

cry power to the individual but in fact what they really mean is “power to the property-owners—and the State which protects them!” They seek to destroy all intermediate bodies—whether unions, local government, or whatever—by which individuals gain some means to counteract the power of property and the State. Ironically, their “anti-statism” actually boosts State power by systematically eliminating all social organisations which could limit its power. It leaves the individual alone against the might of the State machine—to which the owner appeals to help maintain their authority over those who use their property. This is why Kropotkin stresses in *The Modern State* and elsewhere that the State and capital are interwoven, with each supporting and aiding the other.

Being against certain (usually social) functions of the State is not “anti-State”—particularly when one is advocating State

the labor force that is constituted by guard labor.” So the more unequal the society, the more workers and resources are used to guard property and ensure obedience than actually produce goods. (Arjun Jayadev and Samuel Bowles, “Guard labor,” *Journal of Development Economics* 79 [2006]).

Introduction to “Modern Science and Anarchy”

Reality has a well-known libertarian bias

Anarcho

May 16, 2020

At least Spencer grasped to some degree the obvious contradictions in liberalism—unlike most classical liberals of the time and today’s propertarian sects. While, in the abstract, he saw beyond the limits of liberalism and implicitly acknowledged the validity of the socialist critique of landownership and wage-labour, this did not make his ideas anarchist. Particularly when combined with practical politics which sought to bolster both for the foreseeable future. So if Spencer expounded some ideas in common with anarchists, he was nevertheless no more an anarchist than Marx who, likewise, had some ideas in common with anarchists and envisioned, in the future, a State-less socialist society.

As Kropotkin noted, this position does not actually reduce State action in society. As inequalities grow, so does the need to defend the few—it matters little if the police officers are from a private company or are “public servants.”¹¹¹ The propertarians may

¹¹¹ Indeed, in a very unequal society, the people at the top have to spend a lot of time and resources keeping the lower classes obedient and productive. There is “a significant statistical association between income inequality and the fraction of

in their property. Faced with a choice between liberty and property in the here-and-now, he consistently favoured the latter (even when reminded of his initial, irrefutable, position).¹¹⁰ Yet to proclaim that *eventually*—once the masses have been educated—the evils of land ownership, wage-labour and the State will be ended but in the meantime we will defend them all (within their proper sphere) does not make you an anarchist. Quite the reverse—it is not even a “philosophical” anarchism for it defends both private and public *archy* and so amounts to nothing: someone who postulates sometime in the distant future the end of chattel slavery would never be labelled a “philosophical abolitionist” particularly if he defends slavery and supports pro-slavery groups during his lifetime.

¹¹⁰ For example, Spencer exchanged letters with Frederick Verinder, a leading advocate of land reform, on the subject of the former’s change of heart in *The Daily Chronicle* between August and October, 1894. This was later reprinted as a pamphlet: *Mr. Herbert Spencer and the Land Restoration League: Correspondence Between Mr. Spencer and the General Secretary of the League, Mostly Reprinted from the London Daily Chronicle, August, September, and October 1894* (London: English Land Restoration League, 1894).

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movement in its own right, with its own history and thinkers.

There are areas of overlap between anarchism and other political theories. The most obvious similarities are with other socialist theories like Marxism but there are some with liberalism.¹⁰⁹ Kropotkin explores this in his discussion of Herbert Spencer but it is clear that the assumptions of liberalism cannot lead to anarchist conclusions. That Spencer, at his best, could envision something beyond liberalism did not make him an anarchist even if he articulated, to some degree, libertarian ideals.

Spencer is far in advance of most propertarians who can neither envision anything other than wage-labour nor recognise the obvious unfreedom involved in it. Sadly, as Kropotkin notes, his practice was not in keeping with this analysis—he revised his early ideas to the right and happily supported various organisations seeking to secure the landlords

¹⁰⁹ Many Marxists, following Plechanoff, are keen to proclaim that anarchism has an essentially liberal core but this spurious assertion is based on nothing more than some superficial similarities between anarchist and liberal perspectives on (political) power.

makes over his faculties to a master [...] for so much money, and is for the time owned by him [...]. He is temporarily in the position of a slave, and his overlooker stands in the position of a slave-driver.[109]

Given these comments, it is understandable that Kropotkin suggested that Spencer's ideas *could* be developed towards anarchist conclusions. The arguments for land socialisation logically apply to private ownership of workplaces (even by cooperatives) to ensure equal access and equal rights for new members. Only socialisation of industry along with land can secure liberty for all. Yet if we do so then we have moved far beyond liberalism and into socialism.

As is clear from *Modern Science and Anarchy*, anarchism is far more than just opposition to the State—it is against all forms of hierarchical organisation whether political, social, economic or private. That is what makes anarchism a political theory and

“[T]he State, with its hierarchy of functionaries and the weight of its historical traditions, could only delay the dawning of a new society freed from monopolies and exploitation [...] what means can the State provide to abolish this monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? [...] [W]hat advantages could the State provide for abolishing these same privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in their unions, their federations, completely outside the State?”

— Peter Kropotkin¹

Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) should be well-known to most readers of this book. Born into a Russian royal family, he rejected his privileges to become an anarchist, a libertarian communist, struggling for the liberation of all from every shackle imposed upon the individual and society.²

¹ *La Science moderne et l'anarchie* (Paris: Stock, 1913), 91–2.

² Sadly, it is necessary to explain what we mean by “libertarian” as this term has been appropriated by the free-market capitalist right. Socialist use of libertarian dates from 1857 when it was first used as a synonym for anarchist by communist-anarchist Joseph Déjacque in an Open Letter to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and in the following year as the title for his paper *Le Libéraire, Journal du Mouvement Social*. This usage became more commonplace in the 1880s and 1895 saw leading anarchists Sébastien Faure and Louise Michel publish *Le Libéraire* in France. (Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* [London: Freedom Press, 1995], 75–76, 145, 162.) By the end of the 19th century libertarian was used as an alternative for anarchist internationally. The right-wing appropriation of the term dates from the 1950s and, in wider society, from the 1970s. Given that property is at its root and, significantly, property always trumps liberty in that ideology, anarchists suggest a far more accurate term would be “propertarian” (See my “160 Years of Libertarian,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*. 71 [Fall 2017]). We will use the term *libertarian* in its original, correct, meaning as an alternative for anti-State

Modern Science and Anarchy (*La Science Moderne et L'Anarchie*) was the last book by Kropotkin published during his lifetime. It marks the summation of forty years within the anarchist movement since he concluded that he was an anarchist after visiting Switzerland and joining the (First) International in 1872. Like his earliest books, such as *Words of a Rebel* and *The Conquest of Bread*, it is mostly made up of a series of articles originally published in anarchist newspapers (in this case, *Les Temps Nouveaux*). The exception is the first section, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, which was initially written as a pamphlet in Russian (in 1901) before being serialised and later expanded in *Les Temps Nouveaux* (in 1902–3 and 1911).³

As well as being an excellent summary of anarchist ideas and history and a useful restatement of the anarchist analysis of the State, this work also reminds us that Kropotkin's first love was science.⁴ He was a well-respected geographer who made significant contributions to the understanding of the geography of Asia. Indeed, as well as the justly famous—and much reprinted—entry on anarchism, he contributed many entries on geography to the celebrated eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.⁵ It also marks an intersection between his political activism and what he

socialist and *propertarian* for the right-wing liberals who have tried to steal the term from the left.

³ For details, see “*Modern Science and Anarchy*: A Publication History” below.

⁴ Kropotkin recounts his decision to forgo a career in geography in favour of life as a revolutionary in his autobiography (*Memoirs of Revolutionist* [Montreal/New York: Black Rose, 1989], 223–4).

⁵ An obituary expressed regret that Kropotkin's “absorption” in his political views “seriously diminished the services which otherwise he might have rendered to Geography.” He “was a keen observer, with a well-trained intellect, familiar with all the sciences bearing on his subject” and his “contributions to geographical science are of the highest value.” Kropotkin “had a singularly attractive personality, sympathetic nature, a warm but perhaps too tender heart, and a wide knowledge in literature, science, and art.” (*The Geographical Journal* 57: 4 [April, 1921]: 316–319).

Thus “to deprive others of their rights to the use of the earth, is to commit a crime inferior only in wickedness to the crime of taking away their lives or personal liberties” and so it “is immediately deducible from the law of equal freedom. We see that the maintenance of this right necessarily forbids private property in land.”¹⁰⁸

The similarities with Proudhon's earlier critique of property are clear. Proudhon also applied this to industry and argued for the abolition of wage-labour by association. Spencer eventually did acknowledge this:

A wage-earner, while he voluntarily agrees to give so many hours work for so much pay, does not, during performance of his work, act in a purely voluntary way: he is coerced by the consciousness that discharge will follow if he idles, and is sometimes more manifestly coerced by an overlooker. [...] For so many hours daily he

¹⁰⁸ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, 120–122, 125.

leave of others, cannot be equally free with those others.”¹⁰⁷

Spencer rejected the idea that the land should be redistributed more fairly because future generations would “constitute a class [...] as having no right to a resting-place on earth—as living by the sufferance of their fellow men—as being practically serfs. And the existence of such a class is wholly at variance with the law of equal freedom.” This produced a situation where “men born after a certain date are doomed to slavery.” The landlord has the right “to impose just what regulations he might choose on its inhabitants” because they “are the only legitimate rulers of a country—that the people at large remain in it only by the landowners’ permission, and ought consequently to submit to the landowners’ rule, and respect whatever institutions the landowners set up.” These conclusions can “only be repudiated by denying” that “the earth can become individual property.”

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: Or, The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the first of them developed* (London: John Chapman, 1851), 114–115.

did to earn a living—as he notes in the “Foreword” it reflects the research needed to produce the “Recent Science” column for leading British journal *The Nineteenth Century*.⁶

Modern Science and Anarchy is an ambitious work and covers a wide range of issues that are as relevant now as they were then—Where does anarchism come from? How will we create it? Can we use the State to introduce socialism? Does “human nature” make anarchism impossible? Will libertarian communism limit the free development of the individual? What is the relation of anarchism to other political theories such as liberalism?—and Kropotkin brings his usual clarity when answering these (and many other) questions.

It would be impossible to discuss all that Kropotkin addresses so here we sketch a few issues associated with his invocation of anarchism and science as well as correcting a few of the errors made in the work. We hope that these show how well the book has stood the test of time.⁷

Any book with a title which includes the words “Modern Science” is almost certainly going to be dated by the time it is published. This is the case with Kropotkin’s work for the science he discusses reflects his research for the “Recent Science” column of *The Nineteenth Century* and so the situation in the ten years leading up to 1901 when the bulk of Part I, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, was first published. This raises an issue with Kropotkin’s invoking of science to justify anarchism as his comrade and friend Errico Malatesta suggested:

⁶ Kropotkin considered this as a matter of principle: “A socialist must always rely upon his own work for his living.” (*Memoirs of Revolutionist*, 353–4).

⁷ This was not the first work in which Kropotkin links anarchism to science. In 1887, he wrote the article “The Scientific Basis of Anarchy” (*The Nineteenth Century*, February 1887). This was later revised and, along with its companion piece “The Coming Anarchy” (*The Nineteenth Century*, August 1887), published in 1891 as the pamphlet *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles*.

He affirmed himself in his conviction by maintaining that recent discoveries in all sciences, from astronomy to biology and sociology, concurred in demonstrating that Anarchy is the mode of organisation exacted by Nature's laws. One might have objected to him that, whatever conclusions might be drawn from contemporary science, it was certain that if new discoveries would destroy the present scientific belief, he, Kropotkin, would have remained an Anarchist in the teeth of logic.⁸

This is true, to an extent. Science, by its very nature, tends to upset conventional wisdom—including that of science itself. What was once a well-established position can be overturned by new evidence and a better theory. If you proclaim anarchy as a science because of research made up to a certain point then the danger is, as Malatesta suggests, new developments will make a mockery of your claims.

An obvious example of this—although one which is not entirely correct⁹—is provided by Marxism and its pretensions of being “scientific socialism” (a term first used, incidentally, by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the same work in which he proclaimed property is theft and himself an anarchist¹⁰). This claim is based primarily on the use of the then-latest word in economic analysis, namely the

⁸ Errico Malatesta, “Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms by one of his old friends,” *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, ed. Davide Turcato (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 517.

⁹ In this case “the science” actually reversed into a dead-end. Marginal utility theory replaced a dynamic theory of price formation rooted in production and time with a static one which ignored both. However, it did allow capitalism to be defended and so it flourished (with appropriate changes to ensure that key role—for example, the move from cardinal to ordinal utility when the former was used to defend redistribution of wealth via progressive taxation).

¹⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “What is Property?,” *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011), 133.

so enclosed, it follows that if the landowners have a valid right to its surface, all who are not landowners, have no right at all to its surface. Hence, such can exist on the earth by sufferance only. They are all trespassers. Save by the permission of the lords of the soil, they can have no room for the soles of their feet. Nay, should the others think fit to deny them a resting-place, these landless men might equitably be expelled from the earth altogether. If, then, the assumption that land can be held as property, involves that the whole globe may become the private domain of a part of its inhabitants; and if, by consequence, the rest of its inhabitants can then exercise their faculties—can then exist even—only by consent of the landowners; it is manifest, that an exclusive possession of the soil necessitates an infringement of the law of equal freedom. For, men who cannot “live and move and have their being” without the

the toil of propertyless men, compelled to sell their labour and themselves in order to maintain their children and household.”¹⁰⁵

In this he is typical of modern-day proprietarians yet he was in advance of these because, at least in theory, he recognised the non-libertarian aspects of capitalism. Yes, as Kropotkin suggests, he defended the property-owners, “although in another passage he himself very sagely speaks against the usurpation of land in England by its present owners”.¹⁰⁶ These comments explain, in part, why Kropotkin viewed Spencer sympathetically and are worth quoting:

Equity, therefore, does not permit property in land. For if one portion of the earth’s surface may justly become the possession of an individual, and may be held by him for his sole use and benefit, as a thing to which he has an exclusive right, then other portions of the earth’s surface may be so held; and eventually the whole of the earth’s surface may be so held; and our planet may thus lapse altogether into private hands. Observe now the dilemma to which this leads. Supposing the entire habitable globe to be

¹⁰⁵ Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 320, 318–319.

¹⁰⁶ Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 320

“Labour Theory of Value” advocated by David Ricardo and which can be traced back to Adam Smith. Yet in the two decades after Marx published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867, mainstream economics changed when what became known as neo-classical economics replaced this theory of value with one based on marginal utility.¹¹ Thus “the science” has moved on, making Marxist economics appear quaint and old-fashioned and so, for many, easy to dismiss. It matters little that neo-classical economics is deeply flawed and far from an actual science.¹²

The same applies to anarchism. To take an example closer to Kropotkin, namely the idea of “group selection” which was popular in biology for many decades after the Second World War and to which Kropotkin, falsely, was linked via *Mutual Aid*. For some, the tendency was to suggest that Kropotkin’s ideas were validated because “science” supported the notion that the unit of selection was the group. The rise of “gene-level” biology quickly undermined and replaced “group selection” theory and by the 1970s it had been placed, like so many other “truths” of science, in the history books (under “what were we thinking?”).¹³ If Kropotkin *had* advocated group selection, where would that have left his theories and his claims for the scientific validity of anarchy?

Luckily, such readings of Kropotkin were superficial—*Mutual Aid* does not suggest a “group selection” theory—but the danger remains. This can be seen from Kropotkin’s support for Lamarckian

¹¹ While various Marxists have suggested, but never proven, that neo-classical economics was a response to Marx’s book. This not only ignores the earlier socialists, like Proudhon, who utilised classical economics to attack capitalism, it also ignores the awkward fact that Léon Walras, one of the founders of that economic theology, wrote a book attacking Proudhon in 1860.

¹² See Steve Keen’s *Debunking Economics: the naked emperor dethroned* (London: Zed, 2011) for an excellent overview.

¹³ Saying that, “group selection” is undergoing a revival recently as, ironically, the gene-focused theories do not automatically exclude it. It should be noted that Darwin raised the possibility of group selection in his *The Descent of Man*.

“soft inheritance”—the idea that environmental factors promoted evolutionary change via a “use or lose” mechanism. He spent a considerable amount of time seeking to refute August Weismann’s theories and time has shown that he was wrong.¹⁴ Weismann is now recognised as one of the most important evolutionary theorists of all time and the idea of the Weismann barrier is central to the modern evolutionary synthesis. It does not matter that Kropotkin was summarising a common perspective in scientific circles of the time, the fact is that thanks to the discoveries associated with genetics in the 1930s we know that “soft inheritance” is incorrect.

If Kropotkin had based his ideas on mutual aid or anarchism on this “fact” of science, what would that mean for his politics? Kropotkin’s Lamarckian tendencies (like Darwin’s own¹⁵) are obviously dated in the light of modern genetics but they are not the basis for mutual aid. Indeed, if we can ignore the invocation of Lamarck we can easily see that Kropotkin’s real aim reflects the still on-going “nature/nurture” debate. In addition, Lamarckian theories do have a place in analysing the development of social institutions and culture. This is reflected in Kropotkin’s argument that while mutual aid represents an instinct, its expression varies considerably through human history. So while “soft inheritance” has been refuted, the discussion over nature and nurture remains.

Kropotkin was rightly worried that Weismann’s arguments about heritability meant that an organism is unaffected by its environment. Yet genetic heritability, whether it is high or low, implies nothing about modifiability. This is deeply impacted by environment and so nature and nurture interact. The classic

¹⁴ Kropotkin discusses Weismann in “The Inheritance of Acquired Characters: Theoretical Difficulties,” *The Nineteenth Century and After*, March 1912 (included in Peter Kropotkin, *Evolution and Environment* [New York: Black Rose, 1995]).

¹⁵ Kropotkin discusses Lamarckian tendencies of Darwin in his essay, “The Theory of Evolution and Mutual Aid,” *The Nineteenth Century and Later*, January 1910 (this is included in Peter Kropotkin, *Evolution and Environment*).

ity are compelled to enter into agreements of that description, force is, of course, necessary both to enforce the supposed agreements and to maintain such a state of things. Force—and a good deal of force—is necessary for preventing the labourers from taking possession of what they consider unjustly appropriated by the few; and force is necessary for always bringing new “uncivilised nations” under the same conditions. The Spencerian no-force party perfectly well understand that; and while they advocate no force for changing the existing conditions, they advocate still more force than is now used for maintaining them. As to anarchy, it is obviously as incompatible with plutocracy as with any other kind of *-cracy*.¹⁰⁴

Thus Spencer “completely forgets the inability of the great mass of men to procure the necessities of life—an inability developed in our societies through the usurpation of power and through class legislation” and so “passed over lightly the fundamental facts [of] modern civilized societies” that the few “reap the benefits of

¹⁰⁴ Kropotkin, “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism and Anarchist-Communism*, 52–53

work of the monopolists of money and necessities, deepening more and more the obscurity of a science naturally difficult and full of complications.”¹⁰³ This has not changed since Proudhon wrote these words.

In *Modern Science and Anarchy*, Kropotkin notes that the bourgeoisie fought its battles against the absolutist State and sought to increase freedom—in rhetoric, for all; in practice, for them. Thus the State may have been opposed when it interfered with the property, power and privilege of the few but it was called upon when those were challenged by the many:

When a workman sells his labour to an employer, and knows perfectly well that some value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer; when he sells it without even the slightest guarantee of being employed so much as six consecutive months—and he is compelled to do so because he and his family would otherwise starve next week—it is a sad mockery to call that a free contract. Modern economists may call it free, but the father of political economy—Adam Smith—was never guilty of such a misrepresentation. As long as three-quarters of human-

¹⁰³ Proudhon, *General Idea*, 225.

example is height which is strongly heritable (80 to 90 percent) but the average height can and does increase due to changes in diet. Similarly, intelligence (as measured by average IQ scores) is increasing across birth cohorts (for example, America saw an eighteen-point gain in average IQ from 1948 to 2002) and nurture plays its part (for example, adoption of a child from a poor family into a better-off one is associated with IQ gains of 12 to 18 points).

In short, a given genetic inheritance is not immune to decisive and permanent environmental impacts. Nurture—the environment—plays its role as Kropotkin stressed. If he had lived to see the genetics revolution of the 1930s we are sure that he would have admitted his errors (particularly in Lamarckian phraseology) and combated the naive assumption that heritable traits cannot be changed via environmental mechanisms. As Stephen Jay Gould suggested against those who argue that traits like aggression are genetic, “if some people are peaceful now, then aggression itself cannot be coded in our genes, only the potential for it. If innate only means possible, or even likely in certain environments, then everything we do is innate and the word has no meaning. Aggression is one expression of a generating rule that anticipates peacefulness in other common environments. The range of specific behaviours engendered by the rule is impressive and a fine testimony to flexibility as the hallmark of human behaviour.”¹⁶

There is an irony worth mentioning in Kropotkin’s heated critique of Weismann. While Kropotkin rightly rejects the simplistic Lamarckian position (as expressed by the notion that cutting off the tails of mice will result in a tailless mouse being born) the fact is that, given a Lamarckian “use or lose” mechanism, it would be possible—given sufficient repression, for example—to shatter the institutions and practices of mutual aid and so subsequent generations would grow up without this instinct. Mutual aid, then, is

¹⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (London: Penguin, 1997), 360.

actually strengthened by “hard” inheritance: with a genetic basis, mutual aid instincts can *never* be lost in the short term. This far better fits Kropotkin’s position on how mutual aid is the foundation upon which justice and morality is built.

Some confuse mutual aid with altruism. The biologist Steve Jones, for example, asserts that the “split between the anarchists and the capitalists reflected a fundamental clash of beliefs. Is humankind ruled by self-interest, or is altruism our true state? What is the lesson from [n]ature: mutual aid or inevitable strife?” For Jones, anarchists “see a benevolent message in the natural world,” but the grim reality is that symbiosis “marks each stage in evolution, but the notion of mutual aid, a joint effort to a common end, has been superseded by a sterner view: that such arrangements began with simple exploitation.” He does admit that many creatures “do appear to indulge in mutual aid” and that the “semblance of cooperation is all around.” However, this is just appearance, for this is, in fact, based “not on mutual aid but on greed and mutual exploitation.”¹⁷

The cultural presumptions and assumptions in suggesting that it is value-free science to describe animals and people working together in mutually beneficial ways as “mutual exploitation” while describing it as “mutual aid” is just non-scientific, emotional woolly-thinking should be all too obvious.¹⁸

Yet Kropotkin would hardly have disagreed. He was well aware that “strife” and “self-interest” in both the animal world and humanity existed—and that it drove mutual aid. “Life is struggle,” he argued, “and in that struggle the fittest survive.” He explicitly and

¹⁷ Steve Jones, *Coral: A Pessimist in Paradise* (London: Abacus, 2008), 116, 97, 98, 121.

¹⁸ That Jones clearly projects cultural biases onto nature can be seen when he states that economics “may help [us] to understand evolution” and the “laws of the market also help to explain systems in which proponents appear [...] to strive towards the same shared end.” Moreover, sometimes “the market returns to Nature for advice.” (*Coral*, 120, 98.)

The modern Individualism initiated by Herbert Spencer is, like the critical theory of Proudhon, a powerful indictment against the dangers and wrongs of government, but its practical solution of the social problem is miserable—so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of “No force” be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination.¹⁰¹

But, then, Plechanoff’s work is a smear aiming to stop the Marxist faithful being tempted to read anarchist works. Still, Proudhon in 1851 had already noted how liberals were sometimes confused with anarchists:

[T]he disciples of Malthus and Say, who oppose with all their might any intervention of the State in matters commercial or industrial, do not fail to avail themselves at times of this seemingly liberal attitude, and to show themselves more revolutionary than the revolution. More than one honest searcher has been deceived thereby: they have not seen that this inaction of Power in economic matters was the foundation of government. What need should we have of a political organisation, if power once permitted us to enjoy economic order?¹⁰²

In reality, they are “the chief focus of the counter-revolution” and “seemed to exist only to protect and applaud the execrable

¹⁰¹ Kropotkin, “Communist-Anarchism,” *Act for Yourself*, 98.

¹⁰² Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 225–226

power of the State over individuals, and bodies or classes of individuals, is requisite, but I have contended that it should be exercised much more effectually, and carried out much further, than at present.⁹⁹

And the function of the State? As Spencer put it in the early 1840s:

What, then, do they want a government for? Not to regulate commerce; not to educate the people; not to teach religion; not to administer charity; not to make roads and railways; but simply to defend the natural rights of man—to protect person and property—to prevent the aggressions of the powerful upon the weak—in a word, to administer justice. This is the natural, the original, office of a government. It was not intended to do less: it ought not to be allowed to do more.¹⁰⁰

Kropotkin exposed the fallacy of this claim: once the few have the bulk of the land and other means of production then any attempt to challenge or change this is classified as “aggressions” and the State acts to stop it. So reducing the State to just the defender of property and the power that goes with it is hardly anti-State and hardly anti-authoritarian:

⁹⁹ Herbert Spencer, “Specialised Administration,” *The Man Versus the State with Six Essays on Government, Society and Freedom* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), 455.

¹⁰⁰ Spencer, “The Proper Sphere of Government,” *The Man Versus The State*, 187

repeatedly noted that *Mutual Aid* presented a one-sided perspective, that it was “a book on the law of mutual aid, viewed as one of the chief factors of evolution” and “not on *all* factors of evolution and their respective values.” So sociability “is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle” and that, therefore, the question was who is the fittest, those who compete against each other or those who cooperate in the struggle against a harsh environment. He presented evidence that supported his view that “those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest” because “life in societies is the most powerful weapon in the struggle for life, taken in its widest sense.” Thus cooperation provides “more chances to survive” and animals and humans “find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense.”¹⁹

Kropotkin was well aware that the drive for cooperation rested on the “selfish” desire to survive. His argument was that mutual aid, rather than mutual struggle, between members of the same group or species was the best means of doing so. Indeed, he explicitly eschews the notion that “altruism” (in the common meaning of the word) is the basis of mutual aid: it is neither love nor sympathy as such that causes animals to assist one another, but rather a more hard-nosed recognition that it is in their own interests for survival to do so. And the evidence is that cooperation is extensive in nature—an awkward fact which seems to cause some naturalists no end of difficulty.

Then there is the central contradiction in Jones’ account. He claims that for scientists “neither symbiosis nor the struggle for existence has much message for human affairs” before concluding a few pages later that anarchism has been “sidelined by the iron rules of greed that rule the globe.”²⁰ This would be more convincing if he

¹⁹ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Freedom Press, 2009) 70, 26, 32, 33, 68, 33, 229

²⁰ Jones, *Coral*, 98, 122.

had not attacked political thinkers like Marx for drawing lessons for human society from nature. This is forgotten when he turns to Kropotkin. Then we have an assertion that the “iron rule of greed” is a universal law of nature. So, apparently, nature does have a “message for human affairs” after all and it just happens to coincide with the dominant economic system and the ideology of its ruling elite. Strange, though, that capitalism is such a recent development given its alleged genetic basis.²¹

Ironically, Jones suggests that “scientists have nothing to add to philosophy apart from facts,” yet his comments about Kropotkin’s life are consistently wrong. He talks of the fighting between the “adherents of Marx and Kropotkin” in the First International when, in reality, it was Bakunin who fought the former. We are informed that with “the apparent triumph of his ideas in the Bolshevik Revolution his Utopia was, it seemed, realised and the Prince returned to Moscow. Within two years he was disappointed, and within three dead.” Kropotkin returned to Russia *before* the October Revolution which suggests that Jones either is unaware Kropotkin died in 1921 or that both Russian Revolutions took place in 1917. The notion that Kropotkin would have expected his ideas to have been implemented by Marxists is simply staggering: the Bolsheviks simply confirmed over four decades of argument against *State* socialism. Jones even talks about how “the Slavic experiment in mutualism that followed the Russian Revolution failed,” so showing that it is not only Trotskyists who are ignorant of Lenin’s stated desire to create State capitalism in Russia and his systematic campaign

²¹ Space precludes a discussion on how “selfish” genes do not equate to selfish individuals. In the introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of the *Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) Richard Dawkins admits that he confused this in the first edition and indicates how “selfish” genes do not exclude the evolution of individuals who are cooperative and altruistic, quite the reverse. Kropotkin’s position has been confirmed by modern, gene-focused, evolutionary theory.

liberal Herbert Spencer. Now a more-or-less forgotten figure, Spencer was at the time a well-known writer on science—he, not Darwin, coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”—as well as on politics, being a vocal anti-socialist who opposed State intervention in society beyond that needed to defend property.⁹⁶ Given this, it comes as no surprise that Kropotkin spent far more time discussing his ideas than Tucker’s.⁹⁷

Spencer’s vocal opposition to State intervention led some to proclaim him an anarchist. As an example, in 1895 Russian Marxist Georgi Plechanoff—studiously ignoring the anarchist critique of the private property Spencer so loved as well as his support for a State—proclaimed Spencer as “nothing but a conservative Anarchist.”⁹⁸ Someone should have told Spencer for in 1884 he explicitly rejected the suggestion:

I entertain no such view as that of Proudhon—since I hold that within its proper limits governmental action is not simply legitimate but all-important. [...] Not only do I contend that the restraining

⁹⁶ See Stephen Jay Gould, “A Tale of Two Work Sites,” *The Richness of Life: The Essential Stephen Jay Gould* (London: Vintage Books, 2007). Unsurprisingly, Spencer is often claimed by proprietarians as being a precursor of their ideology.

⁹⁷ For a good overview, see Matthew Adam’s “Formulating an Anarchist Sociology: Peter Kropotkin’s Reading of Herbert Spencer,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 77:1 (2016). Kropotkin discusses Spencer in a chapter in *Modern Science and Anarchy*, in *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* (his first major work in English) as well as devoting a chapter to him in *Ethics* (chapter XII). He also wrote a lengthy obituary written at the time of his death (published in *Les Temps Nouveaux* as well as *Freedom* and included by Kropotkin as an appendix in this book) and a two part “Co-operation: A Reply to Herbert Spencer” for *Freedom* in 1896–1897 (included as “Supplementary Material” in this edition).

⁹⁸ Georgi Plechanoff, *Anarchism and Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 143.

tem the demand for labour would be so high that workers would demand and receive as wages the full product of their labour. Yet this is optimistic for the whole point of the labour contract is that the worker agrees to labour to his master's orders and the product of his toil is owned—like that labour—by the employer. This, as Proudhon argued, allowed the boss to exploit the worker—for it occurs *after* the contract has been signed. Why would an employer hire someone if he were not to make a profit from so doing?⁹⁴ Thus wage-labour not only violates Tucker's own principle of "occupancy and use" but also ensures his hope that labour would get its full product would remain just that, a hope.

Other individualist anarchists—such as William Greene—had a better appreciation of the need for association and are far closer to Proudhon.⁹⁵ Tucker in this has more in common with liberalism than anarchism and, indeed, individualist anarchism is the form of anarchism most influenced by—and closest to—liberalism. Yet his recognition that workers are exploited under capitalism plus his opposition to capitalist land ownership places him in the socialist camp, the camp he identified with.

As Kropotkin noted, the individualist anarchists of his time were influenced both by Proudhon and the radical

⁹⁴ Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988) provides a good overview of how the subordinate relationships generated by wage labour results in exploitation being possible. She also relates this to a wider critique of liberal ideology.

⁹⁵ See Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom: Origin of Liberal and Radical Thought in America* (Los Angeles: Rocker Publications Committee, 1949), 108–112.

against cooperation in the workplace in favour of one-man management.²²

Space precludes a detailed discussion of how mutual aid has become a staple of evolutionary theory.²³ As Stephen Jay Gould concluded "Kropotkin's basic argument is correct. Struggle does occur in many modes, and some lead to cooperation among members of a species as the best pathway to advantage for individuals." Yet while correctly noting that Kropotkin "did not deny the competitive form of struggle," Gould also suggested he "did commit a common conceptual error in failing to recognise that natural selection is an argument about advantages to individual organisms, however they may struggle" and "sometimes speaks of mutual aid as selected for the benefit of entire populations or species—a concept foreign to classic Darwinian logic (where organisms work, albeit unconsciously, for their own benefit in terms of genes passed to future generations)."²⁴

Yet Gould also admits that "Kropotkin also (and often) recognised that selection for mutual aid directly benefits each individual in its own struggle for personal success." This drains his (sympathetic) criticism of most of its force: for Kropotkin was well aware that the "result of struggle for existence may be cooperation rather than competition, but mutual aid must benefit individual organisms in Darwin's world of explanation" and so "did include the or-

²² Jones, *Coral*, 122, 96, 121. Maurice Brinton's "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control" is still the classic work on the Leninist imposition of state capitalism (Maurice Brinton, *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* [Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004], 293–378).

²³ For a detailed discussion of *Mutual Aid* and modern scientific theory as well as refutation of the many myths associated with it, see my *Mutual Aid: An Introduction and Evaluation* 2nd Edition, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010)

²⁴ Stephen Jay Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Further Reflections in Natural History* (London: Penguin, 1991), 335–338.

thodox solution as his primary justification for mutual aid.”²⁵ In Kropotkin’s words:

[W]e may safely say that mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that, as a factor of evolution, it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy.²⁶

For Kropotkin, cooperation was fundamentally of benefit to the individuals who practise it—not least because, as Darwin had already recognised, groups which “included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring.” Such practice “will have been increased through natural selection” for those who are constantly fighting and conspiring against each other will be at a disadvantage: “Selfish and contentious people will not cohere, and without coherence nothing can be effected.”²⁷

Kropotkin must be considered as the first post-Darwinian socialist. Yet as he explored in his posthumously published *Ethics* others had seen how humanity possessed a sense of fairness or justice, not least Proudhon.²⁸ So Marx’s smug comment that “M. Proudhon

²⁵ Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus*, 338

²⁶ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Montréal: Black Rose), 6.

²⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) Part I: 82, 162

²⁸ Kropotkin dedicates a chapter in *Ethics* to Proudhon’s ideas. This is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2014).

or the State militia, I pledge myself that, as an Anarchist and in consequence of my Anarchistic faith, I will be among the first to volunteer as a member of a force to repress these disturbers of order, and, if necessary, sweep them from the earth.”⁹³

Given this, it is easy to see how correct Kropotkin was about the rise of a regime—albeit allegedly privatised rather than public—in which the few govern, exploit and repress the many. This is a result of Tucker’s lack of consistency over wage-labour and his dream that a non-exploitative form of it could exist while the worker sold her labour rather than its product. Even if non-exploitative wage-labour were possible (a big assumption!) it would still be based on authoritarian social relationships and these would need the machinery of a State to enforce and protect them.

This flows, as Kropotkin suggested, from the individual ownership of land—but as applied to industry rather than agriculture. Yet even with regard to the latter, the individualist position has its issues for any application of machinery would be limited in an “occupancy and use” regime. So either there would be an agricultural sector with low levels of investment or one marked, as in industry, with masters and servants. Similarly, coal and other mines would be impossible to exploit by one person and their family. Either associations are created or the owner hires workers—and “occupancy and use” becomes a joke.

Worse, Tucker’s notion that wage-labour could be non-exploitative was wrong. He argued that under his sys-

⁹³ Tucker, “The Lesson of Homestead,” *Instead of a Book*, 455.

ative work? The latter appearing the only rational answer.⁹¹

Tucker sadly did not address this part of the letter. Yet he defined the State as having two elements, namely “aggression” and “the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it.” The “essence of government is control, or the attempt to control. He who attempts to control another is a governor, an aggressor, an invader” while “he who resists another’s attempt to control is not an aggressor, an invader, a governor, but simply a defender, a protector.”⁹² Yet the employer assumes sole authority within the workplace and all within it in order to control both their labour and its product.

In short, the capitalist workplace is a mini-State, yet Tucker refused to see this. While defending strikers within capitalism (due to the capitalist State’s interference in the economy in favour of capital), he was less sympathetic about labour protest in a future individualist society:

Let Carnegie, Dana & Co. first see to it that every law in violation of equal liberty is removed from the statute-books. If, after that, any labourers shall interfere with the rights of their employers, or shall use force upon inoffensive ‘scabs,’ or shall attack their employers’ watchmen, whether these be Pinkerton detectives, sheriff’s deputies,

⁹¹ Benjamin Tucker, “The Distribution of Rent,” *Instead of a Book, by a Man Too Busy to Write One* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969), 340.

⁹² Tucker, “The Relation of the State to the Individual,” *Instead of a Book*, 22–23.

does not know that all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature”²⁹ simply shows his pre-Darwinian perspective. We are evolved creatures with an evolved “nature”—luckily, it is a nature which has evolved within groups and so is inherently sociable.³⁰ Indeed, Proudhon’s position—that we have an innate sense of justice—has been confirmed by modern science (and this is an instinct we share with other social animals).³¹

So both the atrocious behaviour we deploy and the noble traits we praise are the product of evolution—as is the moral sentiment which allows us to judge whether specific actions are either. This does not mean that how this evolved nature expresses itself is fixed, far from it:

Men’s conceptions of morality are completely dependent upon the form that their social life assumed at a given time in a given locality. Whether it be based on the complete subjection to the central power—ecclesiastical or secular—on absolutism or on representative government, on centralisation or on the covenants of the free cities and village communes; whether economic life be based on the rule of capital or on the principle of the cooperative commonwealth—all this is reflected in the moral conceptions of men and in the moral teachings of the

²⁹ Karl Marx, “The Poverty of Philosophy,” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976) 6: 192.

³⁰ The work of Dutch primatologist Frans de Waal must be noted here: *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society* (2009); *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (2006); *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (1996)

³¹ Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006) has a useful discussion of “Does our moral sense have a Darwinian Origin?”

given epoch.[...]The ethics of every society reflects the established forms of its social life.”³²

This means that “*Mutual Aid-Justice-Morality* are thus the consecutive steps of an ascending series.” Morality “developed later than the others” and so was “an unstable feeling and the least imperative of the three.” Mutual aid simply ensured “the ground is prepared for the further and the more general development of more refined relations.”³³ Thus mutual aid was the basis of ethical behaviour (including altruism) but not identical to it, for it was—as Kropotkin repeatedly stressed—just one factor in evolution. In this he was reflecting a well-established position in mainstream Russian science of the time.³⁴

A close reading of Kropotkin’s work shows that he was well aware of the need for reciprocal (hence *mutual*) interactions between animals. This means stopping anti-social behaviour and so stopping the few exploiting the cooperative behaviour of the many.³⁵ This applied to those in human society seeking to exploit or oppress others. Freedom—as history shows—needs to be defended:

Provided that you yourself do not abdicate your freedom, provided that you yourself do not allow others to enslave you; and provided that to the violent and anti-social passions of this or that person you oppose your

³² Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development* (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 315–316

³³ Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 30–31.

³⁴ Daniel P. Todes, *Darwin without Malthus: the struggle for existence in Russian evolutionary thought* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Also see his “Darwin’s Malthusian Metaphor and Russian Evolutionary Thought, 1859–1917,” *Isis* 78: 294 (December 1987). As well as inspiring Gould to write “Kropotkin was no crackpot,” this essential article was reprinted under the title “The Scientific Background of Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid” in the anarchist journal *The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly* 24.

³⁵ Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 38, 41, 59, 68–69.

two.⁹⁰ Most obviously, Tucker rejected Proudhon’s position on socialisation of property and workers’ associations and instead postulated the possibility of a non-exploitative form of wage-labour, so suggesting that he completely failed to understand Proudhon’s theory of exploitation. Kropotkin, rightly, notes that Tucker’s ideas are a combination of Proudhon’s and Herbert Spencer’s and argues that because they were based on individual ownership of the land they would inevitably result in the State being rebuilt.

As an overview, this is correct—as can be seen by Tucker’s advocacy of private police, courts, prisons and so forth (although he did think these would become less needed as inequalities fell due to the end of non-labour incomes). However, Tucker’s position on land was rooted in “occupancy and use” and so rejected capitalist rights on landownership—there would be no landlords in individualist anarchism, just workers living on and working the land. The problem arises when industry is considered for, as noted, Tucker had no issue with (non-exploitative) wage-labour arguing that it is a form of voluntary exchange. Yet his support for wage labour produces a massive contradiction with his “occupancy and use” perspective on land use. One letter to *Liberty* (by “Egoist”) pointed this out:

[I]f production is carried on in groups, as it now is, who is the legal occupier of the land? The employer, the manager, or the ensemble of those engaged in the cooper-

⁹⁰ I sketch these in my introduction to *Property is Theft!*.

downplay the influence of mutualism within the First International⁸⁷ and on revolutionary anarchism (Bakunin considered his own ideas as “Proudhonism, greatly developed and taken to its ultimate conclusion”⁸⁸). Kropotkin’s only great error is in suggesting that Proudhon advocated labour-notes.

However, some individualist anarchists also advocated pricing goods by time and as individualist anarchism—as Kropotkin noted—was influenced by Proudhon, he may have considered this advocacy as simply repeating the Frenchman rather than, as was the case, the direct influence of Robert Owen and his utopian experiments in America. Thus individualist anarchist Josiah Warren may have rejected Owen’s communism after his experiences at New Harmony but he, like Stephen Pearl Andrews, advocated labour notes. Other individualist anarchists, like Tucker and Greene, did not.

This feeds into another issue with Kropotkin’s account, namely his discussion of individualist anarchism. While very much part of the dominant libertarian communist tendency in anarchism, it seems fair to conclude he was not as well read on individualist anarchism.⁸⁹

He takes Benjamin Tucker’s linking of his mutualist ideas to Proudhon’s mutualism at face value when, in fact, there are substantial differences between the

⁸⁷ For a discussion of Proudhon’s influence, see my review “Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 69 (Winter 2017).

⁸⁸ Michael Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,” *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1980), 263.

⁸⁹ See section G of *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 2 for a more detailed discussion of the individualist current.

equally vigorous social passions, you have nothing to fear from liberty.³⁶

Freedom does not mean the freedom to oppress, coerce and exploit others—and it says much about the nature of class society that many people think it does.

This short discussion of mutual aid should be sufficient to dispel a common fallacy about anarchism as expressed by Jonathan Wolff:

If we are all naturally good, why has such an oppressive and corrupting state come into existence? The most obvious answer is that a few greedy [...] individuals [...] have managed to seize power. But [...] if such people existed before the state came into being, as they must have done on this theory, it cannot be the case that we are all naturally good.³⁷

Yet anarchists have never suggested people are “naturally good” nor that the State is the only oppressive institution. Indeed, the subtitle of *Mutual Aid*—“A Factor of Evolution”—shows that if you cannot be bothered to read the book itself. Humans, like other animals, are both “naturally” cooperative and “naturally” competitive and which of these tendencies is expressed or is predominant depends on numerous factors and specific circumstances.³⁸ Strangely Wolff prefaces his ruminations on anarchism with a quotation from

³⁶ Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchist Morality,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (Mineola: Dover Press, 2002), 106. Also see, for example, Kropotkin, “The Permanence of society after the revolution,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 614.

³⁷ Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 33–34.

³⁸ One Marxist critic recognises this. Paul Blackledge contrasts Marx’s optimistic—but pre-Darwinian—perspective to anarchism’s pessimistic one concerning “human nature” (“Freedom and Democracy,” *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* [Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], Alex

Kropotkin—“No more laws! No more judges! Liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the only effectual barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instincts of certain amongst us”³⁹—which actually refutes Wolff’s own argument.⁴⁰

As in *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin in *Modern Science and Anarchy* presents an account of history marked by conflict between individuals and between classes which is much at odds with the standard view of anarchism. He was well aware that humans were capable of both coercion and cooperation, conflict and caring, solidarity and selfishness. He sought a system where the varied potentialities that humans were capable of expressing were skewed towards cooperation—which benefits all—rather than towards the conflict of class society—which benefits the few. So the notion that Kropotkin idealised humans or primitive man is simply an invention:

In the eighteenth century, under the influence of the first acquaintance with the savages of the Pacific Ocean, a tendency developed to idealise the savages, who lived “in a natural state,” perhaps to counter-balance the philosophy of Hobbes and his followers, who pictured primitive men as a crowd of wild beasts ready to devour one another. Both these conceptions, however, proved erroneous, as we now know from many conscientious observers. The primitive man is not at all a paragon of virtue, and not at all a tiger-like

Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta and Dave Berry [eds.]). However, the rest of his critique is deeply flawed and inaccurate as I discuss in “Libertarian Socialism: Beyond Anarchism and Marxism?,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 62 (Summer 2014)

³⁹ Peter Kropotkin, “Law and Authority,” *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 218.

⁴⁰ Also see Matthew S. Adams, “Uniformity is Death: Human Nature, Variety, and Conflict in Kropotkin’s Anarchism,” in *Governing Diversities: Democracy, Diversity and Human Nature*, ed. Joanne Paul et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2012), 150–168.

So while William Godwin, like many others before Proudhon, had drawn anarchistic conclusions he did not actually influence the anarchist movement. His thought, like that of Max Stirner, was discovered in the 1890s by a well-defined social movement which retrospectively proclaimed them “anarchist.” This explains Kropotkin’s lack of discussion of Godwin’s ideas beyond a short summary. He had no impact on the anarchist movement and its development—unlike the French Revolution, the labour movement, utopian socialism and, above all else, Proudhon who first raised the characteristic ideas of anarchism (anti-State, anti-property, federalism, workers’ self-management, communes, etc.) and which were taken up and expanded upon by Bakunin and then Kropotkin, amongst many others.

Overall, Kropotkin presents an accurate summation of Proudhon’s mutualism. He recognises that the French anarchist was a reformist and advocated workers’ associations to run socialised means of production.⁸⁵ What may be surprising for many revolutionary anarchists is how often Kropotkin references Proudhon in this book. He even goes so far as to quote his works, something he rarely if ever did with other influential anarchists (so in spite of the obvious influence and inspiration of Bakunin, Kropotkin never actually quotes his words). Elsewhere, he wrote that “the point of view of Proudhon” was “the only one which, in my opinion, was really scientific”⁸⁶ He does, however,

⁸⁵ This aspect of Proudhon’s ideas is often ignored or denied. See my introduction to *Property is Theft!* or my article “Proudhon, Property and Possession,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 66 (2016), 26–29.

⁸⁶ Peter Kropotkin, “Edward Bellamy,” *Freedom* (July 1898).

been around for thousands of years and it would be hard to believe that during that period those subject to both had not questioned them—and sought to change their fate.

Kropotkin indicates that this is the case. Libertarian movements and ideas did develop before the rise of modern anarchism. Most obviously, he pointed to the popular movements and organisations of the Great French Revolution. The mass community assemblies created by the revolution were “practising what was described later on as Direct Self-Government” and so “the principles of anarchism [...] already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretic speculations, but in the *deeds* of the Great French Revolution.” These bodies federated together to push the revolution forward and “[b]y acting in this way—and the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day—the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation.”⁸³

Yet it must not be forgotten that these thinkers and movements did not call themselves anarchist and played no role in the development of anarchism as a movement and theory.⁸⁴ As such, it would be anachronistic to label them as anarchist and far better to say they are anarchistic and part of a wider libertarian tradition which became fully conscious of itself (so to speak) in the nineteenth century with the rise of anarchism as an explicit theory and a movement.

⁸³ Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1989), 183, 184, 186.

⁸⁴ While Proudhon was the first person to embrace the term and apply it to their own ideas, it should be noted that the enemies of radical popular movements sometimes *did* label these “Anarchists.” Kropotkin discusses one example during the French Revolution (see chapter XLI of *The Great French Revolution*).

beast. But he always lived and still lives in societies, like thousands of other creatures. In those societies he has developed not only those social qualities that are inherent to all social animals, but, owing to the gift of speech and, consequently, to a more developed intelligence, he has still further developed his sociality, and with it he has evolved the rules of social life, which we call morality.⁴¹

If people are as bad as some philosophers like to proclaim, then it makes little sense to give such flawed creatures power over others. So if, as Wolff (wrongly) proclaims, anarchism is flawed because “to rely on the natural goodness of human beings to such an extent seems utopian in the extreme,”⁴² then how do the ruling few escape from their genetic burden? Or are these—as Kropotkin mocks—somehow better than all other humans:

[W]hen we hear men saying that the Anarchists imagine men much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition? The only difference between us and those who make the above objection is this: We do not, like them, exaggerate the inferior instincts of the masses, and do not complacently shut our eyes to the same bad instincts in the upper classes. We maintain that *both* rulers and ruled are spoiled by authority; *both* exploiters and exploited are spoiled by exploitation; while our opponents seem to

⁴¹ Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 76.

⁴² Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 34.

admit that there is a kind of salt of the earth—the rulers, the employers, the leaders—who, happily enough, prevent those bad men—the ruled, the exploited, the led—from becoming still worse than they are.

There is the difference, and a very important one. We admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. *They* make it, although sometimes unconsciously, and because we make no such exception, they say that we are dreamers, “unpractical men.”⁴³

Similarly, for those who proclaim that ethical behaviour is achieved against “human nature”—Kropotkin notes in *Modern Science and Anarchy* that this was Thomas Huxley’s position—then such a person “necessarily has to admit the existence of some other, extra-natural, or super-natural influence which inspires man with conceptions of ‘supreme good’” which “nullifies” any “attempt at explaining evolution by the action of natural forces only.”⁴⁴ Where we get the strength and ability to overcome our “nature” is never explained.

The obvious problem with basing your political ideas on empirical evidence is that it appears not to be able to take into account future developments or possibilities. This is not the case, as can be seen by Kropotkin continually stressing the *tendencies* within society which pointed beyond capitalism:

As to the method followed by the anarchist thinker, it entirely differs from that

⁴³ Kropotkin, “Are we good enough?,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 609.

⁴⁴ Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 13.

Association but his presentation may give the impression that anarchism as a political theory predates both this and Proudhon. A close reading shows that this is not the case. As he put it elsewhere:

In the international labour movement Bakunin became the soul of the left wing of the great Working Men’s Association, and he was the founder of modern Anarchism, or anti-State Socialism, of which he laid down the foundations upon his wide historical and philosophical knowledge.⁸¹

Ignoring the stressing of Bakunin’s role—he became influential within the International mostly because he championed ideas already developing within it from reformist mutualism—Kropotkin was right to argue that modern anarchism was born in the labour movement and was part of the wider socialist movement. But what of anarchy before anarchism?

If anarchism—as Kropotkin stresses in *Modern Science and Anarchy*—is a combination of a scientific analysis of society and popular social movements then it would be strange indeed if anarchistic ideas and groups had not appeared before Proudhon described himself as an anarchist in 1840.⁸² After all, class and hierarchy have

⁸¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Russian Literature: Ideals and Realities* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 299–300.

⁸² It should also go without saying that anarchism did not appear fully-formed in 1840 when Proudhon published *What is Property?* Proudhon developed his ideas throughout his lifetime, particularly during the 1848 Revolution when his theoretical conclusions on the State and so forth were confirmed by its fate. Similarly, some of his ideas—such as his sexism—were in obvious contradiction to his stated principles and other anarchists rejected them. In short, while he laid the foundations of anarchism he was not without error and subsequent anarchists built upon and extended his ideas.

... how social value continuously eliminates fictitious values, in other words, how industry brings about the socialisation of capital and property”. Products would be individually owned and sold, with competition driving price down to labour costs for it was “the most energetic instrument for the constitution of value” and ensured a “reduction of general costs” for an “exact knowledge of value” can be “discovered only by competition, not at all by communistic institutions or by popular decree.”⁷⁸

The idea of “labour notes” was inflicted upon Proudhon’s market socialism by Marx in his deeply dishonest and deliberately misleading *The Poverty of Philosophy*.⁷⁹ In Kropotkin’s defence, once the notion of “labour notes” has been suggested it *can* be read into Proudhon’s work—and many have done so. Nor should we discount the desire to show the unoriginality of Marxists from Marx onwards in advocating the notion.⁸⁰ That Kropotkin was repeating a commonplace myth about Proudhon is beside the point for it does not stop him being wrong.

Anarchism—as a theory and a movement—started with Proudhon. Indeed, it would not be called anarchism without Proudhon’s *What is Property?* and his influence on modern, revolutionary, anarchism is clear. Kropotkin correctly places the birth of revolutionary anarchism in the International Workers’

⁷⁸ *Système* II: 525, 65; *Système* I: 87–88, 235, 189

⁷⁹ See my “Proudhon’s Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes,” *Anarchist Studies* 25: 1 (Summer 2017).

⁸⁰ See Marx’s speculations on post-revolution economy in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1891).

followed by the utopists. The anarchist thinker does not resort to metaphysical conceptions (like ‘natural rights,’ the ‘duties of the State,’ and so on) to establish what are, in his opinion, the best conditions for realising the greatest happiness of humanity. He follows, on the contrary, the course traced by the modern philosophy of evolution. He studies human society as it is now and was in the past; and without either endowing humanity as a whole, or separate individuals, with superior qualities which they do not possess, he merely considers society as an aggregation of organisms trying to find out the best ways of combining the wants of the individual with those of cooperation for the welfare of the species. He studies society and tries to discover its *tendencies* past and present, its growing needs, intellectual and economic, and in his ideal he merely points out in which direction evolution goes. He distinguishes between the real wants and tendencies of human aggregations and the accidents (want of knowledge, migrations, wars, conquests) which have prevented these tendencies from being satisfied.⁴⁵

In this he followed Proudhon’s lead in *System of Economic Contradictions* in which the French anarchist argued that instead of contrasting visions of ideal communities to the grim reality of capitalism as did the

⁴⁵ Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” *Anarchism and Anarchist-Communism* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), 24.

utopian socialists (such as Fourier and Saint-Simon), we had to analyse the system and explore its contradictions in order to identify those elements which appear within it which express the future.

This means that there are tendencies within a system which are part-and-parcel of it, express its fundamental principles and reinforce it as well as those tendencies which, although within it, are in opposition to it, express new principles *and point beyond it*. Thus anarchy is consistent with developments within capitalism—such as trade unions, cooperatives, etc.—which express new forms of social life and association in opposition to the wider system. The task of anarchists is to encourage these tendencies until such a time as we are strong enough to finally smash the State and capitalism and replace them with a social organisation and system able to progress freely towards libertarian communism.

This is often forgotten when discussing anarchism. Stephen Pinker, for example, recounts how he was a teenage anarchist before “empirical” evidence showed him the error of his youthful ways:

When law enforcement vanishes, all manner of violence breaks out: looting, settling old scores, ethnic cleansing, and petty warfare among gangs, warlords and mafias. This was obvious in the remnants of Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and parts of Africa in the 1990s, but can also happen in countries with a long tradition of civility. As a young teenager in proudly peaceable Canada during the romantic 1960s, I was a true believer in Bakunin’s Anarchism. I

sumption, and consequently tends to establish itself in a fixed and positive manner.⁷⁵

Proudhon argued that “[p]roducts are bought only with products” and “[i]n economic science, we have said after Adam Smith, the point of view from which all values are compared is labour; as for the unit of measure, that adopted in France is the FRANC.” Rather than exchange notes which record hours worked, “the price stipulated and accepted for sold goods can become currency in the form of a bill of exchange.”⁷⁶

This flows from Adam Smith’s comment that the “produce of labour constitutes the natural recompense or wages of labour” and “labour be the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities,”⁷⁷ although Proudhon of course added that the “justice that Adam Smith would like to establish is impracticable in the regime of property.” In *Modern Science and Anarchy*, Kropotkin does show he is a more astute reader of Proudhon than many, by recognising mutualism advocated common ownership of the means of production and land. For Proudhon, “the possession of these various instruments of production is already a monopoly” and “inequalities [are] created by these monopolies” and only socialisation ensures that “the work incorporated by each producer in their product be the only thing which is paid for when they come to exchange”. Thus the “idea of socially constituted value, or proportionality products, serves to explain

⁷⁵ *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846) I: 87.

⁷⁶ *Système* I: 246, 67–68; *Système* II: 141.

⁷⁷ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* Volume I (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), 72, 35.

portant truth—empirical analysis is needed. He completely ignores the rise of neo-classical economics but this is understandable, for if classical economics tried to explain empirical reality, neo-classical economics simply sought to defend the capitalist status quo. Indeed, it can be considered as an intellectual construct designed to deny empirical reality in order to justify and rationalise its inequalities.⁷³

Related to the Labour Theory of Value is Kropotkin's critique of Proudhon in which he wrongly proclaims that the mutualist advocated labour-notes. In spite of stating that *System of Economic Contradictions* was a "work which, of course, lost none of its considerable merit on account of Marx's malignant pamphlet" *The Poverty of Philosophy*, he also states that Proudhon took up "Robert Owen's system of labour cheques representing hours of labour," thought the "values of all the commodities" should be "measured by the amount of labour necessary to produce them" and "all the exchanges between the producers could be carried on by means of a national bank, which would accept payment in labour cheques."⁷⁴ Yet it is from Marx's malignant pamphlet that this notion primarily derives, for Proudhon did not advocate pricing in labour-notes:

The idea of value socially constituted [...] serves to explain [...] how, by a series of oscillations between supply and demand, the value of every product constantly seeks a level with cost and with the needs of con-

⁷³ See section C of my *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 1 (Oakland: AK Press, 2008) for an introduction to this vast subject.

⁷⁴ Kropotkin, *Direct Action Against Capital*, 214, 183.

laughed off my parents' argument that if the government ever laid down its arms all hell would break loose. Our competing predictions were put to the test at 8:00 A.M. on October 17, 1969, when the Montreal police went on strike. By 11:20 A.M. the first bank was robbed. By noon most downtown stores had closed because of looting. Within a few more hours, taxi drivers burned down the garage of a limousine service that had competed with them for airport customers, a rooftop sniper killed a provincial police officer, rioters broke into several hotels and restaurants, and a doctor slew a burglar in his suburban home. By the end of the day, six banks had been robbed, a hundred shops had been looted, twelve fires had been set, forty carloads of storefront glass had been broken, and three million dollars in property damage had been inflicted, before city authorities had to call in the army and, of course, the Mounties to restore order. This decisive empirical test left my politics in tatters (and offered a foretaste of life as a scientist).⁴⁶

It is hard to know where to start with this nonsense. While Pinker may have been surprised, no anarchist would have been. After all, we have long argued that people are shaped—corrupted—by hierarchical social relationships and inequalities of wealth and

⁴⁶ Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (Putnam: Penguin, 2002), 331.

power.⁴⁷ Even if we assumed—which anarchists do not—that people are inherently “good” and that it is institutions which corrupt them, the people of Montreal were living in a capitalist and statist society and so corrupted by that system. This means that we would expect anti-social behaviours—produced in the main by an unjust system—to be expressed once the inadequate Statist means currently used to contain them is taken away. Similarly, it was a society marked by inequality and it is unsurprising that people took the opportunity to grab some of the wealth they had been excluded from. Indeed, a key postulate of anarchism is that social wealth needs to be expropriated during a social revolution—but for the benefit of all rather than transferring it from one individual to another as in looting.

More, the Hobbesian conclusions that Pinker draws from this “empirical test” are hardly consistent with the evidence as not everyone acted in anti-social ways. Why the few are deemed to express “human nature” while the many do not is rarely, if ever, explained. Similarly, these few—the likes of warlords and the mafia—are exercising coercion and seeking to impose their will on others. In other words, *they are acting as States*. These States-in-embryo have not been as successful in legitimising their rule as the current rulers have but this should not make us forget that it is in these kinds of acts—and the destruction of competitors—that the current State has its origins.

⁴⁷ “In a society based on exploitation and servitude,” Kropotkin stressed, “human nature itself is degraded” and “authority and servility walk ever hand in hand.” (“Anarchist Morality,” *Anarchism: A collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 104, 81)

exploits labour is the same—private property means that workers have to sell their labour and their liberty to a boss who then makes them create as many goods as he wishes and keeps the product of their toil. It is this relationship of domination and subordination which allows the possibility of exploitation to occur. As such, his comment that the “evils of the present day are not caused by the capitalist appropriating for himself” surplus value but rather because workers “have to sell their labour force and their intelligence at a price” that makes surplus value “possible,” is a distinction without a difference.⁷¹

Over one hundred years after Kropotkin published this book, the task of creating an explicitly anarchist economics is not much more far advanced.⁷² However, the same can be said of a genuinely scientific economics itself. Looking around at the various schools of economic analysis, we may suggest that Kropotkin would have been impressed by attempts of the Post Keynesian economists like Steve Keen to construct economics—in the sense of understanding capitalism—on a scientific basis and in the process show the weaknesses, limitations, and fallacies of neo-classical economics. He would also have been disappointed to see that they make little attempt to generalise from the facts of capitalism towards something other than a reformed capitalism.

So Kropotkin’s critique of classical economics and its labour theory of value is flawed but does contain an im-

⁷¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, 92.

⁷² A notable exception is the excellent *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House Publishing, 2014) by anthropologist David Graeber.

Kropotkin, it must be stressed, did not disagree that labour was exploited under capitalism and that workers did not receive the full-product of their labour. The empirical evidence is clear on this. The question is why this happens. Before Proudhon, most socialists had explained this by theories of “unequal exchange” between workers and capital. Proudhon placed exploitation within production and Marx extended this analysis. Every commodity has an exchange value and a use value. Workers sell their labour and they receive its exchange value—wages—and the boss receives its use value—its ability to produce more goods than paid in wages.⁶⁹

Kropotkin, however, had little time for seeking to explain exploitation using “the basic principles of bourgeois political economy to attack its own conclusions in favour of capitalism.”⁷⁰ Rather than producing (to use the sub-title of *Capital*) “a critique of political economy,” Kropotkin sought an analysis of the capitalist economy. In practice, his analysis of how capital ex-

⁶⁹ In other words, wages are not how much the workers produce but how much it costs to produce the workers. However, as Marx noted (echoing Smith and Ricardo), unlike other commodities, “the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element.” (*Capital* 1: 275) More, unlike other commodities, labour-power is embodied in people who can and do struggle and resist against how it is used, something Marx rarely acknowledged in his economic works (see Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988] 2: 202–3, 242–251—a point made many decades before by French anarchist and syndicalist Émile Pouget, in *Direct Action* [London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2003], 9–10). So, unlike coal or a machine, the worker can influence both her wages (exchange value) and productivity (use value)—in other words, labour-power is fundamentally a “fictitious commodity” (to use Karl Polanyi’s term) and can only be squeezed into the framework of classical economics by abstracting from (i.e., ignoring) the class struggle at the point of production.

⁷⁰ Kropotkin, “Western Europe,” *The Conquest of Bread*, 220.

Overall, the only surprising thing about this is not what happened but that Pinker thought it wise to expose his ignorance of both anarchism and the scientific method. For to be an “empirical test” the assumptions of anarchism need to be in place or approximated. In short, Pinker is like someone who believes they have refuted the law of gravity by proclaiming a feather and a brick do not fall at the same rate (and so ignoring the need for a vacuum to remove air resistance) or claims that evolution violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics (and so ignoring that the Earth is not a closed system and the role of the Sun in providing energy).⁴⁸

Anarchists have *never* argued that if you simply remove the State then everyone would be nice and good to each other. This is for two reasons. First, social problems are not simply caused by the State—the economic system produces its share as do the hierarchies of sexism, racism, homophobia, and so forth. Second, social hierarchies have existed for centuries and will take time to overcome—both at a social level and within each individual. This can only be achieved by a process of self-liberation through struggle which both transforms the individual and builds the framework of the new society. This cannot and will not be achieved overnight—and even in the best circumstances anarchists would still expect *some* anti-social acts (such as settling old scores) to occur.

George Barrett long ago exposed the fallacy at the heart of Pinker’s position in his excellent “Objections

⁴⁸ See my “The God Delusion & anarchism,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 52 (Summer 2009) for more discussion, including the views of Bakunin whose anarchism Pinker claimed to be “a true believer” of.

to Anarchism.” First appearing in *Freedom* around the same time as Kropotkin’s *The Modern State* serialisation, it is worth quoting in full:

Even if you could overthrow the Government tomorrow and establish Anarchism, the same system would soon grow up again.

This objection is quite true, except that we do not propose to overthrow the Government tomorrow. If I (or we as a group of anarchists) came to the conclusion that I was to be the liberator of humanity, and if by some means I could manage to blow up the King, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the police force, and, in a word, all persons and institutions which make up the Government—if I were successful in all this, and expected to see the people enjoying freedom ever afterwards as a result, then, no doubt, I should find myself greatly mistaken.

The chief results of my action would be to arouse an immense indignation on the part of the majority of the people, and a reorganisation by them of all the forces of government.

The reason why this method would fail is very easy to understand. It is because the strength of the Government rests not with itself, but with the people. A great tyrant may be a fool, and not a superman. His strength lies not in himself, but in the superstition of the people who think that it is right to obey him. So long as that superstition exists it is useless for some liberator to cut off the head of tyranny; the people will create another, for they have grown accustomed to rely on something outside themselves.

Value is not “an empirically verifiable process” because it is an abstraction based on real processes to explain them. Labour, products and prices exist. Exchange value is an abstraction used to build a model of price dynamics, capitalist development and to explain how labour is exploited within an apparently free economy.

This confusion can be seen from the so-called “transformation problem” first postulated in volume 3 of *Capital* when Marx tries to convert exchange values into prices.⁶⁶ In reality, this is a non-issue as it confuses a model used to simplify and so understand reality with reality itself. This is where Marx’s lack of scientific training really becomes a hindrance and undermines what is, in many ways, a valid and powerful analysis of capitalism—built, without acknowledgement, upon a very similar analysis made earlier by Proudhon (and, ironically, mocked by Marx twenty years before the first volume of *Capital* was published).⁶⁷

Undoubtedly, the quasi-scientific analysis of *Capital* explains the stagnation in Marxist economics which Luxemburg admitted: “The substance of that theory remains just where the two founders of scientific socialism left it.”⁶⁸ The situation has hardly changed for most Marxist economists seem to spend their time analysing *Capital* rather than capitalism.

⁶⁶ It also becomes clear when trying to determine the exchange value of labour and its relation to real wages and the standard of living. The former cannot be determined and, in theory, it can rise or fall as the latter falls or rises (or vice versa).

⁶⁷ See my “The Poverty of (Marx’s) Philosophy,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 70 (Summer 2017).

⁶⁸ Luxemburg, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 107.

formation.⁶⁴ In Marxist economics “value” exists and actual prices are governed by it. Paul Mattick indicates the confusion well:

For Marx—as for the classical economists and for everyone else—only prices exist. As regards exchange relations, value, whether considered as of an objective or a subjective order, is not an empirically observable but an *explanatory* category. As such it does not cease to be a real phenomenon, but manifests itself not in its own terms but in terms of prices, precisely because capitalist society rests upon value relations. [...] Price must deviate from value to allow for the existence and expansion of capital. However, “deviation of price from value” is a somewhat unfortunate expression, because, mixing explanatory and empirical terms, it appears to refer to an empirically verifiable process, while observable reality contains no values but only market prices. Nevertheless, there is no way of avoiding the value-price duality, if we wish to understand why prices are what they are and why they change.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ In his 1853 work *Philosophie du Progrès*, Proudhon usefully summarised the law of value and its relationship to actual economic transactions (*Oeuvres Complètes de P-J Proudhon* [Bruxelles: Lacroix, 1868] 20: 91–92). He never forgot that value is an abstraction and sought workers control over both their labour and its product rather than equate values, as so many—following Marx—wrongly assert.

⁶⁵ Paul Mattick, *Marxism: Last Refugee for the Bourgeoisie?* (Armonk/London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc./Merlin Press, 1983), 25.

Suppose, however, that the people develop, and become strong in their love of liberty, and self-reliant, then the foremost of its rebels will overthrow tyranny, and backed by the general sentiment of their age their action will never be undone. Tyranny will never be raised from the dead. A landmark in the progress of humanity will have been passed and put behind for ever.

So the Anarchist rebel when he strikes his blow at Governments understands that he is no liberator with a divine mission to free humanity, but he is a part of that humanity struggling onwards towards liberty.

If, then, by some external means an Anarchist Revolution could be, so to speak, supplied ready-made and thrust upon the people, it is true that they would reject it and rebuild the old society. If, on the other hand, the people develop their ideas of freedom, and then themselves get rid of the last stronghold of tyranny—the Government—then indeed the Revolution will be permanently accomplished.⁴⁹

Or as Kropotkin succinctly put it: “A structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosives.”⁵⁰ As he elaborated elsewhere:

[I]t was necessary to break up the old organisation, *shatter the State* and rebuild a new organisation from the very foundations of society—the liberated village commune, federalism, groupings from

⁴⁹ George Barrett, “Objections to Anarchism,” *The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly* vol. 12 (1990), 355.

⁵⁰ Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 174.

simple to complex, the free workers union. [...] To give full scope to socialism entails rebuilding from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper. [...] it is a question of completely reshaping all relationships, from those which exist today between every individual and his churchwarden or his station-master to those which exist between trades, hamlets, cities and regions. In ever street, in every hamlet, in every group of men gathered around a factory or along a section of the railway line, the creative, constructive and organisational spirit must be awakened in order to rebuild life—in the factory, in the village, in the store, in production and in distribution of supplies. All relations between individuals and great centres of population have to be made all over again”⁵¹

If Kropotkin thought that it was “ridiculous” for “this immense task, requiring the free expression of popular genius, to be carried out within the framework of the State and the pyramidal organisation which is the essence of the State” by voting for socialist politicians, we can only imagine what he would have said if someone had suggested a mere police strike was sufficient to produce an anarchist society!⁵² For if all it needed was that, it makes you wonder why anarchists—from

⁵¹ Kropotkin, “The State: Its Historic Role,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 257–258

⁵² Kropotkin, “The State: Its Historic Role,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 258

no one had been aware that there was any gap in the teaching.”⁶³

So, in effect, volume 1 of *Capital* was the “first approximation” Kropotkin discusses in his “Foreword” while volume 3 is the next, more accurate, approximation. Sadly, Kropotkin’s opposition to Marxism—while understandable given its negative impact on the labour movement—got in the way of a more sympathetic discussion.

The labour theory of value basically argues that the costs of production regulate a commodity’s market price, that cost is the point around which prices fluctuate. It does not deny or ignore “supply and demand,” but rather contends that before commodities can be sold they must be produced and this, the cost of production, regulates the market price which, over time, would approximate the price of production due to competition.

In and of itself, this is hardly a false model—although the notion that this price is proportional to the labour-time expended in producing a commodity is. The problem with Marx is, as Kropotkin suggests, his lack of scientific training. While trying to produce a “scientific socialism” (as shown by his use of actual empirical evidence at various points in volume 1 of *Capital*), he fails to clearly state his assumptions and confuses his abstraction (“value”) with reality and seeks to equate all the value produced (in his model) with all the prices produced (in reality). A genuinely scientific account of value would recognise that exchange value is an abstraction that seeks to explain the dynamics of price

⁶³ Luxemburg, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 108.

scientifically but has to be taken on faith” and “its indulgence in scientific jargon.”⁶¹

This meant that when volume 3 was posthumously published by Engels and reduced the level of abstraction by discussing “prices of production” within a market process involving industries with varying amounts of capital, many bourgeois critics of Marx argued that there was a contradiction between the first and third volume. As can be seen by his discussion, while Kropotkin had definitely read the first volume of *Capital*, he seems unaware of the contents of volumes 2 and 3. Yet he was hardly alone, as leading Marxist Rosa Luxemburg admitted in 1903: “for socialists in general, the third volume of *Capital* remains an unread book.”⁶² Most Marxists, like Kropotkin, had accepted volume 1 as the full analysis:

The third volume of *Capital*, with its solution of the problem of the rate of profit (the basic problem of Marxist economics), did not appear till 1894. But in Germany, as in all other lands, agitation had been carried on with the aid of the unfinished material contained in the first volume; the Marxist doctrine had been popularized and had found acceptance upon the basis of this first volume alone; the success of the incomplete Marxist theory had been phenomenal; and

⁶¹ Peter Kropotkin, “Western Europe,” *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 220.

⁶² Rosa Luxemburg, “Stagnation and Progress of Marxism,” *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 109.

Bakunin onwards—had spent so much time seeking to make propaganda, organise workers, unions, strikes, cooperatives and so on.

In short, this “decisive empirical test” hardly contradicted anarchist politics for it did not pit what the theory actually argues against the facts, but rather a teenager’s impressionistic notions of that theory. It is not “life as a scientist” to refute strawman arguments.

As Kropotkin makes clear in *Modern Science and Anarchy*, humanity has evolved institutions to manage interpersonal and social conflict throughout its history. Rather than see these institutions as being created by a select few (who somehow manage to rise above humanity’s brutish nature), Kropotkin rightly argues they are the product of the many who seek a peaceful life and so organise to achieve it. This means creating various customs and organisations to stop and resolve the anti-social actions which are the first expressions of the few monopolising power and wealth. However, “instead of demanding that those social customs should be maintained through the authority of a few,” anarchism “demands it from the continued action of all.”⁵³

That is why we see “mutual protection” and “defence of the territory” listed by Kropotkin as two of the purposes the federated groups of an anarchist society are created for—alongside production, consumption, education, etc.⁵⁴ A police strike, by definition, would not

⁵³ Kropotkin, “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” *Anarchism: A collection of Revolutionary Writings*, 137.

⁵⁴ Kropotkin, “Anarchism,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 163. Also see “The Permanence of Society after the Revolution” in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*.

allow enough time for such self-organisation to even start—particularly if we ignore, as Pinker does, the lack of preparatory social struggle needed to make anarchy viable. Our teenage Bakuninist would have been better proclaiming his ignorance of anarchist politics than their failure.⁵⁵

If we apply the scientific method to Kropotkin's ideas (namely, gathering evidence on what he actually argued and basing conclusions on that evidence rather than assumptions about what he wrote), we quickly discover that most writers who dismiss them are by no means scientific. They simply destroy an invention of their own making.

While Kropotkin may have erred by proclaiming anarchy to be a branch of science, he was right to stress the importance of using the scientific method in both critiquing modern class society as well as building evidence for a better one. By so doing, we can expose the false assumptions inflicted upon anarchism by its critics, explain why they are wrong and how they do not accurately reflect the position that they are claiming to refute.

What we have said of anarchism also applies to the numerous attempts to invoke “science” to defend various

tal and Peter Kropotkin, *Act for Yourself!: Articles from Freedom 1886–1907* (London: Freedom Press, 1988).

⁵⁵ Regardless of Lenin's claims in *The State and Revolution*, Kropotkin—like all revolutionary anarchists—recognised the necessity of defending a revolution by means of federations of workers' militias. This should not—as Lenin thought—be confused with a “new” State, for the State, as Kropotkin stresses in *Modern Science and Anarchy*, is a very specific kind of social organisation marked by centralisation and hierarchy (for further discussion, see section H.2.1 of *An Anarchist FAQ* [Oakland, AK Press, 2012] volume 2).

that it worked indirectly and so prices did not equate to labour values. Marx spent a significant part of volume 3 of *Capital* on this aspect of his model of capitalism but in volume 1 he mentioned it, in passing, in a footnote:

[T]he formation of capital must be possible even though the price and the value of a commodity be the same, for it cannot be explained by referring to any divergence between price and value. If prices actually differ from values, we must reduce the former to the latter. [...] How can we account for the origin of capital on the assumption that prices are regulated by the average price, i.e., ultimately by the value of commodities? I say “ultimately” because average prices do not directly coincide with the values of commodities as Adam Smith, Ricardo, and others believe.⁶⁰

Volume 1 of *Capital* ignores the differences in capital between companies and assumes, at this level of abstraction, that prices are proportional to labour-values. Marx does this to show how labour can be exploited according to the postulates of classical economics itself. Sadly, not being a trained scientist he did not explicitly and clearly set out the simplifying assumptions in volume 1 (namely, equal capital investment and no market processes) which he used to do this. As such, Kropotkin was justified in noting its “unscientific character,” how the theory of value “is not demonstrated

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 1: 269

much to be desired: the test used was not measuring discriminative ability but rather preference, not all berries are red when ripe nor were berries the sole food gathered and pink being considered a girl's colour is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon—a century before this study proclaimed preference for pink as being genetic in nature, it was considered as a boy's colour in the Western World.

Still, for some it is nice to think that people have roles and social positions determined “by nature.”

One of the worst examples of this “just-so” story telling pretending to be “science” is seen in modern—neo-classical—economics. Yet the discussion of economics in *Modern Science and Anarchy* concentrates on classical economics and fails to discuss the neo-classical economics which steadily replaced it from the 1870s onwards. Perhaps this is understandable as neo-classical economics was even further from a science than its predecessor was.

Kropotkin's argument is that economics is not a science as can be seen when economists forget that their economic “laws” are premised on a given socio-economic situation. This means that rather than being universal “laws” they are describing what happens under capitalism. This is at best—at worse they are describing the conclusions of their models without the benefit of empirical evidence.

Kropotkin spends some time on the “labour theory of value” of classical economics but, sadly, this is incomplete, probably because it is primarily an attempt to discredit Marxism. While Ricardo thought that labour-value worked directly under capitalism, Marx argued

aspects of the status quo—whether racism, sexism, economic inequalities, hierarchy, etc. We must not forget that every ruling class throughout history has required a justifying discourse or narrative. This has involved gods (or a god) to secure the right of rulers or make property (and its inequalities) sacred. For the past few centuries science—or the misuse of science—has also played this role as seen by the numerous “scientific” theories in support of inequality that regularly spring up (often thanks to well-funded think-tanks).

So Stephen Jay Gould was right to “criticise the myth that science is itself an objective enterprise, done properly only when scientists can shuck the constraints of their culture and view the world as it really is. [...] Scientists needn't become explicit apologists for their class or culture in order to reflect these pervasive aspects of life.” Recognising this obvious fact suggests that science “must be understood as a social phenomenon, a gutsy, human enterprise, not the work of robots programmed to collect pure information” and so science, “since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity.” Even facts are “not pure and unsullied bits of information” as “culture also influences what we see and how we see it. Theories, moreover, are not inexorable inductions from facts. The most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is also strongly cultural.”

[Science] cannot escape its curious dialectic. Embedded in surrounding culture, it can, nonetheless, be a powerful agent for questioning and even overturning assumptions that nurture it. [...] Scientists can struggle to identify the cultural assumptions of their trade

and to ask how answers might be formulated under different assertions. Scientists can propose creative theories that force startled colleagues to confront unquestioned procedures.⁵⁶

The same can be said of any branch of knowledge:

To make good use of an economic theory, we must first sort out the relations of the propagandist and the scientific elements in it, then by checking with experience, see how far the scientific element appears convincing, and finally recombine it with our own political views. The purpose of studying economics is not to acquire a set of ready-made answers to economic questions, but to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists.⁵⁷

Kropotkin's work must be seen in this light, as an attempt to refute, with hard evidence, the cultural assumptions at the heart of the science—particularly the Darwinism—of his day. As he put it:

Besides, when some naturalists, doing honour to their bourgeois education, and pretending to be followers of the scientific method of Darwin, told us: "Crush whoever is weaker than yourself: such is the law of Nature!" it was easy for us to prove, first, that this was *not* Darwin's conclusion, and, using the same scientific method, to show that these scientists were

⁵⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 53–55.

⁵⁷ Joan Robinson, *Contributions to Modern Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 75.

on the wrong path: that such a law does not exist, that Nature teaches us a very different lesson, and that their conclusions were in nowise scientific.⁵⁸

As Kropotkin was aware, a lot of nonsense can be hidden by invoking pseudo-scientific jargon and masses of "analysed" data. Debunking this kind of work can be time consuming and even if successful may be limited in impact compared to the original claims. However, it needs to be done and that is where science and a good scientific education play their role.

Indeed, much of what passes as "science" amounts to little more than "just-so" stories in which middle-class individuals of Western capitalist societies are projected back to the dawn of recorded history, with varying degrees of plausibility. Whether it is "just-so" stories on the development of the State or private property, or to justify sexism or some other deplorable modern trait, this seems to be stock-in-trade for much of the scientific community.

The worst offenders are the so-called evolutionary psychologists who seek an evolutionary (i.e., genetic) basis for all human activities. That this is usually nonsense can be seen from the brave scientists who proclaimed to have proven that "girls prefer pink" on a genetic level because it would have aided our female hominin ancestors gathering berries.⁵⁹ Widely and uncritically reported by the media, the paper left

⁵⁸ Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, (London: Freedom Press, 1912), 40.

⁵⁹ Anya C. Hurlbert and Yazhu Ling, "Biological components of sex differences in color preference," *Current Biology* vol. 17 (21 August 2007), 16.

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Anti-Copyright



Anarcho

Introduction to “Modern Science and Anarchy”

Reality has a well-known libertarian bias

May 16, 2020

Retrieved on 24th April 2021 from anarchism.pageabode.com
This is my introduction to *Modern Science and Anarchy* by Peter Kropotkin (AK Press, 2018). This was the last book published by Kropotkin during his lifetime (*La Science Moderne et L'Anarchie*, 1913) and he explores themes he had been raising since his first joined the anarchist movement in the 1870s. It shows that he did not become a reformist, as some claim, but remained a revolutionary anarchist communist to his death. The book is available, so please consider buying it for AK Press.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

power as a defender of private property (and so private power). Being anti-State is necessary but not sufficient to be an anarchist due to the authoritarian relationships and organisations that property spawns. It is to Spencer's credit that he saw these relationships but it is to his enduring discredit that he acted in contradiction to these insights. This partly explains why he was quickly forgotten after his death as liberals increasingly saw this contradiction and sought State aid to mitigate the worst aspects of capitalism, defend society from the negative impact of free markets, and combat the inherent instability of the capitalist economy.¹¹² In addition to this, the capitalist class has always strengthened the State to bolster its position as it is the *bourgeois* State after all—something, as Kropotkin stresses in *The Modern State*, socialists and radicals singularly failed to recognise. These two movements—social reform and bolstering private power—

¹¹² See Karl Polanyi's 1944 work, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), for a good discussion of this process.

sealed Spencer's fate far more than any internal ideological contradictions.

Kropotkin stresses that capital and State mutually support one another, and are interwoven. This can be seen from neo-liberalism. First imposed on the Chilean people by the dictatorship of General Pinochet, the elections of Thatcher and Reagan ensured that the 1980s saw a move away from the social-democratic consensus which had dominated the Western World since the end of World War Two.

Yet, as with Spencer, neo-liberalism has a reputation as being or seeking a capitalism based on a reduction in the role of the State. It is true that this ideology—inspired by the so-called “science” of neo-classical economics—has definitely rolled back aspects of State intervention, but this has been selective. As Tucker noted about Herbert Spencer:

It seems as if he had forgotten the teachings of his earlier writings, and had become a champion

of the capitalistic class. It will be noticed that in these later articles, amid his multitudinous illustrations (of which he is as prodigal as ever) of the evils of legislation, he in every instance cites some law passed, ostensibly at least, to protect labour, alleviate suffering, or promote the people's welfare. He demonstrates beyond dispute the lamentable failure in this direction. But never once does he call attention to the far more deadly and deep-seated evils growing out of the innumerable laws creating privilege and sustaining monopoly. You must not protect the weak against the strong, he seems to say, but freely supply all the weapons needed by the strong to oppress the weak.¹¹³

The same can be said of neo-liberalism. While the rhetoric

¹¹³ Tucker, "The Sin of Herbert Spencer," *Instead of A Book*, 370.

was for “free markets,” the reality was the same as Kropotkin sketched over 100 years ago—particularly as regards organised labour. While “red-tape” was cut for capital, the rules, regulations and laws imposed on trade unions increased—encouraged by the ideological defenders of capitalism armed with their flawed analysis of the system, the mainstream economists. Indeed, the anti-union laws of the British Tories since 1979 restricting what workers can do and making it harder to strike and show solidarity echo Kropotkin’s analysis in *Modern Science and Anarchy*. Needless to say, if you regulate strikes, if you regulate unions, you regulate the labour market—and as Adam Smith recognised: “Whenever the law has attempted to regulate the wages of workmen, it has always been rather to lower them than to raise them.”¹¹⁴

That this is the case can be seen from the explosion of inequality since the imposition of neo-liberalism in the 1980s. Unions were weakened by means of State action (in line with neo-classical

¹¹⁴ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 146.

End Notes

[109] Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology* (D. Appleton and Company: New York, 1897) III: 572–573.

economics) and the link which had existed between wages and productivity broke (not in line with neo-classical economics). While productivity continued to grow, real wages stagnated (easy debt and partners entering the workforce allowed some improvement in family living standards). The gains of productivity flooded upwards as workers kept a smaller part of the wealth they produced in their own hands.

Thus, using British data, in 1950 the richest 1% of earners was rewarded with 12% of all income. By 1960 this had fallen to 9%; by 1970, 7%; and by 1980, 6% (and only 4% after taxes). By 1983 the income share of the best-off percentile was back up to 7%; by 1992 it was 10%; by 1997, 12%; by 2001, 13%; by 2005, 16%. In 1976, workers' share of the gross domestic product in the form of wages and salaries stood at 65.1%. By the end of 2016 that share was 49.5%. It is worse than that as this share includes exploding top management pay which has gone from around 10 times the average in the 1970s to 129 times in 2017: by mid-day on 4th of January

in 2017, the average boss of a FTSE 100 company had earned as much as the average worker did in the whole year. For those who proclaim that this explosion in pay reflected improved company performance, study after study showed little or no such link. Meanwhile, at the bottom low paid jobs have grown relatively and absolutely as the floor that strong unions provided for *all* workers was undermined.

This shows why Kropotkin was right to argue that unions are the “outcome” of the “popular resistance to the growing power of the few—the capitalists in this case.”¹¹⁵

All this is sometimes described as “market failure,” but that is wrong—it is precisely how capitalist markets *are meant to work*. Yet for neo-classical economics the only “failure” is that of our rationality in questioning this outcome. This is a product of our evolved sense of fairness and hence the pressing need for appropriate belief systems (such as provided by neo-classical

¹¹⁵ Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, 47.

common—particularly amongst non-British people (and, to be fair, amongst many English people as well).

We have followed Kropotkin’s capitalisation—hence “Anarchy” rather than “anarchy,” “State” rather than “state” and so forth. We have done so to remain true to the original text and Kropotkin’s intentions.

Finally, Kropotkin’s language is dated and often reflects the prejudices of his time. So while committed to sexual equality, he uses the term “Man” to refer to humanity as a whole. Similarly, he uncritically uses terms like “savage” and “barbarian,” reflecting the standard terminology of the time to classify human societies. However, he was well aware that the so-called “civilised” nations have usually been far more “savage” and “barbaric”, both internally and externally, than those societies they have arrogantly labelled so.¹⁵⁹ So while his language and terminology has dated, his evidence, arguments and conclusions have not.

Acknowledgements

As usual, I must thank the support and help of my long-suffering partner. Without her and her love, this work and my life would be much impoverished.

I must thank my comrade and friend Jim Tyson for providing me with the relevant copies of both *Comradeship* and *Labour Co-Partnership* and to the colleagues of Senate House Library for aiding him in that quest.

Finally, thanks to David Berry and Matthew Adams for their comments and suggestions on my introduction.

¹⁵⁹ As Kropotkin noted in *Mutual Aid*, a so-called “savage” would have been shocked by how the rich treated the poor—assuming that they survived the often genocidal imperialism inflicted on them by the “civilized”: “I remember how vainly I tried to make some of my Tungus friends understand our civilization of individualism: they could not, and they resorted to the most fantastical suggestions.” (*Mutual Aid*, 100)

3. The intentional communities advocated by the utopian socialists like Owen and Fourier and created by small groups of their followers or, less often, by small groups of anarchists or other socialists;¹⁵⁶
4. A territorial organisation created in the process of a popular revolution (for example, the Paris Commune of the Great French Revolution or of 1871)
5. The basic (territorial) organisational unit of an anarchist society.

We have translated the term “commune” in line with these uses, retaining “commune” for the first, fourth and fifth usages (i.e., the commune of the Middle Ages, the revolutionary grouping and the future communes of an anarchist society¹⁵⁷) while using “municipality” for the administrative body of the Modern State and “community” for intentional groups. The latter, we must note, also reflects Proudhon’s critique of the Utopian Socialists whose various schemes he labelled “Community” (*La Communauté*).¹⁵⁸

This work is in British English. Similarly, we must also note that Kropotkin often uses the term “England” and “English” to refer to “Britain” and “British”. In this, he was reflecting current usage of the time but it is fair to note that this confusion is sadly still

¹⁵⁶ Or, more recently, the “communes” attempted in the 1960s and 1970s by people “dropping out” of mainstream society.

¹⁵⁷ It *should* go without saying that the future anarchist commune is not a return to the Middle Ages however some Marxists—and some other commentators—have tried to link the two and assert Kropotkin (and anarchists in general) wished to return to an idealised vision of the Medieval Commune. Obviously, anarchist communes relate to the organisations created in revolution and was used precisely under the impact of the Paris Commune of 1871. For a discussion, see Kropotkin’s essay “The Commune” in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 593–600.

¹⁵⁸ Kropotkin, likewise, was critical of such intentional communities. For a good summary, see Matthew Adams, “Rejecting the American Model: Peter Kropotkin’s Radical Communalism,” *History of Political Thought* 35:1 (2014).

economics) to allow us to ignore it.

Interestingly, his call in *The Modern State* for economists to work out how much labour the State gets from its subjects has to some degree been done—by those associated with neo-liberalism. Thus the *Adam Smith Institute* likes to proclaim “tax freedom” day each year when, it states, the average person finally starts “working for themselves” rather than the State.¹¹⁶ As to be expected, the so-called think-tank is selective in its reading of *The Wealth of Nations*, confusing, as Smith never did, wage-labour (toiling for a boss) with “working for yourself”:

Nothing can be more absurd, however, than to imagine that men in general should work less when they work for themselves, than when they work for other people. [...] The one enjoys

¹¹⁶ As Proudhon noted, there “is no such liar as an average.” (*Système I*: 156) Neither he nor Kropotkin would not have been surprised that in 2014 the poorest 10% of British households pay eight percentage points more of their income in all taxes than the richest—43% compared to 35%.

the whole produce of his own industry; the other shares it with his master.¹¹⁷

The ideologues of neo-liberalism do not calculate “wage-labour freedom” day, namely the day when the average worker no longer “shares” the product of their labour with bosses, landlords, bankers, shareholders. For obvious reasons, unlike Kropotkin, they fail to note how the riches of the few derive from the unpaid labour of the many.

As Kropotkin’s discussed in *The Modern State*, the State has always intervened in the economy and society for the few. The notion that it should do so for the many is a relatively recent idea which arose once suffrage was expanded—few needed to be convinced that a Parliament elected by the wealthiest 5% of males would seek their interests first and foremost. Indeed, this was why Adam Smith argued for laissez-faire policies—to stop the wealthy few interfering to skew the economy even more in their

¹¹⁷ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 93.

development of Kropotkin’s communist-anarchist ideas when he was an active militant in the European anarchist movement.

For good introductions to Kropotkin’s ideas by anarchists, *Evolution and Revolution: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Peter Kropotkin* (Jura Books, 1996) by Graham Purchase and *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (Humanity Books, 2004) by Brian Morris should be consulted. Both cover his basic ideas and life, as well as indicating how modern research has confirmed the former.

Notes on the text

Most of this book had originally appeared, in some form, in English before. I have completely revised the existing translations and added any missing passages. Chapters without existing translations were translated by Nathalie Colibert. I have revised all the material and I accept responsibility for any errors.

We have decided to call the book *Modern Science and Anarchy* rather than *Modern Science and Anarchism* for two reasons. Firstly, Kropotkin used the word anarchy (*Anarchie*) rather than Anarchism (*Anarchisme*). Second, it will help identify which edition is which—*Modern Science and Anarchism* for English-language versions of 1903, 1908 and 1912 and *Modern Science and Anarchy* for this, the expanded 1913 edition.

We have tried to be consistent in translation (for example, “fonctionnaire” has usually been translated as “functionary” rather than “official” as it was felt this better expressed its bureaucratic nature). An exception is the word *Commune* which Kropotkin uses in five distinct related contexts:

1. The self-governing towns and cities of the Middle Ages;
2. The *Municipality*—the basic administrative unit of the modern French State;

have never been translated as well as many in *Freedom* and other English language papers which have never appeared in book form. Many other editions of his most famous works—such as *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*—are also available.

Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology (AK Press, 2014) contains the most comprehensive selection of his writings. It includes extracts from all his books and numerous newspaper articles, pamphlets (some available in book form or in English for the first time). It also includes a lengthy introduction discussing all aspects of Kropotkin's ideas as well as a biographical sketch. A shorter collection of his pamphlets is available in *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (Dover Press, 2002). This was formerly published as *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* and contains much of his best short work, although most are abridged without indication of the edits.

Daniel Guérin's essential *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, 2005) has a section on Kropotkin, while volume 1 of Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* (Black Rose Books, 2005) has numerous extracts from his works.

In terms of Kropotkin's life story, the most obvious starting place must be his own autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, first published in English in 1899 and reprinted as part of his *Collected Works*. There are three biographies available. The one by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic (*The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin*) has been republished as *Kropotkin: From Prince to Rebel* (Black Rose Books, 1989) as a supplement to the *Collected Works* project. As this dates from 1950, it should be supplemented by Martin A. Miller's biography *Kropotkin* (University of Chicago Press, 1976). *The anarchist-geographer: an introduction to the life of Peter Kropotkin* (Genge, 2007) by Brian Morris is also a useful, if short, work on this subject. Caroline Cahm's *Kropotkin and the rise of revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) is essential reading, as it covers the

favour (something conveniently forgotten by most of those who now invoke his name). So little has changed since Adam Smith:

Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters [...]. When masters combine together in order to reduce the wages of their workmen, they commonly enter into a private bond or agreement, not to give more than a certain wage under a certain penalty. Were the workmen to enter into a contrary combination of the same kind, not to accept of a certain wage under a certain penalty, the law would punish them very severely; and if it dealt impartially, it would treat the masters in the same manner."¹¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, we see the advocates of labour-market “deregulation”

¹¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 158–159.

(i.e., regulations to weaken unions) worry about the market power of organised labour while opposing suggestions to apply anti-monopoly laws to break up big companies. In fact, anti-union laws are almost always not recognised as interference in the market by the State. The same can be said of the defence of capitalist property rights, the privileges given to corporations (such as limited liability) and a host of other State interventions in favour of the wealthy.

Thus neo-liberalism shares the same features of the capitalism Kropotkin analysed in *The Modern State*—an instrument used by the few to secure and bolster their position. State intervention is only viewed as such when it favours the many.

Hence the privatisation of State industries at

La Science moderne et l'anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

Extracts from the *Freedom* translation of parts I to VI are included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital* while the sections on War (VIII and IX) were issued as a pamphlet by Freedom Press in 1914 entitled *Wars and Capitalism*.

The glossary was added “by a friend” to the 1904 German edition and this was revised and expanded for the 1912 British edition before again being revised and expanded for the 1913 French edition.

The appendix on Herbert Spencer was originally written after his death in 1903 and appeared first in *Les Temps Nouveaux* (January to February, 1904) and then *Freedom* (February to September 1904).

French

English

“Herbert Spencer: Sa philosophie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 January to 13 February 1904

“Herbert Spencer,” *Freedom*, February to September 1904

This obituary article has never been reprinted.

Further Reading

A great many of Kropotkin’s works are available online. In terms of published works, George Woodcock edited Kropotkin’s *Collected Works* shortly before his death in 1995.¹⁵⁵ In 11 volumes, it includes all his major writings as well as numerous important essays (although some are edited). This collection is by no means complete, missing out the articles collated in *Act For Yourselves!* (Freedom Press, 1988) for example. It is also missing a very large number of articles in French and Russian anarchist papers which

¹⁵⁵ Published by Black Rose, it includes *The Conquest of Bread*; *Ethics*; *Fugitive Writings*; *Evolution and Environment*; *Fields, Factories and Workshops*; *In Russian and French Prisons*; *Great French Revolution*; *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*; *Mutual Aid*; *Russian Literature*; and *Words of a Rebel*.

“L’Impôt moyen d’enrichir les riches,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 10 March 1900 and 17 March 1900; “A Propos de l’impôt,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 24 March 1900

“Taxation a Means of Enriching the Rich,” *Freedom*, February 1914 and March 1914

V

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

“The Monopolies,” *Freedom*, April 1914

VI

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

“The Monopolies in the Nineteenth Century,” *Freedom*, May 1914

VII

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

“Monopolies in Constitutional England—In Germany—The Kings of our own time,” *Freedom*, September 1914

VIII

“La Guerre,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 March 1912; “La Guerre: La Haute Finance,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 9 March 1912

“Modern Wars and Capitalism,” *Freedom*, May to August 1913

IX

“La Guerre: La Guerre et l’Industrie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 16 March 1912 ; “La Guerre,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 30 March 1912

X

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

XI

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

XII

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

XIII

La Science moderne et l’anarchie (Paris : Stock, 1913)

XIV

a low price or the use of public money to pay for goods or services by private companies previously provided by nationalised industries. Outsourcing is just the funnelling of public money to certain companies which prioritise paying dividends to shareholders over providing good quality and affordable services. Money previously used to pay unionised staff decent wages gets into the hands of companies employing people on the minimum wage with the surplus going to well-paid CEOs and shareholders. Similarly, the public subsidies to the allegedly “private” railway companies in the UK are far higher than the monies provided to nationalised British Rail—tax money is simply funnelled into the pockets of the shareholders while passengers get the most expensive, most

over-crowded and least reliable rail service of any comparable developed European nation.

Another example. The 2017 budget saw the Tory government announce £320 million for 140 new so-called “free schools” while the other 24,288 state-funded schools received £216 million extra for school maintenance. That is just under £9,000 for each state-funded school for three years compared to £2.3 million for every “free school.” A simple gift to the few at the expense of the many, not to mention how the heads of “free schools” and “academies”—privately run schools which are funded and overseen by the Department for Education—could now decide to pay themselves huge salaries (as befitting their position).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Excessive CEO pay is not the only way academy trusts can divert money meant for pupils’ education. One trust was established by a global edu-business

English (in 1898) and then in French (1906). It was slightly revised for inclusion in this book.

French
English

“L’Etat: son rôle historique,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 19 December 1896 to 3 July 1897

“The State: Its Historic Role,” *Freedom*, May 1897 to June 1898

A revised English translation was published by Freedom Press in 1946, 1969 and 1987. Its first and last sections were included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*.

The first few sections of *The Modern State* appeared in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1900 before being translated over a decade later in *Freedom*. The two sections on war were serialised in 1912 (the English translation one year later used the book chapters as its basis rather than the original articles). The remaining sections (V to VII and X onwards) appear to have been written expressly for the book.

French
English

I

“La Société actuelle son principe,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 13 January 1900

“The Essential Principle of Modern Society,” *Freedom*, November 1913

II

“Serfs de L’état,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 3 February 1900

“Serfs of the State,” *Freedom*, December 1913

III

“L’Impôt,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 3 March 1900

“Taxation as a Means of Increasing the Power of the State,” *Freedom*, January 1914

IV

Pamphlets (recently retitled as *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*). It appears in full in *Environment and Evolution* (Montreal/New York: Black Rose, 1995) while extracts are included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*.

Section II, *Communism and Anarchy*, is made up of two distinct texts. Part I was written in 1900 as an article (“Communisme et anarchie”) for *Les Temps Nouveaux* (6 January 1900). Parts II–IV were initially produced as a talk (entitled *Communisme et anarchie*) for the *Congrès Ouvrier Révolutionnaire International* (*International Revolutionary Worker Congress*) held in Paris in September 1900. It was published in *Les Temps Nouveaux supplément littéraire* (No. 23–32: Rapports du Congrès antiparlementaire international de 1900 (Paris)) then as a pamphlet in 1903 (Publications des « *Temps Nouveaux* », No. 27). It was translated in *Freedom* (July and August 1901). Both parts were revised and expanded for inclusion in this book.

French

English

I.

“Communisme et anarchie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, January 1900

II.

“Communisme et anarchie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, supplément littéraire, no. 23, 29 September to 5 October 1900

“Communism and Anarchy,” *Freedom*, July and August 1901.

III.

IV.

The *Freedom* translation is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*.

The State: Its Historic Role was written in 1896 as one of two lectures Kropotkin was asked to give in Paris by Jean Grave, the editor of *Les Temps Nouveaux*. It was serialised in *Les Temps Nouveaux* between December 1896 and July 1897 and was translated in *Freedom* between May 1897 and June 1898. It first appeared as a pamphlet in

It is no coincidence that neo-liberal Britain is the most centralised State in Western Europe. Power rests in Westminster, itself increasingly marginalised by the executive—an elected dictatorship. Tom Crewe notes that of every £1 raised in taxation, 91 pence is controlled and allocated by central government. Yet before nationalisation and privatisation, there was municipalisation in which local councils “of differing political complexions in every part of the country bought out gas, water, electricity and tramway companies, on practical rather than ideological grounds.” The first attack on municipal independence was nationalisation under the Labour government of 1945 to 1951 when

which owns a copy-righted curriculum meaning that the Trust pays for its use and so £100 per pupil per year is transferred towards dividends. Then there are the numerous cases of influential individuals within academy trusts selling their goods or services, or the services of their relatives, to that trust.

“council-owned gas, water and electricity companies (and their profits) were transferred to central government control, depriving councils of a huge chunk of their independent income.” Similarly, the creation of the National Health Service led to the nationalisation of municipal hospitals. Then came Thatcher in the 1980s whose government “launched a sustained attack on the authority of local government” and the “destruction of local government as a potentially rivalrous state-within-a-state” (something, as Kropotkin stresses, the State cannot tolerate). Council housing was sold off to tenants at a reduced cost but councils were banned from using the income to build new housing. The net effect is clear:

[I]t has only ensured that richer Britons

“Le Réveil des Années 1856–1862,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 21 February 1903

VI

“La Philosophie synthétique de Spencer,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 28 February 1903

VII

“La Role de la Loi dans la société,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 2 May 1903

VIII

“Position de l’anarchie dans la science moderne,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 30 May 1903

IX

“L’Idéal Anarchiste et les révolutions précédentes,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 11 July 1903

X

“L’Anarchie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 21 January 1911 to 29 April 1911

Chapters X to XII (“Anarchism”) of *Modern Science and Anarchism* (Freedom Press, London), 1912

XI

XII

XIII

XIV

“Quelques conclusions de l’anarchie,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, July 18 and 25 July 1903

Modern Science and Anarchism (Social Science Club, Philadelphia) 1903

XV

“Les Moyens d’action,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 15 August 1903

XVI

“Conclusions,” *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 12 September 1903

The revised and expanded 1912 edition was reprinted by Freedom Press in 1923 and was then included, in a very edited form, by Roger N. Baldwin in his 1927 anthology *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary*

1911.¹⁵³ They were included in the expanded English-language edition published by Freedom Press to mark Kropotkin's 70th birthday in 1912.¹⁵⁴ This was advertised as a "New and Revised Translation, with three additional chapters, and a useful and interesting Glossary." He further revised and expanded these chapters for the 1913 French edition.

French

English

I

"Les Origines de l'Anarchie," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 18 October 1902

Modern Science and Anarchism (Social Science Club, Philadelphia) 1903

II

"Mouvement intellectuel du XVIII^{me} siècle," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 29 November 1902

III

"La Réaction au commencement du dix-neuvième siècle," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 20 December 1902

IV

"La Philosophie Positive de Comte," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 24 January 1903

V

¹⁵³ A footnote of the first instalment stated: "Our readers remember, perhaps, a series of my articles which were published in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1903 and which were part of a pamphlet *La Science Moderne et L'Anarchie*. Anarchy in this pamphlet was treated very briefly; I referred the reader to other works. Now, I fill this gap, and I give highlights of our ideas and their origins." ('L'Anarchie', *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 21 January 1911)

¹⁵⁴ An abridged version of the new edition had been serialised in *Freedom* between October 1909 and May 1911. The most significant differences is that the sections of "Anarchism" are much shorter – sections X and XI in *Freedom* compared to X, XI and XII in the book – and so there are fourteen rather than fifteen sections.

are taxed less and poorer ones obliged to spend a much larger proportion of their income on goods they could once have gained for a fraction of the price. In 1981, rent for a council property absorbed less than 7 per cent of an average income; in 2015, for a private tenancy, the figure was 52 per cent (72 per cent in London), far higher than anywhere else in Europe.¹²⁰

In 2016, the Commons communities and local government select committee found that forty percent of ex-council flats sold through Right to Buy are being rented out more expensively by private landlords. Almost a third of M.P.s were landlords, rising

¹²⁰ Tom Crewe, "The Strange Death of Municipal England," *London Review of Books* 38 (15 December 2016), 24.

to nearly 40% for the Tories—the same Tories who voted down a law requiring landlords to make their homes fit for human habitation while, four years previously, they had voted to make squatting in residential buildings a criminal offence subject to arrest, fine and imprisonment. Rather than allow local councils to build houses, the government spent £27 billion on housing benefit in 2014–15, tax money which goes straight into the landlord's pocket just to secure someone a home in the face of ever rising rents and house prices.

So rather than replace capitalism, nationalisation was a necessary step towards handing these concerns over to the capitalist and landlord class. This required both a commitment to capitalism and to a strong central State—as it had

of inspiration for further analysis and action then its purpose will be served well.

Modern Science and Anarchy: A Publication History

Modern Science and Anarchy refers to two works—the first part of the augmented 1913 edition and that work itself. The latter is a collection of pieces published independently of the former but all were revised for the 1913 edition. Here we sketch the publication history of its various sections.

The “Foreword” was, unsurprisingly, written for the 1913 edition and had not appeared elsewhere.

Section I, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, has had a varied publication history. Unusually for Kropotkin's works it was originally written in Russian in 1901 (but published in London) as part of his regular attempts to help and influence the rising labour movement there towards anarchism and away from Marxism.¹⁵² This was serialised in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in 1902 and 1903, with a French edition appearing later in 1903. That year also saw the first English-language translation produced in America (another edition appeared in 1908) while a German edition appeared in 1904. This edition did not have the chapters on “Anarchy” (‘L’Anarchie’) and these first appeared serialised in *Les Temps Nouveaux* in

¹⁵² Other than *Modern Science and Anarchy*, very little of Kropotkin's Russian writings have been translated into English. *Direct Struggle Against Capital* includes four works—“Preface to Bakunin's *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*” as well as the three chapters written by Kropotkin for the pamphlet *The Russian Revolution and Anarchism*.

than just seeking to repeat it.

So the need to base our politics on an analysis of society and its tendencies remains as true today as ever—as does the need to be able to debunk the pseudo-science used to defend inequality in all its many forms—and so *Modern Science and Anarchy* remains essential reading.

Regardless of the minor errors that crept into this work as would be expected, given its size, scope, and ambition, Kropotkin's final book is a fitting summation of his contribution to anarchism. It will be a fruitful read for even the most seasoned anarchist activist. As long as it is used as a source

previously, the ruling class used the latter to bring the former into existence. And, of course, to destroy the various intermediate bodies within society which could challenge the power of the bosses, landlords, shareholders, politicians and functionaries—particularly the trade union movement and local government (in Britain, for example, people had an unfortunate tendency to vote in local elections to protect themselves against Thatcherite social engineering). The word “localism” may be uttered but the practice is centralism—particularly to stop local people interfering with the activities of, say, fracking companies—for “[a]ttacks upon the central authorities, stripping these of their prerogatives, decentralisation, dispersing authority would have amounted to abandoning its af-

fairs to the people and would have run the risk of a genuinely popular revolution. Which is why the bourgeoisie is out to strengthen the central government still further” and why the working class, “not about to abdicate their rights to the care of the few, will seek some new form of organisation that allows them to manage their affairs for themselves”.¹²¹

Kropotkin pointed to municipalisation as one of the tendencies within capitalism that is anarchistic. It could be argued that for Kropotkin the local State was not really the State but this would be misunderstanding his argument. The municipalisation of services does not mean that he thought the local State could be used to free the working class (at best it could, like cooperatives,

¹²¹ Kropotkin, “Representative Government,” *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 232, 228.

were so horribly exposed in 1914.

Kropotkin’s “lost” work is an important one whose themes are still as relevant as ever. Few these days even think of introducing socialism by means of the State—Social Democrats have become as blinkered by electioneering as Kropotkin indicated and can see no further than saving capitalism from itself. Fewer still are inspired by revolutionary Social Democracy—Leninism—after it simply confirmed the anarchist critique that State socialism would be little more than State capitalism and the dictatorship over the proletariat. Let all us socialists learn from the past rather

therefore unsurprising that Marxists have sought to build a myth by using Kropotkin to attack anarchism rather than the personal failings of an individual.

Kropotkin's repudiation of the principles of anarchism in 1914 saw him marginalised by the anarchist movement which shows that his previous influence was due to how he articulated the ideas of anarchism. Once he stopped doing that, his previous contributions to the movement mattered little.¹⁵¹ Yet these contributions should not be denied nor neglected as a result of the personal failings which

¹⁵¹ See my "Sages and movements: An incomplete Peter Kropotkin bibliography," *Anarchist Studies* 22: 1 (Spring 2014).

make social conditions better) but that it shows that local action could make a difference.¹²² Local autonomy was a key feature of anarchism and if some improvements can be made today under the weight of representative forms as well as capital and the central State, then think what could be possible once both were abolished.

Kropotkin would not have been surprised by all this. Yet he was also aware of the problems associated with nationalisation. So rather than seek, as State socialists did, to add economic power to the political power of the (bourgeois) State, he suggested that such services like railways be handed over to the workers themselves—a position that Proudhon had advocated one half-

¹²² See the *Freedom* article "Municipal Socialism" reprinted in *Act for Yourself!*.

century earlier.¹²³ As he suggested in a letter to Max Nettlau in 1912:

The State phasis which we are traversing now seems to be unavoidable, but whatever its duration may be, it will never reach *now* the State Socialist conditions which were once imagined once upon a time by the social democratic and the Vidal school. Before they should come to that, there would be accomplished a complete change in the very forms of modern industrial production. I believe that, so far as we may see forward at this moment, it would be good tactics to help the *Labour Unions* to enter into a temporary possession of the

seen in many of the articles on current affairs he had written for the anarchist press. All this—along with the absence of popular revolt in France against the war—undoubtedly played their part in making him forget the ideas he had spent nearly fifty years advocating.

Yet it would be a mistake—and a violation of the scientific method—to generalise from Kropotkin or his few supporters to conclusions about anarchism as such. Faced with the challenge of imperialist war, almost all anarchists met it by reasserting their Internationalist and class struggle principles while almost all Marxists failed. It is

¹²³ Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution*, 151.

majority of Marx-ists and Marxist parties supported their States and ruling classes in the conflict.

Suffice to say, even the best of us can make mistakes and Kropotkin's love of France as embodying the revolutionary tradition from 1789 onwards played its part, as did his sympathies for national liberation movements and his fixation on France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and its negative impact on the labour movement by increasing Marxist influence within it.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, a trace of pro-French and anti-German sentiment can be

¹⁵⁰ See Jean Caroline Cahm, "Kropotkin and the Anarchist Movement," *Socialism and Nationalism* ed. Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978).

industrial concerns, under the conditions of delivery at certain established prices their products to given regions of consumers. This would be perhaps an effective means to check the State nationalisation.¹²⁴

The same should be argued for all State functions. So, for example, would the British Tory government have been able to use the welfare State as a punitive weapon during the 1984–5 Miners strike if the miners' unions had managed welfare provision? Would the Tory government during the austerity years of 2010 onwards been able to weaponise the benefits system against claimants if that function been in

¹²⁴ Quoted in Ruth Kinna, "Kropotkin's theory of the state: a transnational approach," *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, ed. Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (Oakland: PM Press, 2017), 55.

the hands of workers' unions and cooperatives?

It matters *how* State functions are changed. Privatising nationalised industries simply changes the boss back from the bureaucrat to the capitalist—and anarchism is against both.¹²⁵ Some proclaim that anarchists are being illogical to oppose privatisation, neo-liberalism or the imposition of austerity to “shrink the State” because we are, they proclaim, against the State. Yet anarchism has never been just anti-State (surely “property is theft” shows that?). We are against the State because it defends that property and theft, so using economic crisis to impose austerity is nothing more than the State acting as a weapon

¹²⁵ See Vernon Richards ed., *Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation: Selections from the Anarchist Journal Freedom 1945–1950* (London: Freedom Press, 1989).

Needless to say, these facts are forgotten when Leninists discuss anarchism, perpetuating the myth that most anarchists followed Kropotkin in his support of the Allies.¹⁴⁸ In reality, the pro-war anarchists in spite of having “amongst them comrades whom we love and respect most” were “not numerous” and “almost all” anarchists “have remained faithful to their convictions.”¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the vast

¹⁴⁸ This derives from Lenin’s false assertion in *State and Revolution* about “the few anarchists” who “preserved a sense of honour and a conscience” by opposing the Imperialist War. (*Collected Works* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964] 25: 470–471). Nor does Lenin mention that these few—which, sadly, included Kropotkin—had rejected Bakunin’s position (turn the imperialist war into a revolution) in favour of Engels’ defence of the fatherland while, ironically, Lenin went the opposite way. As regards Lenin’s rejection of Engels position, see “What Lenin Made of the Testament of Engels” by the ex-communist Bertram D. Wolfe (*Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* [New York: The Dial Press, 1965]).

¹⁴⁹ Malatesta, *The Method of Freedom*, 379, 385. Similarly, of the syndicalist unions only the CGT in France supported the war—unlike the vast the majority of Marxist parties and unions (significantly, the CGT was a member of the Marxist Second International).

I hope he will see his error, and be again on the side of the workers against all the Governments and all the bourgeois: German, English, French, Russian, Belgian, etc.¹⁴⁶

Comparing Malatesta's arguments to those in *The Modern State* we can easily see how far Kropotkin changed his position and why so many anarchists were surprised by it as well as why he was so quickly isolated by the movement.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Errico Malatesta, *Freedom* (December 1914).

¹⁴⁷ One Bay Area anarchist even went so far as to suggest "Kropotkin should have died before this war. Then he would have been held in grateful remembrance by future working classes." (Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants against the state: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015], 135). While the damage and confusion Kropotkin's position produced—helped by the jingoistic press—made such extreme comments understandable, it must be said that his post-war output—such as the lessons of the Russian Revolution (namely, "Letter to the Workers of the Western World" and the post-face to the 1919 Russian edition of *Words of a Rebel*, both contained in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*) plus the unfinished *Ethics*—makes that too harsh.

for the few against the many.¹²⁶

Anarchists do not side with the State against its subjects. Rather we fight with our fellow workers against attempts by governments to save capitalism by pushing the costs of so doing onto the general population. This does not mean we favour State welfare any more than any other State activity. Welfare, like the State itself, must be abolished *from below* by the many, not from above by the few seeking to increase their wealth and power—indeed, the much more extensive welfare State for the rich

¹²⁶ In addition, there is the counter-productive nature of austerity. As even the most neo-classical Keynesian economist was aware, imposing austerity—like cutting wages—during a crisis would make that crisis worse and this is precisely what did happen in Greece, Spain, Britain and others. Britain was unique in the sense that austerity was not imposed by the European Union and its central bank but was rather the choice of the Conservative government. In all causes, austerity made the crisis worse—as many, including anarchists, predicted (see my "Boomtime in Poundland: Has Austerity Worked?," *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 63 [Winter 2015]). Keynes may have sought to *save* capitalism, but to do that he needed to *understand* it. This is why he is worth reading, unlike most economists who simply eulogise and rationalise an unjust system.

should be targeted long before anything else.

Such popular struggles against privatisation or austerity—against the decisions and actions of the State against its subjects, never forget—will build the confidence and organisations needed to *really* change things and to *really* reduce the authority of the State. Indeed, the UK anti-union laws show that our masters know this and know where our real power lies: not in Parliament but, as Kropotkin always stressed, in our workplaces and streets.

Kropotkin did not think that anarchy was inevitable.¹²⁷ That is why he spent a lot of time stressing the need for anarchists to involve themselves in social struggles and movements to make a libertarian

¹²⁷ For a good overview, see Matthew Adams, “Kropotkin: Evolution, Revolutionary Change and the End of History,” *Anarchist Studies* 19: 1 (Spring 2011).

I confess that we were in the wrong in not giving importance to his Franco-Russian patriotism, and in not foreseeing where his anti-German prejudices would land him. It was because we understood that he meant to invite the French workers to answer a possible German invasion by making a Social Revolution—that is, by taking possession of the French soil, and trying to induce the German workers to fraternise with them in the struggle against French and German oppressors. Certainly we should never have dreamt that Kropotkin could invite the workers to make common cause with governments and masters.

solution only when, the States being destroyed, every human group, nay, every individual, will have the right to associate with, and separate from, every other group.

It is very painful for me to oppose a beloved friend like Kropotkin, who has done so much for the cause of Anarchism. But for the very reason that Kropotkin is so much esteemed and loved by us all, it is necessary to make known that we do not follow him in his utterances on the war.

I know that this attitude of Kropotkin is not quite new, and that for more than ten years he has been preaching against the “German danger;” and

social revolution possible.¹²⁸ So “since the times of the International Working Men’s Association, the anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers’ organisations which carry on the *direct* struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector—the State.” This struggle, “better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil that is done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention

¹²⁸ The essential work on this is Caroline Cahm’s excellent *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Also see works included in the section “The Workers’ Movement and Class Struggle” of *Direct Struggle Against Capital* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

of the capitalist and the State.”¹²⁹

It was in the First International that Bakunin correctly predicted that Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” would become a dictatorship *over* the proletariat while electioneering (the epitome of indirect means) would see any workers elected to legislative assemblies “become transplanted into a bourgeois environment” and “become converted into bourgeois” for “men do not make their positions; positions, contrariwise, make men.”¹³⁰ Marxists denied this, with Plechanoff stating:

The corrupting
influence of the
Parliamentary
environment on

¹²⁹ Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, 68–69. The links with Bakunin’s ideas and syndicalism are obvious. The notion that syndicalism by advocating class struggle is influenced by Marxism cannot be sustained once an awareness of Bakunin’s actual ideas is gained—see my “Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism,” *Anarchist Studies* 20: 1 (Spring 2012).

¹³⁰ Bakunin, “The Policy of the International,” *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 171–172.

the orders of his government. What remains after that of anti-militarism, and, indeed, of Anarchism too?

As a matter of fact, Kropotkin renounces anti-militarism because he thinks that the national questions must be solved before the social question. For us, national rivalries and hatreds are among the best means the masters have for perpetuating the slavery of the workers, and we must oppose them with all our strength. And so to the right of the small nationalities to preserve, if you like, their language and their customs, that is simply a question of liberty, and will have a real and final

and never fight except for the Social Revolution.

Is this to misunderstand anti-militarism?

Kropotkin seems to have forgotten the antagonism of the classes, the necessity of economic emancipation, and all the Anarchist teachings; and says that an anti-militarist ought always to be ready, in case a war breaks out, to take arms in support of “the country that will be invaded;” which considering the impossibility, at least for the ordinary workman, of verifying in time who is the real aggressor, practically means that Kropotkin’s “anti-militarist” ought always to obey

working-class representatives is what the Anarchists have up to the present considered the strongest argument in their criticism of the political activity of Social-Democracy. We have seen what its *theoretical* value amounts to. And even a slight knowledge of the history of the German Socialist party will sufficiently show how in practical life the Anarchist apprehensions are answered.¹³¹

This was written in 1895 just as the debate between the reformists (“the Revisionists” or “Opportunists”) and the orthodox Marxists broke out in both German and international Social Democracy on the death of Engels. The former

¹³¹ Plechanoff, *Anarchism and Socialism*, 99–100.

wished to revise the rhetoric of the party to be more inline with its (reformist) practice, the latter wished to retain the rhetoric while pursuing the same tactics. The “Revisionists” may have lost various battles in terms of conference resolutions passed against them but they won the war because the rhetoric adjusted to the reality, as seen in 1914. Today, each one is—and has been for some time—reformist in both talk and action.

This transformation into (to use Kropotkin’s words from 1899) a “party of semi-bourgeois—that is, radical but not socialist—peaceful progress, in other words, a reformist party” was because it had “moved away from a pure labour movement, in the sense of a direct struggle against capitalists by means of strikes, unions, and so forth. Strikes repelled them

his new position.”¹⁴⁴ In Britain, his old friends and comrades Rudolf Rocker and Errico Malatesta refuted Kropotkin in the Yiddish and English-language press.¹⁴⁵ As an example:

Allow me to say a few words on Kropotkin’s article on anti-militarism published in your last issue. In my opinion, anti-militarism is the doctrine which affirms that military service is an abominable and murderous trade, and that a man ought never to consent to take up arms at the command of the masters,

¹⁴⁴ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), 565; also see Alexander Berkman’s “In Reply to Kropotkin,” in *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), 380–381.

¹⁴⁵ Rudolf Rocker, *The London Years* (Nottingham/Oakland: Five Leaves Publications/AK Press, 2005); Errico Malatesta, “The Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles” and “Pro-Government Anarchists,” in *Freedom* (both are included in *The Method of Freedom*).

Freedom ended mid-chapter in September 1914.

As is well known, with the outbreak of the First World War Kropotkin supported the Allies and, as a consequence, found himself completely isolated from the wider anarchist movement. This position came as a complete surprise to his comrades, particularly given the two chapters on war in *The Modern State* which were issued as pamphlets in both France (*La Guerre*, 1912) and Britain (*Wars and Capitalism*, 1914). These reflected the anarchist position Kropotkin had defended since joining the movement and so British anarchists continued to sell *Wars and Capitalism* while those around *Mother Earth* reprinted it due to it “embodying a logical and convincing refutation of

because they diverted the workers’ forces from parliamentary agitation.” Marxists “recognised the State and pyramidal methods of organisation” which “stifled the revolutionary spirit of the rank-and-file workers” while anarchists “recognised neither the State nor pyramidal organisation” and “rejecting a narrowly political struggle, inevitably became a more revolutionary party, both in theory and in practice.”¹³²

The Marxists did not capture the State, the State captured them. Still, being completely wrong—even when it was written—has not stopped Marxists recommending and reprinting Plechanoff’s pamphlet to this day. Nor has it stopped the call to repeat the same tactics of “political action” in spite of the fate of the Social

¹³² Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 207–212.

Democrats and then the Greens.¹³³

Malatesta also argued that “the anarchist, if he were really an anarchist because of scientific convictions, would have to continually consult the latest bulletins of the Academy of Science in order to determine whether he can continue to be an anarchist.”¹³⁴ However, his point seems too strong as Kropotkin, at bottom, simply stressed the need for anarchists to use the scientific method to build up their ideas. Thus our critique of the State is based not on feelings, but on a systematic analysis of how States developed as well as their role and practices. No State has ever existed, not even the so-called workers’ state of the Bolsheviks,

¹³³ This does not mean that social-democratic parties did not introduce significant—albeit usually Statist and reversible—reforms but they were meant to *end* capitalism rather than make it nicer.

¹³⁴ Malatesta, “Science and Social Reform,” *The Method of Freedom*, 371.

lords by the Party elite and State bureaucracy.¹⁴² Kropotkin was proved right—new functions need new organs.

As becomes clear from reading *Modern Science and Anarchy*, the suggestion by George Woodcock—repeated by many others—that Kropotkin became increasingly reformist from the early 1890s onwards cannot be supported. He remained a committed revolutionary and class warrior for almost the whole of his politically active life.¹⁴³

We say “almost” for it would be remiss not to discuss events after the publication of this book for these undoubtedly explain why it has taken so long to be translated—indeed, the serialisation of *The Modern State* in

¹⁴² See section H.6 of *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 2.

¹⁴³ See my “Kropotkin, Woodcock and *Les Temps Nouveaux*,” *Anarchist Studies* 23: 1 (Spring 2015).

initial foundations of the communist commune.¹⁴¹

The events of the 1917 Revolution show that Lenin's innovation of building a State upon workers organisations—namely, the soviets—simply confirmed the anarchist critique. This centralised regime quickly became alienated from the masses and produced a bureaucracy around it. To secure party rule, the Bolsheviks packed and disbanded soviets and repressed working class protest and strikes. Centralisation, as Kropotkin predicted, produced a new ruling minority. Applying the same organisational structures developed to secure minority rule simply changed who that minority was—replacing the capitalists and land-

¹⁴¹ Peter Kropotkin, "L'Action directe et la Grève générale en Russie," *Les Temps Nouveaux* (2 December 1905). This was also published as "The Revolution in Russia and the General Strike" in *Freedom* (November-December, 1905) under the alias "S" along with a letter signed by Kropotkin entitled "The Revolution in Russia" (this letter is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*).

which did not create and maintain, perpetuate and extend rule by the few, rule by a minority class.

Rather than just being against the State—as many proclaim, particularly Marxists—anarchists have always seen it in the context of class and as being interwoven with the economy. It is no neutral body but rather an instrument of class rule and structured accordingly. As Proudhon argued:

And who benefits from this regime of unity? The people? No, the upper classes. [...] Unity [...] is quite simply a form of bourgeois exploitation under the protection of bayonets. Yes, political unity [...] is bourgeois: the positions which it creates, the intrigues which it causes, the influ-

ences which it cherishes, all that is bourgeois and goes to the bourgeois.¹³⁵

The centralised, hierarchical, state is “the cornerstone of bourgeois despotism and exploitation.”¹³⁶ It is no coincidence that “nothing resembles a monarchy more than a unitarian republic [*république unitaire*].”¹³⁷

Kropotkin follows in this analysis, stressing how the State is a specific form of social organisation, a hierarchical, centralised and top-down one. This is why there are two sections in the book on the State: a historic overview and an analysis of the modern State. Both seek to explain what the State is and why Anarchists reject the idea of using it to transform society.

¹³⁵ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La fédération et l'unité en Italie* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 27–28.

¹³⁶ Proudhon, *La fédération et l'unité en Italie*, 33.

¹³⁷ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du principe fédératif* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862), 140.

tral Committee which preceded the Paris Commune in 1871 and it is certain that workers across the country must organise themselves on this model [...] these councils represent the revolutionary strength of the working class. ... Let no one come to proclaim to us that the workers of the Latin peoples, by preaching the general strike and direct action, were going down the wrong path. [...] A new force is thus constituted by the strike: the force of workers asserting themselves for the first time and putting in motion the lever of any revolution—direct action. [...] [The] urban workers [...] imitating the rebellious peasants [...] will likely be asked to put their hands on all that is necessary to live and produce. Then they can lay in the cities the

power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers progressing towards *the search for new forms of life* that would be *their* own—that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal.¹⁴⁰

Bakunin's vision of revolution predicted both syndicalism and the workers' councils of 1905 and 1917. Unsurprisingly then, it was Kropotkin and not Lenin who in 1905 saw the soviets as the means of both fighting and replacing the State as well as comparing them to the Paris Commune. Thus "the Council of workers [...] were appointed by the workers themselves—just like the insurrectional Commune of August 10, 1792."

[The council] completely recalls [...] the Cen-

¹⁴⁰ Kropotkin, *La Science moderne et l'anarchie*, 124–125.

The two are obviously related and are based on a class analysis of the State. In a nutshell, the State is an instrument by which minorities – minority classes – impose their rule onto the rest. As a result of this role it has evolved certain features without which it could not do it and so workers had to destroy and replace it with a new kind of social organisation more in line with the new tasks required by a people seeking its freedom.¹³⁸ This had to be based on the organisations created by the workers in their struggles against exploitation and oppression. In this he followed Bakunin:

Workers, no longer
count on anyone

¹³⁸ Leading anarcho-Syndicalist Rudolf Rocker was very impressed with Kropotkin's evolutionary analysis of the State, using it to inform his discussion of the subject (*Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* [Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2004], 14–5). Likewise, his account of anarchism and its history follows that laid out in *Modern Science and Anarchy* and, as Kropotkin regularly did, links syndicalism with the libertarian tendencies in the First International (as did other syndicalists).

but yourselves [...] Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of funds for resistance, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of Chambers of Labour [...] the liquidation of the State and of bourgeois society [...] Anarchy, that it to say the true, the open popular revolution [...] organisation, from top to bottom and from

the circumference to the centre.¹³⁹

The “Chambers of Labour” were federations of local unions grouped by territory and Kropotkin likewise saw an anarchist society built from below by the workers themselves using their own organisations forged in the direct struggle against capital and the State:

We see in the incapacity of the Statist socialist to understand the true historical problem of socialism a gross error of judgement [...]. To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system *while retaining the machine of the State* and only changing the men in

¹³⁹ Peter Kropotkin, “Letter to Albert Richard,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 62 (Summer 2014), 18 (originally from James Guillaume, *L’Internationale: Documents et Souvenirs (1864–1878)* [Paris: Société nouvelle de librairie et d’édition, 1905] I: 284–285).