, what are these great bodies but the alienation of the collective forces, passed into the state of a political institution? In 93, and later in 1848, the tribunes of the people all began from the idea of representing the people, in the exercise of its collecting force, through agents. This was to preserve the alienation in another form. The boldest did not go as far as direct and universal suffrage, with an imperative mandate and the faculty of permanent revocation: precautionary measures that would perhaps have been good, if the people had known what they should want, summon and ordain, consequently if they could discern among their representatives those whom they should maintain and those they must dismiss.

To elect, to give a mandate, to dismiss, all that does nothing for the people, if they do not know. What am I saying? All of that is only good to make the passions of its representatives pass to the people, and push them to civil war. But if the people knew, then they would no longer make representatives, for the first thing that they would know is that before science they are useless, as I will prove hereafter.

[...]

The political organism being by its nature exclusive and possessive, tending to domination and authority, it is necessary to arrest that tendency with the economic organism, which has a nature that is positive and that, the more perfect it is in its expression, the more it will push back the other.

The principle of economic organization is contained in this double proposition:

1) Everything that depends on individual action must remain free, since man is free, and be given up to appropriation.

2) Everything that does not depend on individual action and comes either from the nature of things or from collective action must be exempted from appropriation, and must be held by the Community.

This rule, which reigns over the relations of the citizen and the commune, rules for the same reason those of the commune and the nation, and of the nation and all of humanity.

(Apart from appropriation and individual labor, like the Community, there are the obligations and Contracts, which still come to modify the nature of individual possession every day, and the relations of men among themselves.)

1) Thus the land belongs to no one: it is for everyone; all have the right to cultivate it. That is the principle.

The eminent domain of the land is thus not for the man: it is for the Community.

But the earth spreads its good profusely only for the laborer: so each must have the power to cultivate the earth, and on that condition to obtain its fruits. Consequently, let the one who has labored enjoy what he has produced.

2) Thus, the fruits of the soil come back exclusively to the who cultivates it!... That is the second principle.

But this second article supposes three things:

That each family can obtain a share of land, equal in surface area, quality and productivity, and that the chances of annual harvest are equal and invariable.

Now, neither of these propositions is true.

The arable land is not sufficient for a division bien qu'elle could suffice for long encore to nourish the population.

The quality is not everywhere the same, nor the product similar.

Good farming practice is opposed to an indefinite parceling out.

The opportunities for harvest are variable and subject to chance.

Finally, not all men can cultivate the soil; the need for the arts, sciences, industries, commerce, etc. contradicts it.

So it is necessary to provide these necessities. The question becomes complicated. It is necessary to resolve it.

[...]

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP
Organized by Shawn P. Wilbur
WEEK SEVEN READINGS

Constructing an Anarchism: Collective Force

In general, I've had pretty good luck keeping up with the demands of the project, despite all of the distractions of multiple crises. This weekend I'm running a bit low on steam. So the post connecting the discussion of governmentality with that of collective force will follow this post—which is perhaps not a bad thing—and should then be followed by a post discussing the polity-form, before I get to next week's discussion of the aubaines and exploitation.



Collective force — If you haven't read the selections from Proudhon's "Principles of the Philosophy of Progress," go ahead and do that. It's a remarkable text, which has been sadly neglected—having only fairly recently been published in French, but not yet in book form. The basic idea is that the things that we do together with others do not simply add up, but that specialization and association bring about the formation of *unity-collectivities*, social beings with qualities, strengths and perhaps even ideas that arise from the combination and unification of the constituent beings.

Proudhon applied the analysis of collective force to a variety of problems, from explaining capitalist exploitation in his earliest works to discussing political geography (the formation of nations, etc.) in his final manuscripts. In his work on *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, he used it to discuss the problem of "free will," concluding:

What then is liberty or free will? The power of collectivity of the individual.

Someone asked me yesterday to try to clarify just how *collective force* and "liberty or free will" might be connected and what that connection could tell us about anarchy. This was my response, which, however off-the-cuff it may be, strikes me as perhaps useful for those first encountering Proudhon's theory.

Every *individual*, whether a human individual or a group united by active association, is also a *group*—a *unity-collectivity*. The unity of the individual is a matter of *internal organization*, which may be simple or complex. The internal relations may also involve greater or lesser degrees of *intensity*. Sometimes greater intensity just means greater *health*, or some other kind of increased capacity, particularly where the relations are simple. And where relations are all simple, we would expect the actions of the individual to reflect its various influences fairly directly. In the chain of causes and effects, there is comparatively little in a simple individual to redirect the forces acting on it. So, for example, we think of animals as responding to stimuli in ways much more narrowly channeled by hardwired instincts than humans. As the internal mechanism of the individual organism becomes more complex, we expect the responses to external stimuli to be at least subject to considerably more mediation or processing before producing a reaction in the individual. And at some point the complexities of the individual organism are such that it's hard for us to describe the reaction as produced by the stimulus. Cause and effect are no doubt still at work, but the complexity of the processing mechanism means that the individual is forced to *choose*. If, then, "free will" is the capacity (or perhaps we should call it a determined *tendency*) to make choices, then it is (according to this reading) increased by

changes in the internal organization of the individual organism which complicate and delay responses that might otherwise be strongly determined by the stimuli received.

And that's half of the model, since the human individual or association exists within larger forms of association, which are subject to a similar internal dynamic.

An authoritarian society is characterized by constraining the responses of individuals comparatively tightly. If licit and illicit options are clearly defined in advance, then presumably the citizen of such a society needs to exercise very little individual power to choose. Relations among individuals are largely mediated by the central authority (reducing certain basic kinds of complexity) and conflict is presumably reduced by the compliance of individuals. If the citizens of this society were water in a boiler, we wouldn't expect to see them bouncing off one another much or with much force—simply because their interactions are limited and mediated by authority. Within an authoritarian society, an individual may have to internal organization necessary to make choices, but is going to lack the opportunities and occasions we might expect to encounter in an anarchic society, where there is no central mediating authority and no legal code constraining choices artificially.

Looking at the anarchic society we can easily talk about about the freedom that this *social body* affords its *members* by not constraining their choices. That much seems easy, I think. But if those members have no internal capacity to choose, there isn't much sense in noting the lack of constraint. So presumably human freedom has two sides: one addressing organization internal to the human individual and one addressing organization internal to some larger social body. And both sides need to afford conditions for freedom if we are to recognize it as actually existing. But what Proudhon also suggests—by connecting the quantity of freedom associated with a unity-multiplicity and the quantity of collective force generated within it—is that the same conditions of organization that he associates with greater productive capacity, increasing complexity and intensity in internal relations, also produce greater freedom for the members.

It feels sort of strange to share this kind of interaction in the context of this particular project, although similar on-the-spot responses are a regular part of most days on the internet. I'm probably getting a little spoiled, in this context, having so much leeway to choose the limbs I climb out on.

Having “officially” introduced the concept of collective force here at about the midpoint of my construction, I'll dedicate much of the rest of my time to explaining a variety of ways in which it might inform « my own anarchism ». But perhaps the most important thing to emphasize at this point is just what a difference the possibility of talking about anarchist relations in these terms has made for me as my own thought has developed.

We just looked at *governmentalism* — and if the term itself is not particularly *au courant* in modern anarchist circles, it's pretty hard to escape any of the related terms in our internal discussions—and it is fairly common to find many of them used in at least nominally anarchist discourse in ways that suggest that anarchism is doomed to have no language of its own. Terms like “justified hierarchy,” “legitimate authority,” “pure democracy” and the like are often used, I am sure, without any intention to confuse or mislead. And there is, after all, a fine old libertarian

tradition of stretching archaic language to indicate at least potentially anarchic ideas: *self-ownership*, *self-government*, “the authority of the bootmaker,” etc. But those sorts of potentially subversive borrowings seem prone to losing whatever edge they might have had, leading us back toward governmentalism at least as often as they lead us deeper into anarchic territory.

The problem, of course, is that the defenders of the *language* of democracy and the like can pose roughly the same challenge as those who defend democratic *practices* — *What is your alternative?* — and with roughly equal chances of nobody effectively calling their bluff. (*Anarchy?* we respond. — *But what does that really mean?* — And it’s not always so easy to make ourselves clear.) We really do seem to lack much language that even anarchists will recognize as designating truly non-governmental relations.

At various times in my own development as an anarchist, I’ve attempted to force a bit more clarity on my own thoughts by setting some limits on the language I would allow myself in the explanation and exploration of anarchist ideas. I made a months-long trial separation with the language of *mutualism* and have for some years now generally limited my use of the term anarchism to descriptions of anarchist thought in the period after the death of Bakunin — not, in either case, because there weren’t other vocabularies that might be used, but because a bit of discipline with regard to word choice helped to reinforce connections or the lack of connections between the various ideas and movements I was examining.

When I discovered Proudhon’s social science — hiding in plain sight, of course, in works that looked very different once I was able to understand them in the context of that developing project — I gained both a useful set of analytic tools and a vocabulary that didn’t rely on turning the language of government, hierarchy and authority back on itself. Having already begun to think of anarchy as fundamentally descriptive of structures, a descriptive language that could emphasize forces and their dynamics — owing as much to physics as political science — was welcome. And, as a tool for suggesting potential renovations of anarchist theory, it had the combination of qualities that I have come to think of as close to ideal: it was at once “new,” in the sense that it is unfamiliar to most anarchists, and as old and orthodox as just about anything in the tradition, being the glue that holds together “property is theft” and “je suis anarchiste” in one of the most influential (if not always the most clearly understood) of early anarchist texts.

The theory and the vocabulary let me talk about anarchy — about anarchic relations — in a much more direct way than I had experienced before. Whether or not I have made good use of that opportunity is, no doubt, something readers will have to judge for themselves as I continue to describe my construction of anarchism. It hasn’t been an easy toolkit to learn to use, but I feel like I am slowly but surely getting somewhere.



This week’s readings are related to the analyses in Proudhon’s *What is Property?* Those unfamiliar with the work can take a look at my [notes on the text](#) for an overview. Much of the work is focused on Proudhon’s theory of exploitation — a more consistently anarchistic alternative to the marxian theory of surplus value. The extension of that discussion in the “Notes on Contribution and Disposition” — an ambitious and exploratory, so perhaps not always absolutely lucid attempt to apply Proudhonian terms — takes anarchist communist economics as a foil.

Frédéric Tufferd, "Unity in Socialism" (1887)

We begin to talk of union, to understand that the ridiculous disputes which have divided the socialists thus far, to the great joy of the bourgeois, should come to an end, if we want socialism to become something more than a powerless dream. But how will we bring about union among the different socialist schools? Obviously, by establishing socialism on a demonstrable basis, and no longer on a few unproven principles, about which we can dispute endlessly without ever agreeing. Ask the astronomers if the earth is round and if it orbits around the sun, and all will be in agreement; ask them if there are inhabitants in the moon, and their opinions will be divided. In the first case, the astronomers know; in the second, they can only rely on analogies of which nothing proves the reality.

If I say that a man who lets himself fall from the sixth floor will be killed when he hits the pavement, everyone, materialists or spiritualists, atheists or deists, anarchists or collectivists, will agree with me, for they all recognize that this is a necessary consequence of the law of gravity. But if I add that this man, after his death, will begin again a new existence here or elsewhere, some will say yes, others no, and those who have the largest dose of good sense will say to me: You know nothing of it, any more than I do.

When I say that as long as there are men who, without producing, take the lion's share for themselves, the workers will be reduced to the bare minimum, I do not have to debate about God and the state, socialism or anarchy; it is enough to prove that all wealth comes from labor, and that the sum of social wealth equals that of labor accomplished; because any deduction which is not represented by any labor diminishes proportionally the portion of the laborer.

If we only mean by the word "God" the angry, vengeful and jealous Jehovah of Moses, heaven's despot, symbol and support of the despots of the earth, every sensible man needs no reasoning to be convinced that such a God is impossible. But the word "God" also means the directing force of the universe, the principle of movement and life. What is this principle? We know nothing about it; it is the great unknown, and that is all. Will we then take the unknown for the basis of socialism?

I do not know what God is, and consequently neither affirm nor deny its existence. Nor do I know what is matter and what is spirit. Is matter a reality or a simple illusion of the senses? I don't know. Bakunin thought of matter, not as inert, but as endowed with movement and life; but where is the proof of that assertion? All that I know is that there are in nature some sensible manifestations produced by forces that the senses cannot perceive, but that the intelligence conceives. What are these forces, and where do they come from? What is movement, and what is life? I do not know. Thus I can be neither materialist, nor spiritualist, nor atheist, nor deist. On these questions I doubt and I seek; and if I express an opinion, I am careful not to make it the basis of social reform. It is long since Proudhon said: "We know nothing of substances and causes; we only know relations."

But if our science of substances and causes is null and void, there is one thing that we know: it is that the laws of nature are immutable. An astronomer can predict the eclipses which will take place in the future and calculate those that have taken place in the past. The magnet attracts, and will always attract, iron. Hydrogen will always combine with oxygen to form water. On the laws of nature that we know, our science is complete, absolute. For every phenomenon of which we understand the laws, we can infer the past and predict the future; and when we know the economic laws of society, we can calculate the social phenomena with the same certainty as the astronomer who calculates the course of the stars. Thus, let us study the economic laws which

direct social evolution, if we want to put an end to disputes and divergences of opinion. Do we see the astronomers argue about the movement of the planets or chemists argue about the formation of salts. Would we dream of putting the theorems of geometry or the proportions of the logarithms in doubt? Let us cease then taking the unknown for our basis, and start from the facts to discover the laws, and from the laws determine the future organization of society.

The most incredible confusion is that between the government and the State. I am an anarchist, as Proudhon was, for like him I want to abolish government, the principle of authority in the State, in order to replace it by an responsible and controllable administration of the public interests; but I do not want, with Bakunin, to abolish the State. The word State comes from *stare*, to hold, to persist; the State is thus the organized collectivity. Just as the commune is the local collectivity, the State is the national collectivity which has lasted, lasts, and will last as long as the nation itself. Even if society ever succeeds in realizing the ideal of the universal Republic, that Republic will still be composed of distinct States, in solidarity with one another, but each living its own life.

As long as the socialists quarrel over God, nature and the State, there will be no more harmony among them that there could be between the zealot who believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ and the free-thinker who denies it. The astronomer, the physicist, and the chemist do not have to quarrel about God and matter; they only concern themselves with determining the laws of the phenomena that they study. It is time that the socialists imitate them and concern themselves with determining the laws of social phenomena.

I do not propose to determine these laws here; that would be impossible in a journal article. My aim is less to answer the questions than to indicate the way. Thus I will content myself with sketching the social problem from the point of view of wages and *aubaine*.

All wealth comes from labor. Natural goods are useful only after labor has collected, modified, and prepared them. Even wild fruits rot on the vine without any utility, if labor does not gather them. To labor is to modify the natural materials in order to render them proper for the satisfaction of our needs. Labor creates nothing, it only accomplishes a change of form (art), or a change of place (transportation), or a distribution (commerce). The one who measures fabric works as much as those who transport or make it; for the production does not stop when the product is finished, it is only finished when it is delivered to the consumer. Doubtless commerce hardly knows how to do anything today but defraud and deceive; but it is not for that any less a necessary part of social labor. We do more work with a harvesting machine with a sickle, but when we do not have the machine, we must use the sickle. Similarly, as long as we have not reorganized commerce, we must make it serve us such as it is.

If all wealth comes from labor, there can only be two means of living: either at the expense of one's own labor, by *wages*; or at the expense of the labor of others, by *aubaine*.

I designate as wages every remuneration for a useful labor delivered in the marketplace, however it is collected. To receive a wage, it is not necessary for the worker to have a boss. Those who work on their own behalf receive their wages by selling their products; and the merchants receive their own by a profit on sales. I do not have to concern myself here with badly distributed wages; I have only to indicate the fact that everyone who delivers a useful labor in the marketplace has a right to a wage which allows them to take from the market an equivalent labor of their choice.

I designate as *aubaine* every collection of income which takes some value from the market without replacing it by a useful labor of equal value; for then it can only be made on the labor of others.

There are three sorts of *aubaines*: rent, interest, and profit. The rent is made up of the income (*rente*) from the soil and the interest from buildings and other immovable properties.

The more fertile a plot of land is, the higher the *rente* from it is. It is, however, not the labor of the proprietor which has created the fertility of the soil.

The better situated a plot of land is, the higher the *rente* from it is. The high rents in Paris do not come from the price of the houses, for a house costs no more to build in Paris than in Pontoise; they come from the location. It is their situation which makes it so that for each square meter of land, one can do more business and employ more labor than one could on as many acres in the country. It is not, however, the labor of the proprietor which has made the roads, canals, railways and towns.

Thus, the income is only an *aubaine*, and in the majority of cases the rent of immovable property is nothing else. It costs to construct, repair, and maintain a house; thus it is fair to pay a rent sufficient to reimburse these costs; but to whom? To the proprietor? Are there many proprietors who have themselves built the houses that they rent to us, or who have paid for the construction by their own labor? Isn't it almost always money from the *aubaines* which has paid for the building? Each has a right to demand payment for all the increase in values that they labor has added to the soil; but no one has the right to appropriate the labor of others.

If the *rente* does not belong to the proprietor, does it belong to the tenant or leaseholder? No, for it is not the fruit of the labor of either. And yet, whatever social order we suppose, the *rente* will exist, for there will always be parcels of land which, with equal labor, will yield more than others.

To whom, then, does the *rente* belong? To society, obviously, for the advantages of fertility come from the free gifts of nature, and those of situation result from social development. Let the *rente* cease to be paid to the proprietor, and be paid to the state, in the place of taxes, and justice will be realized. Conditions will be equal, for each will pay in proportion to the advantages of the land that they occupy, and the *rente* will profit everyone, since it will remunerate all the works of public utility. As for the rent of immovable property, it will be reduced to the rate necessary to reimburse costs, plus an insurance premium in anticipation of accidents. When each pays rent only to the commune and the state, a fifth of the present rents will amply suffice for all public expenses.

Interest, whether it is taken as interest on loans, dividends on stocks or government bonds, is only an *aubaine*. How will we make it disappear? Obviously, by replacing private credit, which is expensive, by public credit, which will be free. Instead of granting the Bank of France to a company which will pocket the profits, we could make it a national bank which discounts and credits without interest, with its notes, on good security. Then its notes will no longer be a promise of reimbursement on gold on demand, guaranteed by bullion; they would be bills or exchange guaranteed by public fortune.

As for profit, to abolish it, it would be necessary to make industry and commerce no longer individual speculations, but social agencies for production and distribution. When the bank credits its interests, it could credit the workers organizations in order to open workshops and stores, on the condition that they produce and sell at cost-price, without profits other than those necessary to cover wages, general costs and insurance premiums. It is claimed that only individual are prosperous, — the monopolies of the companies are certainly not the proof of it, — but if they can do better than the workers' organizations, they will persist; if they cannot, they will become bankrupt, and industry will gradually pass into the hands of the workers.

But if we can leave time and competition to reorganize commerce and industry on social bases, this is not the case with the large monopolies, which it is urgent to make disappear as soon as possible. There is no doubt that the post carries our letters more cheaply than it would if it was the monopoly of one company, and for good reason that the state does not seek to make a fortune and has no dividends to pay to anyone. Now that the telegraphs belong to the state in England, telegrams cost much less, and for the same reason. Let us give notice to all the stockholders, and it will be the same with the other monopolies.

This is social reform sketched in broad strokes and deduced, no longer from vague and indeterminate notions, but from social phenomena that everyone can easily verify. Let the socialists go down this road, and they will soon cease to argue.

Another cause of disputes is the means of action. But they depend on times, places, and circumstances, and what is impossible today may perhaps be possible tomorrow. It is not up to us whether the revolution is accomplished violently or peacefully; that will depend on events that we can neither predict nor control, and on the will of our legislators and rulers. Let those legislators and ruler consent to the most urgent reforms and we will bear with the rest. The people do not revolt for the pleasure of smashing streetlights; when the rebel it is because their condition has become intolerable and because they feel the need of escaping it at any price. It is up to our masters to decide if the revolution will be violent or peaceful; as for us socialists, let us first study which reforms will resolve the problem of misery and bring about liberty, equality, solidarity, and justice for all. The circumstances will suggest the means of action. If some socialists want to employ means that we think must fail, we are free to not assist them; but must we impede them, and thus do ourselves the work of the masters?

The *aubaine* is the cause of poverty, and yet our rulers constantly strive to increase the *aubaines*. Companies issue more shares than they have real capital; governments contract new loans each year, always swelling in this way the ranks of the parasitic army of *state-rentiers*; government positions and sinecures are multiplied everywhere; the leprosy of parasitism invades everything, and as a necessary, inevitable result, poverty becomes misery, and misery become famine. The terrible cry of 1789—*For bread! For bread!*—still resounds on all sides. Perhaps there is still time to avoid the cataclysm, but we must make haste! It is no longer only bankruptcy, *hideous bankruptcy* which threatens us, it is famine and despair.

To decrease the *aubaines* will be to increase wages by that much; to suppress them would be to render wages equal to product, while leaving to the state a vast revenue, the *rente*. Every reform which diminishes the *aubaines* is useful. War to the *aubaines*!

Frédéric Tufferd

Source: *La Société Nouvelle*, 3 no. 2 (1887) 223-228.

[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur; revised February 26, 2013.]

Collective force: notes on contribution and disposition

A force of one thousand men working twenty days has been paid the same wages that one would be paid for working fifty-five years; but this force of one thousand has done in twenty days what a single man could not have accomplished, though he had labored for a million centuries. Is the exchange an equitable one? Once more, no; when you have paid all the individual forces, the collective force still remains to be paid. — P.-J. Proudhon, *What is Property?*

I think that the concept of *collective force* and the theory of *exploitation* that Proudhon developed from it are at least increasingly well known among anarchists. But, even in mutualist circles, when we talk about non-capitalist economies, we still tend to focus on “the worker’s right to the full product of their labor,” without much attention to the difficulties of knowing what “their labor” means for any given worker. So how do we make sense of the various contributions to production, incorporating the Proudhonian analysis, so that we can make practical proposals regarding the distribution of its fruits?

This is a set of questions that might take us in a variety of directions, but what I would like to do is to try to simply propose a general *formula*—on the model of the communist “from each according to ability, to each according to need”—that could guide further exploration. These formulas are not blueprints, but they are concise visions. In the communist instance, while we can imagine all sorts of conflicts and confusions regarding specific instances of “ability” or “need,” we can also pretty easily understand why the formula describes a system that would almost certainly work, provided that those uncertainties could be addressed.

We might even take the familiar communist formula as a more general formula for non-capitalist economies. What the theory of collective force suggests is that, in a well-organized economy of any complexity, we might expect modest contributions by individuals to result, thanks to the multiplying power of association, in subsistence for all—even in cases where the individual contributions might not, if isolated from one another, be sufficient to meet individual needs. And it isn’t likely to change things much if the distribution of the fruits of labor takes the form of the communistic *prise au tas* (free consumption), some form of non-capitalist market or some combination of those approaches. Communistic distribution simply adds the wages of individuals to the fruits of collective labor and *puts it on the pile*. If you want instead to divvy up the fruits of association among the contributing individuals, any division that is not wildly out of proportion with the contributions made should enrich those individuals and expand the capacity of the economy to support those who cannot contribute directly. Of course, outside of a capitalist economy—where contribution essentially means *capacity to create a profit for a capitalist*—there will be considerably less concern about ability to contribute. But the key issue, when it comes to addressing the needs of those who might need particular social assistance, will arguably not be the mode of division of the fruits of collective force, but instead the organization of productive association itself and increases in the multiplying capacities of collective force.

The question becomes whether or not we can produce a general formula with the elegance of the familiar communist example—one about which we might at least say that “it works when it works,” as, of course, there are all the unanswered questions about capacities and needs to be addressed. If we are not assuming the simplicity of the communistic “pile”—if, for example, we retain a lively interest in avoiding the individual experience of exploitation, even in less systemic forms—then perhaps we might begin by suggesting something like this:

- From each: a share of the socially necessary labor commensurate with their capacities—performed with an awareness of larger contexts.
- To each: a subsistence—and a share of whatever social wealth is produced through association of labor.

But, again, that just gestures at the real complexities involved, including the issue of collective force. In order to grapple more directly with all of that, let's move from a largely individualized account to one that recognizes three classes of contribution:

1. *Ambient contribution*: all of the contributions of collective force from sources outside a given association of producers;
2. *Collective contribution*: the collective force generated by a particular association;
3. *Individual contribution*: the productive power of isolated individuals or of each associated producer's efforts if exerted individually at a task similar to that performed within the association.

We know that the various kinds of contribution are connected. Assuming the best case, where the elements are in relative harmony, increases in ambient force should decrease the contributions at other scales necessary to provide for subsistence, increase general prosperity, accommodate more individuals unable or unwilling to contribute, etc. The key concern is that the ambient force remains free, unmonopolized by any class or faction, so that it can do this sort of general work. But we've essentially defined the *ambient* force as the contributions that can't be attributed to any particular individual contribution, or even to any particular association of individuals, so, while each individual has an interest in maintaining and enhancing this general multiplying force, they can only do so by associating their labor more locally with an eye to larger dynamics.

In the best case, that probably means simply making an effort not to gum up the works, while being vigilant about the possibilities of the ambient force being monopolized. And, because the production of collective force is as much a matter of controlled conflict as it is simple cooperation, there seems to be plenty of room for self-interested behavior in the mix. Perhaps very little is called for, in this case, other than a particularly robust sort of *anti-monopolism*, informed by anarchistic sociology, extending beyond Tucker's "four monopolies" to address monopolization of collective force as a systemic element in *archic* social structures.

We are not likely, however, to have the luxury of working with a best case scenario any time soon after the defeat of those *archic* systems. The material base of society is likely to require a significant transformation, which will take some time. But we might think of that necessary transition as a blessing in disguise, as what will be required of us under those less-than-ideal circumstances is just a steady advance toward anarchic relations.

That process will demand careful analysis of the institutions we are transforming and new consultative networks to provide feedback on the systemic effects of our efforts. I imagine a "complete" transformation, assuming such a thing is possible, would involve a fairly complete abandonment of the *polity-form* and the replacement of the governmental apparatus with this new consultative apparatus. Priorities will be driven by real needs, as we are likely to find that the institutions established by capitalism and governmentality really aren't all that well suited to providing generally for human subsistence—let alone a more general prosperity. Potential enterprises will be constrained by the state of the transformation. And the more abstract sorts of

calculation problems probably won't materialize, as our choices will be limited in a variety of ways.

Individuals who want to be relatively self-sufficient will have to work for the social conditions under which that is a possibility, often by working with others to establish sustainable patterns of resource use. But certainly they can be afforded all of the autonomy that they can create without engaging in harmful or monopolistic behavior towards others. If they benefit from the effects of ambient force, no one is the poorer for it—and, ultimately, there ought to be plenty of opportunities for even loners to contribute their share to flows of information, expertise, etc. in the public domain.

Those inclined to association will have plenty of opportunities to explore, although there may be some heavy lifting involved ridding our associations of *archic* elements that we presently take for granted. Abandonment of the *firm*, which is really just the polity-for transported into the economic sphere will mean that the unity of given associations will be complex. What Proudhon suggested about social collectivities was that they are indeed a kind of real social actor, with their own interests and a particular form of agency, but that, in an anarchic society, they must not be elevated in any way above the human individuals who are also parts of their complex whole.

Accounting for the equality of human individuals and social *individualities* across a range of scales—with only the first being what Proudhon called *free absolutes*, capable of self-consciousness and reflection—is bound to make demands on our understanding of social relations that are novel—or very nearly so.

But there is also a kind of simplification that comes with this theoretical shift, as, when we turn back to the question of the disposition of collective force, we can treat all of the various contributors we have to account for as individuals of one variety or another. So, for example, we can begin with the assumption that in an anarchistic society choices about the disposition of the fruits of labor ought to be in the hands of the laborer—even if that laborer is an association, recognized as a kind of collective person. But we can recognize that each individual, at whatever scale, is likely to have complex investments and interests — (and here the recent posts on anarchist individualism ought to provide useful insights) — while, at the same time, each instance of more-or-less individual labor also has to be understood in terms of a collaboration of sorts with what we have been calling the ambient contributions.

In order to understand the general dynamic of a society or economy understood in these terms, we might return to the rudimentary “social system,” proposed by Proudhon in *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, which I have often discussed in terms of an *anarchic encounter*:

Two men meet, recognize one another's dignity, state the additional benefit that would result for both from the concert of their industries, and consequently guarantee equality, which means economy. That is the whole social system: an equation, and then a collective power.

Two families, two cities, two provinces, contract on the same footing: there is always only these two things, an equation and a collective power. It would involve a contradiction, a violation of Justice, if there were anything else.

In this account, we already have indication of a general equality of actors. Elsewhere, as in his discussion of what I've called the citizen-state, Proudhon clarifies that the equation applies to circumstances like the encounter of an individual and an anarchistic “state.” And then the addition of ambient force to our analysis suggests that something very similar occurs even when individuals act in relative isolation, so that we might say that every attempt to act according to

this model demands the recognition of the interests of others, if only, in the most isolated cases, in a very general way. “Don’t gum up the works.”

Constructing Anarchisms: The Anarchist and « Their Own »

The level of difficulty in this work varies considerably from post to post—or from paragraph to paragraph—and from moment to moment. Thoroughly stuck in the middle of this post, for example, I turned to the material on collective force and worked through it in record time. Then I pattered at translation and went to bed. Or tried to go to bed. Got up and re-outlined the opening for this post. Went back to bed. Got up again and scribbled a bit more in a notebook. Made a bit of headway the next day. Ran errands. Took the afternoon ramble—and came back with the outline for a short, but potentially book on individualism and anarchist practice...

So now it's a matter of pulling what is immediately related to our joint project, while perhaps gesturing at the range of other pieces that fairly suddenly seem to have fallen into place.



I've started to talk about the shift from *governmentalism* to *collective force* in terms of a shift in vocabulary. *What would we talk about and how would we talk about it, if we could manage to stop talking about governmental norms and institutions?* And that's not a simple question. A certain kind of subversive use of governmentalist language is traditional and has, with some mixture of positive and negative effects, provided the traditional with some of its most durable phrases: *property is theft, the authority of the bootmaker, I am an anarchist...* In that last case, there has certainly been some progress in giving the language of *anarchy* a distinctly non-governmental sense, but it seems hard to deny that some of anarchists' struggles with the concept of anarchy reflect a failure to let go of old notions. Stirner's critique of "property is theft" as a moralizing affirmation of sacred property is arguably a very bad reading of Proudhon, but perhaps applies to a lot of the subsequent success of the phrase, divorced, as it has been in most instances, from the specific critiques with which it was originally associated. And how do we explain the way that Bakunin's aside about expertise has overshadowed most of the rest of the discussion of authority in "God and the State"—including the remarkable passages on the anarchistic "revolt of life against science"—if they are not a reflection of a failure or unwillingness to let go? The strictly rhetorical defenses of the language of democracy, which lean on its familiarity—as if not even another rhetoric was possible—seem like more of the same.

We have to ask ourselves, I think, if these issues haunt our encounters with the idea of "making anarchism our own." There is, after all, nothing particularly simple about the notion of *property* in an anarchist context. So it is comparatively easy to talk (and talk and talk) about the potential and potential hazards of *anarchy* and *anarchism*, but, when we try to come to grips with the notion of « our own », the difficulties seem much greater.

Stirner arguably provides us with one of the most direct approaches to a theory of anarchistic *individuality* or *personality*, but the *einzig*e can be slippery, elusive, particularly when we try to put it to use in a shared context. That shouldn't surprise us, particularly as one version of Stirner-inspired egoism—as we find it in John Beverley Robinson's essay "Egoism," for example—starts with the premise that "each one of us stands alone in the midst of a universe." Egoism seldom stops there. We soon find ourselves back in the realm of egoistic unions, camaraderie, even encountering the egoism of collectives in the work of James L. Walker, but we are seldom far from the *solitaires* and *only ones*, vagabonds and hermits.

The obvious question is whether or not a theory of anarchistic individuality influenced by Stirner is going to be any use to us, when the alternative to governmentalism already proposed is one rooted in an analysis of collective force—an analysis that takes as its basic premise that individuals are always already *associated*—so very clearly not “alone in the midst of a universe.” Those who accompanied me on the “Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism” won’t be surprised to hear me say that, yes, I believe that Stirner and Proudhon can work together well in this context. But I want to make the argument in a considerably less meandering form here.

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For those who haven’t read the “Rambles...,” there are links to both the original posts and a pdf collection in the sidebar—and much that will be addressed rapidly here is dealt with there in more detail.

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We want to “make anarchism our own” and we want to conceptualize *ownness*—a matter of individuality and of property—in as non-governmental a manner as we can. Having pointed out some of the ways in which we tend to fall short of non-governmental conceptions, we should be prepared to perhaps be a bit extreme in our attempts to strip away all of the archaic trappings. And, of course, Stirner is a fine guide in that sort of project.

Consider this passage from “Stirner’s Critics:”

Only when *nothing* is said about you and you are merely *named*, are you recognized as you. As soon as *something* is said about you, you are only recognized as that thing (human, spirit, christian, etc.). But the unique doesn’t say anything because it is merely a name: it says only that you are you and nothing but you, that you are a *unique* you, or rather your self. Therefore, you have no attribute, but with this you are at the same time without determination, vocation, laws, etc.

So what if we were to at least begin with this goal of saying nothing about the individual—or of unsaying, rejecting the full range of things that tend to subordinate the individual as a being in constant evolution to any number of types, models and standards—“human, spirit, christian, etc.”? (“As long as even one institution exists which the individual may not dismantle, my ownness and self-possession are still very far away.”) As an exercise in anarchistic analysis, peeling back all the various layers by which the *unique* is reduced to *types* seems likely to be both satisfying and useful. It’s also likely, at times, to be awkward and perhaps painful, as we can hardly help but have attachments to at least some of the things that are said about us and that connect us with others about whom similar things are said. Some of those things will, in fact, be of vital importance to us under present circumstances. While we may dream of a kind of radical anarchistic *self-creation*, in the context of which we would no longer have any use for attributes and expression (to pick up some of the details of Stirner’s exposition), that doesn’t seem to be a space in which even Stirner can remain for long.

That shouldn’t bother us, I think—and it certainly shouldn’t bother us here, where we are quite explicitly treating Stirner’s thought as “our food,” consuming the bits that seem useful in an analysis that will at least flirt with the project of a type of anarchist individuality. This paring

away of the layers of potentially archaic associations—constraints on anarchistic thought—is just the first step of a process and we are almost immediately led to the second.

Indeed, Stirner is one of those who suggests the next move, as we turn from the question of the individual's proper name to that of their shape and extent. Having done our best to rid ourselves of phantasms, fixed ideas about our own being—a process much like Proudhon's "elimination of the absolute"—we still want to know something about the "you and nothing but you," with its "thoughtless content," which "cannot exist a second time and so also cannot be *expressed*," but does presumably exist *once*. We can accept that this constantly evolving individuality cannot be expressed in its fullness, but we might still find some uses for a rough sketch or approximation, a snapshot of sorts of its interactions with the world.

We haven't really strayed that far from Proudhon in all this. He had already made his case against fixed ideas before *The Unique and Its Property* was published. Where Stirner was thinking about the inexpressible content of the unique, Proudhon was concerning himself with the approximate nature of representation in the face of a *progress* understood in terms of constant change. Proudhon provoked Stirner with his declaration that "property is theft," but the account that Stirner gave of property hardly seems incompatible with an analysis—if we are to concern ourselves with analysis, recognizing that it is not the same as *expression of the unique*—based in the theory of collective force. And I feel fairly confident that a more extended comparison would demonstrate that the ideas of both Stirner and Proudhon are largely assimilable to an anarchistic and at least minimally typifying account of individuality.

So our search for a theory of the anarchistic subject might begin with an elimination of the *absolute*, a paring away of governmentalist and quasi-governmentalist elements and lenses, before turning to a sort of mapping of the individual in terms of the extent of its reach and its (no doubt complex) internal dynamics. The insistence on laying bare the solitary individual—the *einzig* as "only one"—would, of course, seem unlikely to result in a diminishing of that unique, which, to borrow a couple of phrases from Whitman, almost certainly "contains multitudes" and is "not contain'd between its hat and boots." Sticking close to Stirner's analysis, for example, we'll have to account for the ways in which « our relations »—« our intercourse »—is not external to the solitary self. Even the "union of egoists" remains, in important ways, a part of the inexpressible content of the *einzig*.

That points us in a new direction, back away from the potential vanishing point of the solitary "only one," but hopefully down some path that does not simply lead back to archaic, governmentalist or sacred conceptions of the self. And, honestly, I'm still not quite sure where that road leads, either in terms of the new ways we might develop to speak about more fully anarchistic individuals and forms of association or in terms of the practices we might find ourselves elaborating in some new language. Being honest and a bit insistent about that is probably the best thing at this point, even if we have clues and glimpses of the language and practice to come.



I've said on various occasions recently—and will no doubt continue to insist—that I am neither an individualist nor an egoist, despite my rather obsessive engagement with the thought of figures like E. Armand. That doesn't mean that a certain, and rather extreme, conception of the individual—one that hovers at the edge of various abysses and might, in a pinch, answer to the name of "creative nothing"—is not absolutely central to a recurring moment my understanding

of anarchist theory. But, ultimately, my inspiration is more Whitman than Stirner—and there is another equally extreme moment in which the path from the individual through the various forms of its intercourse seems to lead to unity-collectivities on the largest of scales, without any very clear way to determine when or if we left a given individual behind.

The oscillation between those extreme moments, and through endless complexities at a full range of intermediate scales, squares with my understanding of ecological realities and echoes what seems to me most usefully provocative about analyses like Charles Fourier's treatment of the *passions*. (And my attachment to the *papillon* will perhaps not have gone unnoticed.) There seem to me to be purely practical reasons why an attempt to radically rethink our relationships to one another and to the world around us simply cannot afford to balk at confronting the extremes.

It's not like anarchists really shy away from extremity anyway. Instead, we seem most likely to have directions in which we will go to almost any length and others in which we'll balk at the first sign of an unwelcome notion ("individualism," "collectivism," etc.) It just isn't clear that the theories and theorists that we tend to attach ourselves to really back us up in our exclusive preferences.

Anyway, as I said at the outset, once this material started to fall into place, it was clear that there was more like a book than a blog's worth of exposition to tackle. We can only sketch an outline here. But I do want to return once more to the questions of anarchism as movement and tradition in this partially transformed context.

The thing that Proudhon's analysis confronts us with—something also perhaps implied by the suggestions about collective egoism in Walker's work—is the possibility that it is not just human individuals that we have to account for, even when we are focused fairly close to the individualist end of the spectrum. Once we strip away all of the false claims to authority and all the legal fictions, there are still arrangements of forces on a scale that we would recognize as social that seem to have and pursue interests of their own. And not all of them are likely to be phantasms given flesh, so to speak, by our acceptance of them. Some will almost certainly emerge from the combination of more or less self-interested actions on the part of human individuals—and some of those will have the often laudable effect of amplifying the reach of those individuals. Without confining human relations to some rather simple, narrow range, the emergence of unity-collectivities of a rather persistent character seems hard to avoid.

And one way of thinking about anarchism as such, rather than as the individual ideas of specific human beings or groups of human beings, is as one of these persistent presences, emerging and developing its vague and often changeable character as a result of a long and complicated history of more or less anarchistic thoughts and deeds. The relationship of individual anarchists to that kind of anarchism would necessarily be complicated, involving the transformation of individual acts by their connection to the emergent complex and transformations, probably much harder to achieve to any significant degree, of the complex by the more or less willing association of individuals with it.

A few weeks down the road, I'll be adding the notion of *encounter* to my list of concepts, drawing on an old claim of mine that within anarchy "every meaningfully social relation will have the form of an anarchic encounter between equally unique individuals—free absolutes—no matter what layers of convention we pile on it." This was my first serious attempt to posit a basic model for non-governmental social relations, drawing on a passage from Proudhon's *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, and I think that it still has a lot of power as a way to begin talking about how anarchists might interact among themselves, as well as how an anarchistic approach to the rest of the world might start to take shape. It is obviously much more difficult to

apply to these unity-collectivities of more-than-human scale, but perhaps the start to that comes from taking the possibility of these entities seriously, applying all the tools in our Stirnerian toolkit to determine if they are a figment to be dismissed or an institution that should be dismantled, and then, if we find we can't make one of those moves, perhaps the next step is to try to figure out how we can *deal with them* (in some one or more of the possible senses of that phrase.)