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# Utopian civic virtue

**Bakunin, Kropotkin, and anarchism's republican  
inheritance**

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## ABSTRACT

Civic virtue is a core concept in the republican tradition. Its associations with duty and sacrifice indicate that it is temperamentally incompatible with anarchism, an ideology typically defined by its commitment to maximizing freedom. Presenting an original reading of the work of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, two seminal figures in the history of anarchist ideas, this article argues that, nevertheless, a conception of civic virtue was central to their political theory. Tracing their engagement with the language of Enlightenment civic virtue, filtered through the experience of the French Revolution and the politics of Jacobinism, it argues that Bakunin and Kropotkin looked to anarchist civic virtues to both conceptualize anarchist revolution and underpin future anarchist social relations. Casting fresh light on anarchism's intellectual origins, its neglected relations with republicanism, and the complexities of republican visions of civic virtue, this article also recovers duty, and a potentially demanding model of participation, as key values in anarchist political thought.

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Although freedom has always been recognized as a cardinal concept in anarchist political theory, anarchist theorists have also stressed the responsibilities that meaningful liberty entails. This is reflected in recent work on anarchism's conceptualization of 'freedom', which has seen a turn to the concept of 'domination' and, in consequence, renewed focus on the tradition's interconnections with republicanism. Not only has this demonstrated that 'rule making' and constitutionalizing play,<sup>1</sup> despite its usual associations, an important place in anarchist activity, but, growing out of efforts to recover the republican thread in socialist thinking (Gourevitch

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<sup>1</sup> For 'rule making', see: <http://anarchyrules.info/>. Carter (1971, 56–59); Kinna and Prichard (2019); Prichard (2019, 71–90 (especially 73–78)).

2011), that anarchism, like socialism more broadly, was ‘made [...] by drawing on diverse traditions’ (Bevir 2011, 3).

As much as this fresh attention directed at anarchism’s engagement with republicanism highlights the diversity of the anarchist tradition’s approaches to understanding freedom, one component of republican thinking overlooked in these discussions is the concept of ‘civic virtue’. In one sense this should be no surprise. Given that civic virtue possesses, in one reading, a set of associations with demanding participation and sacrifice, not to mention its importance to the rhetoric and actions of a Jacobinism that many anarchists would see as the quintessence of revolutionary authoritarianism, it might be expected that anarchists would, if anything, define their politics against the precepts of civic virtue. If we agree that ‘republicanism is based on civic virtue co-ordinated by and structured within the state’ this appears fundamentally incompatible with anarchism where, successive generations of political theorists have argued, a nebulous ‘freedom’ is the ultimate good.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, if we see civic virtue as underpinning a ‘good citizenship’ supporting ‘republican laws’ through the ‘habits [...] of [...] civility’, we may also perceive little of edification for anarchists, committed as they frequently are to disrupting hegemonic definitions of law and citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

Hostility to the association of anarchism and civic virtue tends to rest on a particular definition of civic virtue that stresses those elements that are ‘incompatible with anarchis[m]’, or sees its strictures informing a constrained understanding of citizenship that is antithetical to anarchic visions of freedom.<sup>4</sup> If we accept that citi-

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Franks, ‘The Virtues of non-domination: Anarchism for and against republicanism’. Unpublished paper. Franks offers a more complex vision of the relationship between virtues and the polis in Franks (2010), Berlin (1969, 149); Carter (1971, 57).

<sup>3</sup> Pettit (2010, 245). For this in the context of anarchist thought, see: Ritter (1980, 144–145).

<sup>4</sup> Franks, unpublished paper, 9.

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zenship only makes sense when it is ‘necessarily linked to statism’, and that, therefore, anarchists must look askance at any proposed alternative emerging from the ‘order they refuse’, virtuous citizenship seems too enmeshed in statist concepts to be salvageable (Ince 2019, 157; Springer 2012, 1617). The concept of citizenship may well have historically been a weapon for oppressed groups to challenge established authorities, but equally ‘to be a citizen [...] is [...] to be considered an *insider*, or be *at home*, but in a context in which others are kept out’ (Ackelsberg 2013, 6).

Despite these anxieties, the anarchist tradition has a long history of engaging with concepts of citizenship in which an interpretation of civic virtue plays an essential part. For ‘pioneer’ anarchists in the 1940s and ‘50s, an anarchic citizenship offered a solution to the deadening tyranny of the state (Goodway 2012, 254). Paul Goodman concluded, for instance, that if you ‘remove authority [...] there will be self-regulation, not chaos’, because the practices of ‘participatory democracy’ that fill the void will cultivate the virtues vital to the efficient functioning of anarchism. This, he added, was a lesson that owed as much to Thomas Jefferson as Peter Kropotkin (Goodman 2010, 94). Murray Bookchin’s ‘innovative anarchism’ similarly placed great emphasis on citizenship and responsibility, especially in the context of the ‘libertarian municipalism’ he championed in the 1980s and ‘90s (Goodway 2012, 254; White 2008, 176). Here too, while rooted in anarchist values, the influence of republican conceptions of a virtuous citizenry were plain. As he lamented the replacement of the citizen with the transactional ‘taxpayer’ and the quietistic ‘constituent’, Bookchin also mourned what he saw as the loss of the ‘heroic stance of a socially [...] involved body politic’, and proposed an antidote that amounted to ‘reempowerment and self-reconstitution’ through renewed ‘participation’ and ‘civic-mindedness’.<sup>5</sup> And this set of con-

<sup>5</sup> Bookchin (1995, 21, 22). While *From Urbanization to Cities* stems from an era in which Bookchin was distancing himself from the anarchist tradition, simi-

nections runs much deeper in the anarchist tradition, to the true pioneers who first staked out anarchism's ideological identity. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, for example, the first to take 'anarchist' as an affirmation rather than a term of abuse, rooted his 'republican anarchism' in Montesquieu's and Rousseau's republican reading of civic virtue: a reconciliation of liberty and equality through the promotion of a civically situated 'non-egotistic social spirit'.<sup>6</sup> Virtue is thus at the heart of Proudhon's politics, and if 'la vertu' is the 'objet de la morale', then we must 'cherchons dans la raison pure les conditions de la concorde et de la vertu' (Proudhon 1867, 77, 83). Proudhonian reason would illuminate anarchic virtue, and, as with Goodman or Bookchin, anarchic freedoms would be born through citizens re-engaged with the politics of daily life (See also Prichard 2013, 13–14).

This article focuses on the work of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, two of anarchism's most important theoreticians, to illuminate anarchism's relations with republicanism through the concept of civic virtue. Following the 'profonde et pénétrante' Proudhon in his effort to anarchize a republican notion of civic virtue, as well engaging in an independent reading of republican traditions of political thinking, Bakunin and Kropotkin were crucial in establishing the contours of the intellectual tradition with which later theorists such as Goodman and Bookchin engaged (Bakounine 1895, 40). They also clarified a set of debates about the relationship between political participation and personal freedom that continue to resonate in anarchist-inflected politics from the

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lar conceptions of active citizenship are apparent in his earlier work. As he wrote in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), for example, 'It is not in "god" that the Athenian polis placed its "trust", but itself. The practice of direct democracy was an affirmation of citizenship as a process of direct action' (Bookchin, 1982). There are similar panegyrics in earlier works, see, for instance, Bookchin (2004, 95–99). See also Prichard (2019, 80–82).

<sup>6</sup> Prichard (2010); Vincent (1984, 60) (see also 56–58). For Proudhon's adoption of the anarchist label, see Woodcock (1962, 9). For the importance of Rousseau's virtuous politics to Proudhon, see also Noland (1967).

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Occupy movement to the Arab Spring to Rojava.<sup>7</sup> In this article civic virtue emerges as a set of habits and characteristics typifying the actions of a citizen that support the functioning of a society and, in turn, are nurtured by the structures and institutions of that society. Its theorists therefore tend to present it as a route to both individual and social flourishing: just as it demands independence and confidence, these attributes also point to a spirit of abnegation and self-sacrifice that help maintain social cohesion in the face of divisive egotism or factionalism. It is therefore a 'role-related concept', and as such appears naturally antagonistic to anarchist political principles, especially given anarchists' queasiness in the face of making demands for individuals to follow particular types of behaviour (Dagger 1997, 14).

By addressing Bakunin's and Kropotkin's engagement with civic virtue, as they encountered it in Enlightenment political thinking and in their reading of the French Revolution, this article highlights both the malleability of the language of civic virtue in the history of political thought, and anarchism's neglected relationship to it. In looking to reconcile the contrapuntal forces of freedom and duty, both thinkers drew on a revised conception of civic virtue – often filtered through the language of solidarity at the heart of nineteenth-century socialism – in which the virtues of anarchist citizens would be born in the heat of revolution and grow into the qualities that they envisioned supporting a functioning anarchist society. The methodological focus here is therefore inspired by a particular approach to the history of political thought. Historians of political thought necessarily see contextual archaeology as central to their discipline, with the recovery of these diverse contexts providing the analytical apparatus to fathom the 'particular utterances' that are also their subject

<sup>7</sup> On Occupy, the Arab Spring, and Rojava, consider: Kinna, Prichard, and Swann (2019, 357–390); Galián (2019, 715–732). For competing perspectives on Rojava, consider Knapp (2016); Leezenberg (2016). On the influence of Proudhon, consider Kropotkin (1995b, 62–63); Woodcock (1987, 275–278).

(Hampsher-Monk 2011 105). The disciplinary soul-searching that informed this method resulted, as one commentator notes, in a sense that ‘discipline [is] the watchword’: that is that rigorous contextual reconstruction is the *necessary* grounds for meaningful scholarship (Haddock 2011, 66). This article engages in a particular kind of contextualization, but one that resists the possibility for theorists to be ‘submerged and overcome’ when locating particular texts in deep linguistic contexts, focusing instead on longer conversations concerning ideas about citizenship, freedom, responsibility, and anarchism’s contribution to these concepts.<sup>8</sup>

The first section offers a foundation for their reading of civic virtue by considering the key – often contested and contradictory – meanings of civic virtue in republican political thinking. The second section examines the development of this language in the context of Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s engagement with the legacies of the French Revolution. With both drawing inspiration from a particular reading of Revolutionary history, the association of the language of virtue with Jacobinism posed a challenge to anarchists interested in the concept. The third section considers both thinkers in ‘utopian’ mode: imagining the possibilities, and indeed reflecting on the necessity, for civic virtues in their creative speculation on the potential shape of a future anarchist revolution.<sup>9</sup> Just, therefore, as a modified conception of civic virtue – purged of its reliance on the coercive inculcation of behavioural norms by the state that

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<sup>8</sup> Hampsher-Monk (1992, x). Elsewhere I have made the claim that robust historical contextualization is vital to fathoming anarchism’s distinctive emergence as a political culture. I remain committed to this objective, and the argument developed here remains fundamentally shaped by a sense of anarchism as an historically grounded political tradition in what I would argue is a parallel fashion. If political theory ‘has a concern with the past that serves its disciplinary interests in understanding the character of political rule’, which does not necessarily ‘entail becoming a historian’, it is this objective that guides the argument here (Philip 2008, 149). See also Adams and Jun (2015).

<sup>9</sup> For the particular understanding of ‘utopianism’ here, see Honeywell (2007, 239–254); Kinna (2009); Adams (2015, 139–179).

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this constant activity, as the republicans observed, would this society survive. Only with anarchist civic virtues would anarchy endure.

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is one characteristic of its history – was central to 'labor republicans', through Bakunin and Kropotkin, anarchism is a chapter in this story too (Gourevitch 2015, 17). Tracing their often-implicit engagement with the idea of civic virtue reveals the unexpected ways in which civic virtue, that most demanding of republican political principles, found expression in the most libertine of political ideologies.

## Civic virtues

Described as 'the key concept in classical republican thought' or a 'fundamental *topos* of liberalism', civic virtue is often defined via a set of adjectives that stress strenuous moral self-direction and sacrifice (Dagger 1997, 14; Comparato 2002, 176). We might, therefore, encounter civic virtue as a quality that hinges on 'men's capacity to place the public weal before their own self-interest', an abnegation that demands 'civic virtues such as prudence, justice, courage and modesty' (Opaliński 2002, 165; Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2002, 46). It follows that the kind of individual imagined by the theorist of civic virtue is discernible by their resolute action: 'the true citizen is a politically active citizen who participates in and contributes to the general and public cause', involving themselves in the daily governance of their polity, 'either of the city-state or in representative bodies of the state' (Tilmans 2002, 110). Yet the wherewithal to regularly attend meetings was not the only sacrifice envisioned by theorists of civic virtue. As the product of the politics of the ancient and medieval city, the background of social conflict and war also left an imprint of martial valour on certain conceptualizations of civic virtue. 'The mark of a good citizen was bravery in battle and caution in the council chamber', one scholar observes, and there was expectation that the virtuous citizen would bring 'his sword to the defence of the *patria*' (Grześkowiak-Krwawicz 2002, 46; Peltonen 2002, 105).

No concept in the history of political thought is static. With civic virtue's history spanning the politics of antiquity, the era of civic humanism, and the republicanism of the Enlightenment, it too is, inevitably, shaped by its context in fundamental ways, and what Machiavelli and Montesquieu considered the virtues underpinning a functioning polity could be quite different.<sup>10</sup> As children of the Enlightenment, it would have been the eighteenth-century renderings of civic virtue that Bakunin and Kropotkin would have been most familiar with, yet taking a broader perspective does point to consistent themes spanning the conceptual history of civic virtue. The importance attached to participation in the quotidian activities of political life outlined above, and the demand for the armed defence of these political liberties if necessary, highlights the fact that civic virtue theorists possessed a sense of the concept's essential vulnerability. History informed this anxiety. After all, as much as Machiavelli surveyed the history of republican Rome in order to plunder it for 'lessons of permanent political usefulness', Rome's collapse was an unavoidable feature of this story (Burrow 2008, 270; See also Lintott 1999, 236–243). Describing a cyclical process in *Florentine Histories* (1532), Machiavelli presented Rome's success in securing good living for its citizens undermining civic virtue by encouraging apathy:

Governments [...] proceed from Order to Confusion  
[...] For Virtue begets Peace; Peace begets Idleness;  
Idleness, Mutiny; and Mutiny, Destruction. (Machiavelli 1891, 227)

Martial valour was a wellspring for renewal in Machiavelli's reading – 'there were Captains before Philosophers and Soldiers before Scholars' – and he praised Cato the Elder for his efforts to

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<sup>10</sup> Machiavelli's stress on the 'benign passivity' of good subjects is a case in point, and quite different from the active citizens of Enlightenment imaginings Skinner (2006, 125).

relation to republican notions of civic virtue, but to their awareness that civic virtue could, in the right hands, be an empowering concept defined in terms of empowering enthusiasm and engagement. Indeed, what drew Bakunin's and Kropotkin's qualified praise of the Jacobins was precisely their embodiment of a revolutionary virtue that they saw as one of the noble features of the Revolution. Using the French experience to theorize an anarchist revolution, both thinkers saw the importance of cultivating revolutionary virtues parallel to those of the Jacobins. Developing these civic virtues was important precisely because the values that would allow an anarchist society to function would be nurtured in this revolutionary process: with the liberation of the creative spirit of the people, anarchy would not, they thought, be a utopian delusion.

In charting this path from rebellion to a new society, both Bakunin and Kropotkin rested their hopes on a cluster of attributes that would have been recognizable to republican theorists. The Dantonian audacity of revolutionary action would be civilized into the spirit of confidence and foresight in the commune's meeting room. Machiavelli's insistence on the importance of sacrifice would mature from revolutionary fervour to a sagacious ability to set aside individual prejudice and work towards the common good. Montesquieu's stress on the importance of defending the civic way of life when threatened from outside, would develop into the iron will of anarchist citizens confident in the superiority of their approach to organization, and willing, if necessary, to raise the standard of battle to protect it. All of these approaches to civic virtue, while tending to the dramatic and martial, presuppose the more quotidian involvement in the affairs of the polity: the regular participation of the individual in the daily life of a society unshackled from the tyrannies of capitalism.<sup>21</sup> And only through

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<sup>21</sup> Non-domination therefore necessarily meant the liberation from the 'wage and bond-slavery' of capitalism. Kinna and Prichard, 'Anarchism and Non-Domination'.

project – an imagining of possibilities to clarify the potentials of the present – but whether it was utopian, in the now more common usage of the word, is open to question.

## Conclusion

Bakunin and Kropotkin were not theorists of civic virtue. Neither were they engaged in an attempt to rethink or expand the republican tradition, or to investigate the possibilities of the ideas of a Machiavelli, Montesquieu, or Rousseau in their age. But like every thinker they *were*, to a degree neglected in the scholarship on anarchism, the product of multiple, intricately interlaced, intellectual strands that formed their present, and the heritage that every new generation of rebels confronts. As much, therefore, as their theoretical project may have departed in fundamental ways from the ideas that comprised their intellectual universe, the impressions of a host of traditions found their way into their efforts to confront the challenges of the present, and the influence of Proudhon over the political tradition they inhabited, demanded engagement with the precepts of republican politics.

Civic virtue allows us to consider this process. Freighted, in one reading, with connotations of obedience, sacrifice, and expectation, the conceptual language of civic virtue appears to be the antithesis of the anarchist project of maximizing individual liberty. Seen in the context of Jacobinism, its discordance with anarchist values seems all the more profound. However, as the products of an education that focused on the classics of the Enlightenment, both Bakunin and Kropotkin were more sensitive to the complexities of a nebulous concept like civic virtue, and were aware that the language of civic virtue was not simply in the key of narrow austerity and obedience. Their fascination with the history of the French Revolution, and their multifaceted appreciation of the Jacobins, points not only to the validity of thinking about their anarchism and its

prevent Athenian philosophers from cultivating ‘honest laziness’ in a Roman youth focusing on logic at the expense of the legion Machiavelli (1891, 227; 1989, 23–24). It is clear therefore, that for Machiavelli at least, while participation was an essential virtue in a functioning political society, this alone would never be enough. The willingness to fight to protect these liberties was both essential, and a measure of the dissemination of civic virtue, while, in broader terms, a lively ‘conflict between classes and institutions’ in the body politic was an equally important guard against torpor (Lintott 1999, 243). Above all, however, history demonstrated that the decay of virtue was an inevitability for a languorous citizenry too fixated on its own pleasures.

Strength and heroism may indeed have counted as civic virtues, it might be said, in the context of Florence’s sixteenth-century politics or in the Catonic Rome Machiavelli praised, but the connection between military gallantry and political participation is a leitmotif in discussions of civic virtue more broadly.<sup>11</sup> For Adam Ferguson, for instance, writing in the very different context of the Scottish Enlightenment but looking, like Machiavelli, back to the ancient world for inspiration, something vital had been lost through the ‘devolv[ing] of military service on those who are contented with a subordinate station’ in society. As those elites who should, according to Ferguson, have the clearest interests in defending their station ‘resigned the sword’ to professional soldiers from the lower orders, a different kind of military discipline was necessary that boded ill for domestic political liberties:

A discipline is invented to inure the soldier to perform, from habit, and from the fear of punishment, those hazardous duties, which the love of the public, or a national spirit, no longer inspire (Ferguson 1782, 253; Guena 2002, 188).

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of this in an anarchist context, focusing on Proudhon’s relation to Rousseau, see Prichard (2013, 62–63).

Martial power was not a *sufficient* guarantor of civic virtue – indeed, Ferguson warned against the toxic ‘maxim’ that national ‘grandeur’ lay in territorial conquest – but he nevertheless united military and civic virtues in a way that was characteristic for a particular strand of republican civic virtue theory (Ferguson 1782, 257). Rather than revelling in the military life *per se*, these examples centred on the fear that if citizens were unwilling to make sacrifices in the defence of their liberties, the death knell of the republic was at hand. ‘Political rights, when neglected, are always invaded’, Ferguson noted, and only those polities that ‘reserved the power to defend themselves’ would successfully survive and cultivate the higher arts of political societies (Ferguson 1782, 356). ‘The most celebrated warriors were also citizens’, he added, ‘opposed to a Roman, or a Greek, the chieftain of Thrace, of Germany, or Gaul, was a novice’ (Ferguson 1782, 259).

It was not just a failure to meet the barbarians assembling on Quirinal Hill that imperilled civic virtue, therefore, but rather unwillingness to defend the republic was an expression of a pre-existing demise in civic virtue. As a pervasive theme in republican theorizations of civic virtue it is reasonable to infer that this is an idea with which both Bakunin and Kropotkin would have been familiar, particularly in its Enlightenment articulations. Their shared debt to Proudhon was a key avenue down which this influence travelled, but also the centrality of the Enlightenment to the education of dissident Russians – the ‘French philosophers of the past century’ that Kropotkin ‘plunged into’ as a young man, not to mention his reading of Marcus Aurelius whom Machiavelli thought both virtuous and a protector of civic virtue – highlight this thread.<sup>12</sup> With the defence of the polity so frequently invoked by republican theorists as a means of measuring the presence of civic virtue in a society, Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s early immer-

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Bakunin (1953, 365–367); Kropotkin (1978, 81). On Machiavelli and Marcus Aurelius, Belliotti (2009, 121).

nize collectively to meet a variety of practical challenges; the ability to recognize when one is pursuing one’s particular interests at the expense of the collective good and suppress this impulse; and the practical capacity to participate in a complex of temporary institutions – each with their meetings and discussions – would all be essential. While anarchism’s emphasis on freedom is seen as a defining quality of the tradition – indeed, the anarchist’s is the ‘view from liberty’ – it is clear that this virtuous project is replete with well-defined expectations and demands (Freedman 1996, 311). There is in this again a republican echo, not merely in the emphasis on the expectation of participation, but also in the rewards of virtue, in the republican vision of civic virtue as a form of positive liberty. With anarchist citizens free to truly engage in political life as never before – Bakunin’s righteous revolutionary soldiers and Kropotkin’s magnanimous participants in a meeting room – their civic virtues are an expression of the newly articulated principles of post-capitalist political life. True freedom, for Bakunin and Kropotkin, is secured by abiding by these communally-established values; values firm enough to inform durable political life, but also pliable enough to adapt to changing circumstances and resist the ossification that characterized statist politics. This was a utopian

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Kropotkin saw the willingness to sacrifice (understood in its broadest terms) as virtuous. Consider, for example, his exhortation to the young scientist in ‘To the Young’: ‘Come to our aid with your rigorous logic ... [but] above all, teach us to apply to our reasoning the boldness of true scientific investigation, and, teaching by example, show us how one must sacrifice one’s life for the triumph of truth!’. Or, his article ‘Law and Authority’, where he reflects on the underlying sociality that demonstrates that moral virtues are not the product of legal systems:

The hospitality of primitive peoples, the respect for human life, the feeling of reciprocity [...] the courage to sacrifice oneself in the interest of others, which one learns to practice towards all members of the community – all these qualities developed among mankind before there were any laws. (Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, [1885] 1992), 57, 151).

Anarchist society, he imagined, would make such sacrifices unnecessary, but anarchist citizens would be virtuous enough to make them if a situation demanded it.

of common work', and narrowed by the unit's temporary nature and specific remit, his image of groups sprouting 'spontaneously, organis[ing], federat[ing], discuss[ing]' does not necessarily imply diminished burdens on individuals (Kropotkin 1893, 14; Kropotkin 1907, 175). If its demands on time are uncertain, however, what it does clearly imply is a developed degree of civic virtue that would have been familiar to eighteenth-century republicans. Participants must recognize the superiority of the new model of organization; be willing to work cooperatively, suppressing their individual desires and recognizing what is in the common interest; and be ready to surrender their time to the meetings and discussions this would require. For Kropotkin, these fledgling virtues would take flight in 'Revolution [where] one can dine contentedly [...] on a bit of bread and cheese while eagerly discussing events' and continue to soar once the forces of reaction retreated in the face of anarchy's triumph (Kropotkin 1907, 75). Yet this success would not be without its demands.

Bakunin and Kropotkin both saw the qualities that an anarchist society would require developing during the revolutionary rejection of capitalism. These revolutionary virtues – the ability to organize effectively, the confidence to act decisively, and, potentially, a willingness to self-sacrifice for the good of the collective, especially in a revolutionary situation – would all mutate into a set of characteristics amounting to anarchist civic virtues, Proudhonian 'social virtues' that allowed a federal society to function meaningfully.<sup>20</sup> A spirit of individual initiative; the wherewithal to orga-

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<sup>20</sup> Vincent, *Proudhon*, 87. The idea of self-sacrifice as a virtue in anarchist theory should not be overstated, as, after all, much of Kropotkin's political theory rested on outlining the bounty that a logical political economy could secure, and the idea that this would underpin the flourishing of human potential in anarchist society. Indeed, he also saw the ascetic sacrifices of other forms of communism as an inherent weakness that explained their failures. (For this see, Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*); Matthew S. Adams, 'Rejecting the American Model: Kropotkin's Radical Communalism' (2014, 49–73). Nevertheless, in perilous circumstances – especially in revolutionary contexts – it is clear that

sion in republican thinking would have highlighted this notion, one that would ultimately support, as we will see later, their own perceptions of labour militancy and anarchist revolution.

Montesquieu, another *philosophe* looking to the ancient democracies for guidance in navigating the uncertain waters of eighteenth-century politics, identified virtue as the vital 'spring' for popular government (Montesquieu 1989, 22). As with most discussions of civic virtue, Montesquieu's exact meaning of the term remained opaque, implied by a list of adjectives as opposed to a detailed definition. Yet the contours of the term can be inferred from depictions of its absence, as in, for instance, Montesquieu's dissection of monarchism, a system whose stringent laws, he argued, overrode the need for civic virtue. Monarchy does not depend upon 'love of the homeland, desire for true glory, self-renunciation, sacrifice of one's dearest interests', he argued, or any of the 'heroic virtues we find in the ancients' (Montesquieu 1989, 25). These heroic virtues centred on the suppression of individual wants and desires so that the individual could recognize, and then act, in the common interest, but it also included more exacting qualities of piety and sacrifice. Again, the armed defence of these liberties played a role here, principally because to fight for one's polity was the ultimate expression of the diffusion of civic virtue. These themes came together in the *Persian Letters* (1721), in which Montesquieu used the story of the Troglodytes to consider a community passing through successive forms of government. In a utopian state succeeding a period of Hobbesian war, a virtuous anarchy emerges from the actions of two Troglodytes who 'possessed humanity [...] knew justice [...] [and] loved virtue', and founded a bucolic paradise where everyone 'worked for the common interest' (Montesquieu 1977, 116). Virtue, Montesquieu insisted, was the uniting factor in this society, expressed not only in economic diligence and self-sacrifice, but also in an iron spirit of defiance when envious neighbours turned their eyes towards the Troglodytes' happy community. Their intransigence embodied

a virtue Montesquieu saw in the resistance of Athens to the Persians:

A new ardour burned in their hearts. One man wished to die for his father; another, for his wife and children; a third, for his brothers; a fourth, for his friends; and everyone for the Troglodyte people [...] Such was the combat between injustice and virtue Montesquieu (1977, 111–142 (119)).

The Troglodytes, in their anarchic phase, highlight the importance Montesquieu placed on moral responsibility, economic prudence, and participation as foundational features of a civic virtue that was essential to a democratic community. These qualities were manifest in dramatic form when it was necessary to repel outside aggression, but the day-to-day association between each member of the community and its governing ethos was the real source of its strength.

Viewed in this way, civic virtue, for all its associations with military valour, is primarily a stabilizing concept. It binds individuals in a political community; insulates that community from enervating inaction at home and destructive invasion from abroad; and, theoretically, provides the grounds for thoroughgoing freedom, ensuring that each individual can rest confident in the good sense of their fellows and the robustness of their political compact. But it follows that civic virtue is a demanding concept. As Rousseau recognized, with civic virtue the ‘fundamental principle of Republics’, it relied on a ready identification of the individual with the republic that necessarily also had a performative basis (Rousseau 1920, 59). The emphasis he placed on ‘education, public festivals, and civil religion’, was pitched at cultivating the fraternal qualities upon which political survival depended (Neidleman 2001, 106). For civic virtue theorists, however, such expectations do not theoretically impinge on meaningful freedom, but secure it. Civic virtue is ‘fair-minded political engagement’, in which individuals rely on others’

Although Kropotkin was less inclined to reflect on the more lurid potentialities of revolution, he was also insistent that anarchist society would not be toothless in the face of internal and external challenges. Rather than this strength coming from civic virtue actualized in the aggressive self-assertion of the revolutionary militia, he tended to focus on the qualities of reasoned argument, persuasion, and prudence, reflecting the more urbane behaviours of virtuous republican citizens. Even his discussions of violence, for example, tended to abstract the role of force by focusing on individual and collective affirmation:

The liberty of each is created by his taking it [...] We shall thereupon be met by force, and our opponents will seek to deprive us of our physical liberty [...] but we can take the liberty of pitting our own force against theirs. The Revolution is a question of ideas to be acted upon, and of force to enable us to act upon them (Kropotkin 1998b, 87).

This was a call for vigilance in making sure the conquests of anarchism were not lost, but the thoroughgoing solidarity it implied would, Kropotkin believed, be the beating heart of a viable anarchist community. Just as Bakunin offered an image of a federated set of communes populated by people united first in ‘voluntary associations’ then in ‘autonomous communes’, ‘autonomous provinces’, ‘autonomous regions’ and then countries, Kropotkin too envisioned a bewildering complex of ‘temporary corporations’ and ‘artéls’ cohering to meet specific needs before disbanding (Bakunin 1980, 98; Kropotkin 1914, 193, 272). His emphasis on the ephemerality of these groups was a guard against the congealing of social privilege, but viewed in another way this kind of life would clearly necessitate considerable participation. As much as he argued that the demands for mutual agreement would be limited, reduced only to ‘agree[ing] to some advantageous methods



rights' and warned the communes to be on guard against 'vicious and parasitic individuals'. He even broadened the definition of recalcitrance from the simply lazy to 'antisocial adults', a plastic category potentially vulnerable to abuse (Bakunin 1980, 79, 80). This concern with work reflected a vision of class antagonism in the ancient world, where Bakunin saw the polity 'corrupted' by a split between the 'idleness of the privileged citizens' and the 'relentless activity of the slaves' that made city states vulnerable to 'barbarian' invasion. Spying a repeat of this in 1789, Bakunin echoed the anxieties of some republicans that commerce diminished interest in the commonweal, seeing a nobility 'weakened and demoralized by [its] depraved idleness', and therefore lacking the vigour to withstand the revolution (Bakunin 1980, 89, 90). Possessing civic virtue, the communalist citizens Bakunin imagined are characterized, in contrast, by their participation, discipline, and ability to place the common good before individual desire. This civic virtue, which was a core component of Sorel's subsequent vision of moral regeneration against the decadence of *fin de siècle* society, is even more apparent when Bakunin shifts to the armed defence of these freedoms (Jennings 2011, 386). Repudiating standing armies for the 'disruption, brutalization, and financial ruin' that accompanies them, he proffered 'the militias in Switzerland or the United States' as a more appropriate model, and insisted that 'all able-bodied citizens should [...] take up arms to defend their homes and freedom'. Far from Bakunin's utopian vision amounting to a paradisiacal triumph of peace and harmony, he added that in the context of inter-commune war, 'all members of the revolutionary federation must actively take part in approved wars against a non-federated state' (Bakunin 1980, 86, 87). In this way the revolutionary rabble that he presented as the bearer of the regenerative qualities that would overcome the state and capitalism would endure. The militia would be another crucible of their civic virtue, and their willingness to fight evidence of civic virtue's presence (See also Prichard 2013, 62–63).

civic virtue to protect their freedoms: obeying laws that they have themselves helped – virtuously – formulate (Simpson 2017, 51). In this sense then, civic virtue notionally protects freedom by inculcating the civility necessary for a political organization to function when it lacks, as Montesquieu saw it, the spectacular authority of a despot. In effect, these citizens may formulate their own laws, but the 'emphasis ... [is] ... on the virtue of citizens not needing the force of law to bind them'. These citizens possess the intellectual and moral capacities to rule themselves and live comparatively unhindered lives, the 'reflexive and self-watching' subject of the liberal imagination (von Friedeburg 2002, 133; Joyce 2003, 4).

For civic virtue theorists, problems occur when a new force enters civil society that disrupts the ready association of the individual with the collective and corrodes this self-righting, stabilizing, system. The cynicism of patronage; the destructive power of factionalism; and, as the thirteen colonies felt keenly in the wake of the Seven Years' War, the latent threat of standing armies, could all insert themselves into this relationship (Pocock 1975, 507). Commerce, with its materialism and avarice, could also be one of these forces, although this was not necessarily a consistent fear for theorists of civic virtue and tended to reflect contextual assumptions about trade and capital. For an eighteenth-century thinker such as Montesquieu, for instance, the 'frugality, economy, moderation, labour, wisdom [...] order and restraint' demanded by commerce was a crucible for civic virtue, an attitude reflected, tellingly, by a cluster of Scottish intellectuals including David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith.<sup>13</sup> Equally, property-owning was often seen as a guarantor of an independence that would guard against factionalism (Pocock 1972, 121). For Montesquieu again, the 'Roman property owner was free because he was not in the family of another', and he counselled moderation in the use of property-confiscation as a

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<sup>13</sup> Montesquieu quoted in Richter (1997, 76); Harrington (2001, 38–41).

legal redress as it takes ‘away the equality which is the [...] soul’ of the republic (Montesquieu 1989, 626, 64). A different reading, however, emphasizes the challenge that commerce posed to the social unity demanded by civic virtue. Distracted by prosperity, in J.G.A. Pocock’s words, the ‘commercial man might be social but [...] could never be a wholly political being’. Such an individual may well have the hallmarks of an upstanding citizen but would inevitably rely on ‘intermediaries’ to meet the duties evaded in favour of commercial activity, opening the door to the corruption of civic virtue (Pocock 1985, 121). Perhaps little surprise then that Machiavelli suggested that it ‘should be the object of every well-governed commonwealth to make the State rich and keep individual citizens poor’ (Machiavelli 1883, 118).

Republican theorists saw civic virtue as a concept that ensured the practical functioning of the polity. There is much in these definitions that Bakunin and Kropotkin would, as we shall see, adopt and adapt, and the figure of the resolute republican citizen has an unexpected echo in an anarchist tradition conventionally seen as standing aside from histories rooted in statist concepts of citizenship and civic responsibilities (Ince 2019; Ackelsberg 2013, 6). But if the focus shifts to the demands rather than the rewards implied by this approach to civic virtue, it emerges as a concept potentially freighted with crushing austerity, as its frequent connection to ideas of military valour imply. Here, civic virtue might be seen as demanding the suppression of individuality for the good of the community; as insisting on an asceticism that upholds the status quo at the expense of a destabilizing experimentalism; and even countenancing violence to protect the purity of a threatened polity. This reading of civic virtue is naturally much more problematic for anarchists, although here too we can also see, as we will discover, unexpected echoes of civic virtue’s demands in Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s sense of the requirements of belonging to an anarchist society. It was the French Revolution, an event at the forefront of the anarchist historical imaginary,

tagonism between the two would cultivate an ‘entirely epic state of mind’, inspiring the proletarian virtues that would ‘allow the realization of a freely functioning and prodigiously progressive workshop’ (Sorel 1999, 78, 75, 250; See also Llorente 2017, 78–95). For Bakunin and Kropotkin it was similarly the struggle against capital by labour that nurtured anarchic virtues. While not persuaded that the general strike was alone sufficient, Kropotkin did note its utility in drawing those ‘who are not yet converted, even though they really should be’ to the war against capital. Given the inevitability of the state responding to strikes with violence, he saw ‘the factory rebel becom[ing] a rebel against the State’ too, and solidarity in resistance, nurturing a ‘mutual trust’ underpinning a Dantonian ‘courage’, would mean that in the coming struggle the ‘precious blood of the people will not be spilled in vain’ (Kropotkin 2014a, 309, 311; Kropotkin 2014b, 318).

Just Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s image of revolutionary transition drew on the civic virtues of anarchist revolutionaries, as they looked forward, to a future defined by communal organization and federal cooperation, these virtues would remain essential. Bakunin mused on the nature of this post-revolutionary society in a series of catechisms, all of which emphasized the importance of a freedom that was ‘fully acknowledged and mirrored by the free consent of his fellowmen’ and underpinned by equality. But this liberty was not a warrant for libertinism:

If there is one fundamental principle of human morality, *it is freedom*. To respect the freedom of your fellowman *is duty*; to love, help, and serve him *is virtue* (Bakunin 1980, 76).

For all that Bakunin stressed absolute liberty as the necessary foundation of this society, therefore, he also held that it would demand certain qualities and actions from its citizens. This was not without contradiction. While defending the right to be ‘lazy’, for example, he also declared that ‘work must be the basis of all political

*vir* of virtue, Kropotkin's 'effete' ruling-class, and Bakunin's 'white-gloved' pseudo-revolutionaries – but there are even echoes of the republican image of martial valour as a cornerstone for certain forms of virtuous civic action. Kropotkin was attracted to the 'democratised' armies 'of the Republic' in 1794, just as he was to the militias of the medieval communes, which he presented as expressions of the 'collective life and collective enterprise' of a virtuous populace (Kropotkin 1909, 556; 1914, 181). Similarly, while reflecting on the opportunities for revolution in Italy, Bakunin pondered the 'invincible' force that the Italian peasantry, organized by the industrial workers into an 'army of the Social Revolution', would comprise. Elsewhere, he noted that a force such as this would not demand the coercive discipline of a standing army, but that a 'voluntary and thoughtful discipline, which harmonizes perfectly with the freedom of individuals' would exist in the context of a fluid command structure, never 'petrified' into a conventional military hierarchy (Bakunin 1953, 205, 259). Bakunin thought that this revolutionary army would be unbeatable, but also in its combination of liberty *and* stability, it exhibits the uncoerced civic virtues that would characterize an anarchist society.

If martial valour was an index for republican theorists in locating the existence of civic virtue in a polity – the willingness to fight for their liberties was proof of virtuous citizens – there is an echo of this in Bakunin's and Kropotkin's visions of revolution. But more important than their tendency to reach a little too quickly for images of the musket and cockade, is the reworking, particularly via the language of solidarity, of these martial virtues in a repertoire of labour militancy. Georges Sorel's syndicalism, itself rooted in Proudhon, would later enshrine this translation with particularly vividness. With the bourgeoisie recovering the 'warlike' qualities of capitalism from the 'morass' of democratic welfarism, and, in opposition, the proletariat developing their own 'warlike spirit [...] confident of its revolutionary strength', the sharpening of the an-

that helped cultivate these problematic associations with duty and sacrifice. With the language of virtue omnipresent, it became a guiding, but consistently ill-defined principle in the Revolution's efforts to create a new political order, its ominous potential captured in Maximilien Robespierre's argument before the National Convention that 'the mainspring of popular government [...] amid revolution [...] is virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is impotent'.<sup>14</sup> The sanction for such 'vacuous notion[s] of civic virtue' rested, one scholar writes, not on objective assessments of moral goodness, but on a purely subjective 'self-certainty and sincerity' that fuelled a cannibalistic hunger to consume 'hypocrites' (Smith 1990, 230). A few short months later, Robespierre's jaw and neck would meet this combination of flinty virtue and implacable terror.

## French revolutionary virtues

Heard as a distorted echo of a Jacobin violence whose register was that of daunting obedience and sacrifice, civic virtue no doubt has a hollow ring in anarchist ears. Yet, as the foregoing makes clear, austere submission is only one aspect of civic virtue's conceptual history. This is something that both Bakunin and Kropotkin would have been sensitive to, politicized as they were, like many educated Russians in the nineteenth century, by reading the French classics of Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Kropotkin's thinking also owed something to Bakunin himself, in the sense that Bakunin had been central to establishing anarchism as an independent political creed. While the relationship between the two countrymen is subject to speculation – the younger Kropotkin strangely passing up the opportunity to meet Bakunin in Locarno in 1872 – Kropotkin

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<sup>14</sup> Maximilien Robespierre quoted in Bienvenu (1970, 34).

<sup>15</sup> For their early education, consider Leier (2006, 35–47). Mendel (1981, 32–147); Miller (1976, 15–21).

nevertheless saw him as a pioneering and dynamic exponent of a vital political philosophy, despite their varying stances on particular issues including, for instance, the role of science.<sup>16</sup> ‘Every pamphlet by Bakunin’, he wrote, in 1905, ‘marked a turning point in the history of revolutionary thought in Europe’, and Bakunin’s historical dithyrambs were sustenance too, he added, containing for ‘the thinking reader more philosophical comprehension of history than heaps of university and State-Socialist treatises’ (Kropotkin 1905, 13).

The intellectual connection between the two was therefore very real, one strengthened by a critical engagement with Proudhon’s legacy, but civic virtue was not a term that either thinker used consistently, for a number of interrelated reasons. Given their abiding interest in the history of the French Revolution, which they saw as both a noble episode in a perpetual struggle against the forces of autocracy and a source of profound lessons for future revolutionaries, they were familiar with the Jacobins’ political language, and the importance of civic virtue to this tradition. This French Revolutionary legacy, and the emerging popularity of the language of solidarity in the nineteenth century, which increasingly occupied much of the conceptual ground of civic virtue in the socialist tradition (Gourevitch 2015, 17, 140), accounts for its waning rhetorical power. Its Revolutionary associations with the ‘ardent, austere’ rebel did not necessarily point to the joy of revolutionary self-expression, even more so when the Jacobins’ commitment to moral regeneration might entail such uninspiring outcomes as the ‘regimentation’ of citizens’ clothing and diet (Jennings 2011, 8). The post-Revolutionary history of civic virtue, especially in the context of the institutionalizing of the Third Republic – an era in which Bakunin was producing his mature writing and

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<sup>16</sup> For an overview of these differences, see Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 177, 186–189. For a useful qualifier, see Kinna (2016, 13–23). For the missed meeting, see Kropotkin (1978, 202–205) and Ward (2010, 212–214).

efforts to canalize the momentum via outmoded representative institutions, as he argued when discussing the issue of housing:

Sixty elected persons sitting round a table and calling themselves a Municipal Council, cannot arrange the matter on paper. It must be arranged by the people themselves, freely meeting to settle the question for each block of houses, each street [...] proceeding by agreement from the single to the compound [...] all having their voice [...] and putting in their claims with those of their fellow citizens. (Kropotkin 1998a; 97–102 (101))

Echoing Proudhon’s Rousseauian image of the individual ‘libre, à ses risques et périls, d’obéir à la voix de sa conscience’, there was no need for representation when anarchist citizens, their virtue invigorated by revolution, could organize affairs more efficiently on their own initiative (Proudhon 1850, 17; Vincent 1984, 57).

While there are differences in the way that Bakunin and Kropotkin approached conceptualizing revolution, a unifying factor was the notion that the struggle would liberate and cultivate the qualities necessary for a functioning anarchist society. This is clear in Bakunin’s liberated individual looking afresh at the enticements of science, and in Kropotkin’s practical revolutionaries cooperating to organize the necessities of daily life. For both thinkers, these were not abilities that would disappear with victory over the state but would rather mature and strengthen under the sun of a newly free society. All the qualities that Bakunin and Kropotkin associated with these revolutionaries would have been familiar to republican theorists of civic virtue. The rebels are confident in their objectives, possessed of formidable sagacity, and are fully capable of setting aside any personal interests in the pursuit of the common good. Moreover, not only are their revolutions expressions of a certain virility – remembering the

guides the revolution through the travails that Kropotkin imagined would confront it and is defined by the qualities of civic virtue:

In the streets wander thousands of men, who in the evening crowd into improvised clubs asking: 'What shall we do?' and ardently discuss public affairs, in which all take interest; those who yesterday were [...] indifferent are perhaps the most zealous. Everywhere there is plenty of goodwill and a keen desire to make victory certain. It is a time of supreme devotion. (Kropotkin 1907, 23)

Quixotic it may be, but the instinctive virtue displayed by Kropotkin's rebels – their good sense and dedication to political life – was crucial to the communistic character that he believed any durable revolution must possess. With the complexity of the modern world meaning 'each branch of production is knit up with all the rest', Kropotkin argued that the communist logic of 'to every man according to his needs' was the only equitable form of economic organization (Kropotkin 1907, 29, 32). This economic model rested to a considerable degree on the civic virtues of anarchist citizens, for it placed daunting demands on both their participation and altruism. Securing housing, food, and clothing were the immediate objectives of Kropotkin's revolution, but he envisioned the same principles organizing the redistribution of these assets, and eventually coordinating agricultural and industrial production in post-capitalist society. The key was to avoid

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of this into anarchist conceptions of revolution are often, in a sense, rhetorical rather than practical. Bakunin and Kropotkin both used masculinist imagery of violence and, in their visions of the French Revolution, martial valour, but this did not, at least in theory, negate the contribution of women to the revolutionary effort. This is clear, for example, in Kropotkin's comments on Russian nihilism, where he recognized the leading role of women. For this, see: Kinna, *Kropotkin*, 64–68, 105–106. For civic virtue's gendered language, see Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 13 and Mongoven (2009, 9–11).

Kropotkin was turning towards anarchism – is also crucial. With Jacobinism increasingly defined, in the context of France's post-Franco-Prussian War state-building, by its 'vigorous defence of the State', civic virtue's Jacobinical inflection would have been unpalatable for anarchists (Hazareesingh 2002, 6). This was, after all, the era in which the term 'Jacobin' emerges in the anarchist tradition as an appellation intended to signify authoritarianism, an association that both Bakunin and Kropotkin promoted, and one they felt particularly relevant in the context of anarchism's enduring struggle with Marxism for the heart of the labour movement. An image of Marx haunts both Kropotkin's lament that the 'modern radical is a centralizer, a State partisan, a Jacobin to the core', and Bakunin's definition of modern Jacobins in the context of the Paris Commune as 'fanatical defenders of the State' (Kropotkin 1908, 38; Bakunin 1980, 234).

Yet, just as civic virtue has more complex associations than austere submission or martial glory, closer inspection reveals that both Bakunin and Kropotkin also tended to hold a more nuanced appreciation of the Jacobins than these comments might imply, at once attracted by their revolutionary purity, but repelled by the intolerant fanaticism and the centralization this could engender. Indeed, what is striking is that despite the role of Jacobinism in discrediting the language of virtue, and despite the apparent incompatibility of anarchism and the language of civic virtue, it was precisely the qualities of Jacobin virtue – fearlessness, incorruptibility, and brio – that they found most attractive. In one sense, their reading of the Jacobins was perhaps more historically acute than their polemical tendencies suggested: they may have agreed with the assertion that 'Jacobinism began as a libertarian doctrine of individual freedom and becoming' (Higonnet 1998, 258). Seeking to better understand their role in the political aspect of what Bakunin and Kropotkin interpreted as a more profound *social* revolution, both endeavoured to locate the theoretical weaknesses of Jacobinism in a deeper, Enlightenment, pre-history. This reading emphasized the

recurrent failure to jettison the fetish of the state in radical intellectual circles as a limiting factor in revolutionary France, through an engagement with key republican theorists of civic virtue.

The thrust of Bakunin's and Kropotkin's critique of the Revolution was that centralizing political forces fettered the local, largely spontaneous, action of the peasantry and working class that gave the uprising its initial élan. Both frequently indicted Jacobinism as an archetype of this attempt at control. As Bakunin wrote:

The Jacobin, bourgeois, exclusively political revolution of 1792–94 was bound to lead to legal hypocrisy and the solution of all difficulties and all questions by the victorious argument of the guillotine. (Bakunin 1953, 414)

Before this ossification of revolutionary virtue into political forms, Bakunin saw in the actions of the National Convention's deputies an admirable model for inspiring action, however. Cognisant of the true source of the Revolution's power, when they arrived in a provincial town, Bakunin argued that these deputies addressed themselves not to the 'revolutionaries in white gloves' but to the '*sansculottes*, to the rabble' (Bakunin 1953, 391). The implied contrast between the foppish fellow-travellers of the Revolution and the horny-handed authenticity of the revolutionary *sans culottes* hints at Bakunin's perception of revolution as a virile act of self-assertion. These were qualities the Jacobins possessed, he argued, a 'revolutionary mind, will, and energy' but also a 'demon within the flesh', an unshakeable conviction in the Revolution 'which put a truly heroic imprint upon the men of 1793' (Bakunin 1953, 389).

Civic virtue, derived from *virtus*, which given its derivation from *vir* carried with it masculine connotations of 'strength and boldness', is at the heart of Bakunin's comments regarding the Jacobins' qualities as ardent revolutionaries, and informs his image

During the period of decay [...] there rises [...] a minority of persons who are not corrupted [...] who are [...] spirited, intelligent, and magnanimous individuals who prefer truth to their own interests and who have arrived at the idea of people's rights (Bakunin 1953, 356, 357).

In the context of an explicitly anarchist rebellion, Bakunin imagined the uprisen populace as a 'rude, savage force capable of heroic feats' venting their 'ruthless' vengeance, but also profoundly logical, 'guided by their admirable sound sense' (Bakunin 1953, 380, 381, 382). This, he believed, would mean revolutionaries would not repeat the errors of 1789 and address economic issues first – the 'bread and leisure' denied by capitalism – but that this process would also witness a general emancipation of initiative (Bakunin 1953, 380, 381, 382). 'Spontaneous action' would be 'brought back to the commune by virtue of the abolition of the State', Bakunin insisted, and he predicted great things for the 'free and proud' revolutionaries: 'All will unite and march with fresh vigour toward new conquests in science as well as in life'.

Where Bakunin's palette was comprised of bold primary colours, Kropotkin tended towards the more muted end of the spectrum when thinking through the nature of anarchist revolution. That is not to suggest that Kropotkin did not find himself carried along with the romanticism of revolution – he could readily picture the barricades, fleeing bureaucrats, and mutinous army – but he was certainly more focused on detail than Bakunin (Kropotkin 1907, 22–23). As with Bakunin, however, Kropotkin's revolution was defined by a process of self-assertion, in which the 'effete and powerless' ruling class retreated before the virile revolutionaries, and by the unleashing of the revolutionaries' innate good sense.<sup>19</sup> The liberation of this organizational acumen

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that while the language of civic virtue, as the very origins of 'virtue' as a term make clear, are inherently gendered, the translations

ing that has remained central to the anarchist tradition, albeit one finessed into formulas such as ‘fluid solidarity’, that stresses anarchist commitments to ephemerality and non-binding agreements (Bamyeh 2010, 38). It also stands as an essentially ahistorical concept in their thought, a human characteristic that might potentially inform liberation from capital and the state. Yet as the discussion of civic virtue above has demonstrated, republican analyses were especially sensitive to the *demands* of civic virtue, and republican theorist’s anxieties pointed to a quality that seemed to be always imminently imperilled, with egoism, laziness, and vested interests ready to corrupt virtuous citizens.

To imagine, however, that because Bakunin and Kropotkin cleaved to a timeless notion of solidarity that they did not consider the behaviours necessary to a functioning anarchist society would be incorrect. In their utopian mode, they saw anarchist citizens expressing their essential solidarity through a particular set of civic virtues, virtues that flowered in the midst of a rebellion, and were developed and reinforced by the practical organizational modes of an anarchist society. If solidarity was a propensity towards cooperation therefore, cooperative individuals would manifest civic virtues that were often as demanding as those outlined by the republican theorists Bakunin and Kropotkin had read as young men. Bakunin portrayed these virtues as an inherent quality of the revolutionary temper. Despite the slave-societies they created, he saw the ‘celebrated republicans of Greece and Rome’ defined by their heroism, ‘sacrific[ing] themselves [...] for the benefit of the class which to them constitutes the whole people’. Hot on the heels of this heroism, however, as many republicans would have agreed, was the abuse of the privileges that this dynamism secured, ‘beget[ting] egoism, cowardice, meanness, and stupidity’. Yet such is the dialectic of revolution, Bakunin continued, that this decadence could only ever be temporary:

of revolution (Dagger 1997, 13). This continued into his discussion of violence. Noting that ‘the people are not cruel’ and any violence would be a ‘spontaneous’ outburst against their ‘tormentors’, he nevertheless drew a distinction between these passionate ‘bloody’ eruptions, and the ‘calculated, cold, legal terror [of the] guillotine’ once the Revolution veered off course (Bakunin 1953, 413; Bakunin 1980, 100; Bakunin 1953, 414). Where Bakunin portrayed manliness in terms of being a ‘thinking’ and ‘active’ individual, ‘proud and calm in the awareness of his liberty which he won by freeing himself’ – qualities familiar to a strand of civic virtue thinking discussed above – the formalized violence of the Terror violated all of these traits through its dull, legal, processes (Bakunin 1953, 59). The ultimate cause of the Revolution’s failure for Bakunin was its hesitation in dealing with the underlying economic problems confronting France, leaving inequality intact and allowing the bourgeoisie to simply usurp the office of the nobility (Bakunin 1953, 390; Bakunin 1980, 163). However its failure was also the product of the faltering energy and conviction that was apparent at the beginning of the Revolution, but was destroyed as political interests bound the Revolution’s creative power. Once, in other words, its virtue faltered.

Kropotkin offered a similarly paradoxical vision of the Jacobins. As with Bakunin, the issue of rigidification was central, seeing the formalization of the Jacobins into a ‘party’ as a Rubicon moment that mirrored the Revolution’s subjection to political forces. Initially an ill-defined group characterized by competing interests, Kropotkin saw the Jacobins at their height as one of the few noble political expressions of the Revolution, committed to securing ‘tangible results – that is to say, to destroy[ing] [...] royalism, to crush[ing] the [...] aristocracy and the clergy, to abolish[ing] feudalism and to establish[ing] the Republic’ (Kropotkin 1909, 311). In reaching this position he also offered magnanimous portrayals of key Jacobins. Marat emerges as a devoted and clear-sighted revolutionary who unfairly acquired a posthumous reputation as

a ‘sinister exterminator’, but was in reality someone who ‘gave himself entirely’ to the Revolution and lived ‘in absolute poverty’ amongst the people (Kropotkin 1909, 394). Saint-Just too had his moments of ‘republican probity’, Kropotkin argued, when preaching violence to menace ‘the foes of the Republic’ before the Convention (Kropotkin 1909, 543). If both Marat and Saint-Just were praised for reflecting identifiably civic virtues – self-assertion, authenticity, boldness – Robespierre was presented as embodying these qualities. He was, Kropotkin asserted, a man of ‘strength of will and intelligence’, whose fanaticism ‘sprang from the purity of his intentions’ and kept him ‘incorruptible in the midst of a widespread corruption’ (Kropotkin 1909, 551). Where Kropotkin echoed Bakunin’s identification of noble revolutionary virtues at work in these years, he similarly saw the squandering of the Revolution’s promise in its failure to address material inequality. The distraction of foreign invasion was key, and he saw this cultivating an atmosphere of paranoia in which the virtues of the ‘advanced revolutionaries’ could not resist the impulse to control the Revolution through centralizing authority (Kropotkin 1909, 323, 551). With France increasingly polarized between, in Robespierre’s words, ‘traitors and conspirators’ and ‘patriot leaders’, the focus shifted to making ‘terrible examples of all scoundrels who have outraged liberty’.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting on these phrases, Kropotkin concluded that it was no longer ‘the revolutionist who speaks but a member of a Government using the language of all Governments’ (Kropotkin 1909, 554). Virtue had been corrupted.

For both Bakunin and Kropotkin, the collapse of the French Revolution was the product of economic faintheartedness and the external pressure of invasion, all of which exacerbated tendencies to domination inherent in Jacobin politics. Underpinning this critique, therefore, was an indictment of the intellectual foundations of the Revolution, especially the tired forms of republican poli-

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<sup>17</sup> Robespierre quoted in *Ibid.*, 554.

(Nightingale 2015, 68). As his criticism of Rousseau implied, he saw solidarity as humanity’s essential state, an ‘inevitable dependence’ through which every individual is ‘irrevocably chained to the natural and social world’ (Bakunin 1953, 97). He more frequently invoked solidarity as a weapon of internationalist cooperation against bourgeois society, ‘embrac[ing] the workers of the world, powerfully organized for their defense, for waging war against exploitation’ (Bakunin 1980, 251). If the international working class – including for Bakunin the tattered underclass, brigands, and rebels – recognized the nature of their shared exploitation and latent power, the death of class society was at hand. Kropotkin’s position mirrored much of this. Given his Comtean proclivities, it is unsurprising that he embraced solidarity, and his sociological project focused on detailing its significance as a force in biological and ethical evolution. He thus presented solidarity as an ‘instinct’ but also as the ‘conscience’ of humanity: a logic of survival in animal communities ‘much more advantageous [...] than [...] predatory inclinations’ that would be reinforced by natural selection, and in advanced species, a ‘feeling’, a ‘deeply human need’, to exist in association with others (Kropotkin 1914, xiii, 16, 292). The more narrowly political expression of this, as with Bakunin, was an emphasis on cultivating cooperation in the workers’ movement. ‘The concept of workers’ solidarity must become more than just a saying’, he urged in 1881, ‘it must become a daily reality for all [...] nations’. Such concerted action would make the rebels unstoppable, he hoped, inaugurating ‘a new era [...] based on Equality, Solidarity and Labour’ (Kropotkin 2014a, 309, 311). For both, these virtues were a Proudhonian ‘animating spirit’ that made a post-state society a feasible option (Vincent 1984, 56).

Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s discussions of solidarity tended to emphasize the *benefits* of solidarity as an existential and practical force: as the quality that defines being human and is crucial in overcoming the particularism of capitalist society. This is a read-



archist ethics would emerge during an upheaval that would then underpin a functioning anarchist society at its end. For all that the guillotine blemished with blood the language of civic virtue, both Bakunin's and Kropotkin's utopian sketches are populated by remarkably virtuous individuals displaying qualities that would have been recognizable to a Montesquieu, Rousseau, or Ferguson, albeit within a very different institutional framework. These noble anarchists return us, however, to the dualism of the utopian: their characters are sketched in utopian pictures of possible futures designed to stir revolutionaries, but perhaps also, in these virtuous individuals, we see the 'hopelessly impractical' at the heart of their anarchism (Davis 2009, 73).

The shadow of the Terror may have worked against the popularity of the language of civic virtue on the left in the nineteenth century, but the emergence of 'solidarity' was also crucial. Solidarity, a term popularized by French 'utopian' socialists and soon picked up by sociologists like Auguste Comte, emerged as a ubiquitous and highly mutable concept in socialist thought (Stjernø 2009, 25–41), and one whose lexical connotations of unity and harmony were more palatable for socialists than civic virtue's post-French Revolutionary associations with austere probity (Mattern 2016, 37). Civic virtue and solidarity therefore are 'certainly related', but this relation has been conceptualized in different ways: the terms seen as synonyms; solidarity theorized as a subset of particular civic virtues; or, conversely, civic virtue presented as a principle of 'active' solidarity (Scholz 2010, 31; Dagger 1997, 176–181; Halldenius 1998, 335–353 (335n1); Gourevitch 2015, 17).

Both Bakunin and Kropotkin gravitated to solidarity, tending to use it as a synonym for the qualities of civic virtue, but also in an abstract sense as an essential quality of humanity away from the particularities of political society. Civic virtues were thus the expression of underlying solidarity in certain historical and social contexts. For Bakunin, for example, solidarity allowed us to understand both abstract humanity and humans in class societies

tics towards which the revolutionaries gravitated. Developing this theoretical position amounted to a critical, if uneven, engagement with key Enlightenment civic virtue theorists. Bakunin, for example, in a move that would become popular for Cold War liberals, identified Rousseau as laying the foundations for the Terror:

Rousseau invented the Supreme Being, the abstract and sterile God [...] And it was in the name of the Supreme Being, and of the hypocritical virtue commanded by this Supreme Being, that Robespierre guillotined first the Hébertists and then the very genius of the Revolution, Danton. (Bakunin 1970, 80)

The root of Bakunin's rebuttal rested on what he saw as Rousseau's erroneous appreciation of the origins of the state. Offering a false dichotomy between 'primitive men enjoying absolute liberty [...] in isolation' on the one hand, and, on the other, a social compact where 'some [...] freedom is surrendered to assure the rest', Bakunin argued that Rousseau both misunderstood humanity's innate sociality, and opened the door to the dominion of the state (Bakunin 1980, 128). His description again revolved around a contrast between the 'sterile' legalism of the Terror and the virile assertion of spontaneous revolutionary violence. Tied, in this example, to a deeper intellectual history of pallid Enlightenment philosophizing, the implicit juxtaposition is with Bakunin's own haematic language, and few political thinkers, save perhaps Joseph de Maistre, have invested their rhetoric with quite so much blood. Dismissing as 'fraudulent' the argument that the liberty offered in the context of state society was compensation for the loss of natural freedom, Bakunin elsewhere turned to another virtue theorist, Machiavelli, to expose the chicanery at the heart of state power (Bakunin 1980, 261). Offering surprising praise for the 'great Italian political philosopher', he saw Machiavelli's deification of the state as a product of confining contextual

circumstances, namely an inability to see the people as anything but an ‘inert and inept mass’ (Bakunin 1980, 135). Machiavelli’s commitment to perfidy in the pursuit and maintenance of power nevertheless revealed, whether it be monarchy or republic, that ‘crime will always’ underpin the state, with the ‘permanent violation of justice, compassion, and honesty’ the cost of securing its dominance. This was the irresistible logic of statism, and for Bakunin, a glance at ‘three and a half centuries’ of history demonstrated that ‘while [...] small states are virtuous only because of their weakness, the powerful [...] sustain themselves by crime alone’ (Bakunin 1980, 135).

With the French revolutionaries drawing their political models from Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, it was clear, from Bakunin’s perspective, why the locomotive of history slipped from its rails in September 1793. Kropotkin shared much of this vision, but the consistency of his engagement with the philosophical, scientific, and political currents that flowered from the thicket of eighteenth-century intellectual life points to a very different approach from the methodological and rhetorical objectives of Bakunin. His reading of Rousseau, for example, tended to reflect the ambiguities of the source material. We thus encounter Rousseau the nascent anti-statist; Rousseau the ‘sentimentalise[r]’ of ‘Roman doctrines of the all-powerful state’; Rousseau the pioneer of social scientific methods; and Rousseau the idealist, naively seeing in nature ‘love, peace, and harmony’ (Kropotkin 1995a, 237; Kropotkin 2014c, 566; Kropotkin 1995b, 24; Kropotkin 1914, 5). He also recognized a radicalism in social contract theory that Bakunin did not, pointing out that while it did indeed open the door to centralizing authority, it was also an important ‘weapon with which to fight royalty and divine right’ (Kropotkin 1908, 5). It was *this* Rousseau at the centre of Kropotkin’s analysis of the Revolution. He even went as far as to argue that one of the Revolution’s essential failures was not cleaving to the radical logic of thinkers like Rousseau closely enough and allowing the

The notion seems to have been that in Utopia citizens [...] would be animated only and at all times by stern considerations of the public weal, at least when assembled in the forum: all considerations of personal or local interest would be banished. When the personal did intrude it had to be subsumed in the public. (Brogan 2006, 277)

While playing on the negative connotations of utopian – its equation with a ‘hopelessly impractical, or dangerously idealistic [...] quest for perfection’ – anarchists have often held a far more positive view of the utopian impulse (Davis 2009, 73). Introducing Emile Pouget and Emile Pataud’s syndicalist utopia *Comment nous ferons la révolution* (1909), for instance, Kropotkin reflected on the principal objection to utopianism, the argument that ‘romances’ were not only a waste of creative effort but could also establish plans that ‘hamper the creative force of a people in Revolution’ (Kropotkin 1990, xxxi). He was not persuaded. As long as these works of imagination did not dictate a path, Kropotkin argued, utopian speculation was a useful tool, encouraging concrete reflection on the kind of society desired, but also fostering a critical dissatisfaction with the present.

Bakunin held a less generous view of utopianism. Tending to associate it with efforts to form experimental communes in the present that would protect their inhabitants from the barbarities of the state and capitalism, he argued that while these ‘plans are very fine, extremely magnanimous and noble’, they were hopelessly unrealistic and would never secure meaningful change (Bakunin 1980, 348). Yet despite his scepticism, Bakunin was, like Kropotkin, a habitual painter of utopian pictures. This is apparent in their efforts to gauge the legacies of the French Revolution; believing that knowledge of its failures would be invaluable in any future revolution, they quickly shifted to imagining what that revolution might look like, and to examining the ways in which a set of distinctively an-

century philosophy that both thinkers saw inspiring the Revolution. Where Bakunin traced a direct line of duplicity, Kropotkin held a similar, but more nuanced, view. He saw the intellectual advances of the previous century preparing the ground for the social and political changes of the French Revolution but falling short in failing to renounce the state. The civic virtues of republicanism, invigorated by the Revolutionary enthusiasm of 1789, pointed to a different conclusion: that these virtues would be enough to build a functioning, orderly, and vital society, free from the tyranny of the modern state. For all its intellectual courage, for both Bakunin and Kropotkin, the republican tradition had failed to recognize this truth. Either way, it was *this* fixation that imperilled the Revolution, not the Jacobins' commitment to virtue, which was, in fact, their magnetic quality.

## Utopian civic virtues

There may well have been more than 'simple zealotry' to the Jacobin's efforts to create *'l'homme régénéré'*, but just as the descent of the Revolution into bloodletting alienated a generation of socialists from the very concept of revolution, the language of virtue similarly fell into disfavour (Neidleman 2001, 101; Pilbeam 2000, 27–38). Yet it would be incorrect to overstate this shift. As Alexis de Tocqueville journeyed around the United States in the 1830s, for instance, questions of civic virtue, classically seen as incompatible with the depersonalized politics of large nation-states, were on his mind. Even though Tocqueville's parents nearly lost their lives to the Terror, he stated that he knew of 'no higher principle' than that of virtue, and praised innovations such as the jury system for cultivating 'that manly confidence without which political virtue cannot exist' in America's democratic experiment (Tocqueville 1848, 265, 311). For one of Tocqueville's biographers, this commitment to the concept of civic virtue was supremely utopian:

leadership of the political crisis to fall into the hands of those with sectional interests. As he commented, where some were 'actuated only by purely selfish motives', others had,

drunk from that sublime font, the eighteenth-century philosophy, which was the source of all the great ideas that have arisen since. The eminently scientific spirit of this philosophy; its profoundly moral character, moral even when it mocked at conventional morality; its trust in the intelligence [...] and greatness of the free man when he lives among his equals; its hatred of despotic institutions – were all accepted by the revolutionists. (Kropotkin 1909, 9)

This was a source of revolutionary virtue that would be squandered as events unfolded.

Kropotkin's encomiums to the profundities of eighteenth-century philosophy – and his insistence that these values were the foundation for the achievements of the modern age – might seem to place him at some distance from Bakunin. Where, in Bakunin's reckoning, Robespierre emerges as an amanuensis for the thoughts of Rousseau, a role that ultimately imperils the Revolution, Kropotkin presents the republican philosophy represented by figures like Rousseau as a positive force. Both see these ideas as motors of change, but the destinations mapped by them appears quite different. Yet Kropotkin did also see the Revolution's republicanism as an obstacle. The solution to this problem rests in Kropotkin's quest for a synthesis, a belief that, following in the footsteps of Auguste Comte, a grand 'synthetic philosophy' that offered a 'unified, systematic summary of the whole of our knowledge' was not only viable but essential.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it was precisely in this context that he tended to lavish most praise on the

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<sup>18</sup> Kropotkin (1995b, 31). For the influence of Comte on Kropotkin, see Adams (2016).

eighteenth-century philosophers, their greatest achievement not being their political ideas *per se*, but their radically new technique for comprehending the natural and social worlds. Immanuel Kant, ‘the French Encyclopaedists’, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith, Kropotkin argued, were innovative because they boldly wrenched the consideration of moral problems from the hands of religious dogmatists (Kropotkin 1995b, 31). Moreover, they did this through a method of ‘generalisation’ borrowed from the natural sciences, an epistemology in evidence, he thought, when Rousseau turned his attention to explaining the origins of society (Kropotkin 1995b, 24). Tied to this keenly historical sense of European intellectual history, was a distinctly ahistorical interpretation of the state. Seeing in statism an essentially immutable set of characteristics – centralized authority; a monopoly on force; a powerful bureaucracy; a reverence for formal law; a state-sanctioned education system; and an industrial system that monopolized land and concentrated wealth in the hands of the few – in evidence from Neronian Rome to Bismarckian Prussia, Enlightenment philosophy, for all its moral impudence, failed to liberate itself from the creed of the state (Kropotkin 1909, 5). This, Kropotkin argued, was one of the abiding lessons of the French Revolution and showed the importance of revolutionary audacity. In 1793, ‘a government composed of men more or less honest’ set themselves the job of transforming the state, ‘purifying [...] the administration, [...] separate[ing] church and state, civic liberty, and such matters’ (Kropotkin 1907, 61). These were worthwhile struggles, but they failed to prioritize the most important feature of the social revolution – economic redistribution and food – and their concentration on narrowly political solutions was something future revolutions must avoid.

Both Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s appreciation of the Jacobins’ role in the French Revolution is more complex than is usually allowed. While ‘Jacobin’ certainly entered their lexicon of political abuse, representing centralization and authoritarian violence, they

equally saw in Jacobinism the qualities that true revolutionaries must possess: unshakable conviction, a spirit of self-sacrifice, and devotion to a set of profound philosophical principles. When in polemical mode the Jacobins emerged as the epitome of statist reaction, but in historical mode, the case is quite different. As Bakunin himself argued:

There are Jacobins and Jacobins. There are Jacobin lawyers and doctrinaires [...] presumptuous, despotic, and legalistic republican[s] [...] And there are Jacobins who are frankly revolutionaries, the heroes, the last sincere representatives of the democratic faith of 1793. (Bakunin 1980, 265)

If a core ambition of the Jacobins was to establish a ‘universal’ model of citizenship stressing virtuous self-direction and participation as a unifying identity, above the particular claims of ‘religion, estate, family, and region’, there is little Bakunin and Kropotkin would disagree with here (Walzer 1989, 211). Overcoming the atavistic particularism of religion, class, and region, was an objective that any anarchist revolutionary should share.

The language and ethos of civic virtue infused this model of citizenship, and both Bakunin and Kropotkin repeatedly expressed admiration for those perceived characteristics of the Jacobins that embodied their virtue. The problem was therefore not necessarily the model itself, but its corruption in the revolutionary tumult, which they attributed to a cluster of forces. One factor, which would reappear in 1917, was revolutionary isolation. With a powerful league formed between external powers fearing the internationalization of revolution, and internal enemies eager to preserve their property and lives, an air of paranoia descended upon a vulnerable political experiment. More distinctively anarchist was the indictment of the failure to break with the idea of the state. This was a weakness of the Jacobins, but it was one that ran through the eighteenth-