

# **Religious Anarchism**

**New Perspectives**

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# PREFACE

Both religion and anarchism have been increasingly politically active of late, often (though by no means always) behind the same lines and for similar causes. At Genoa or Porto Alegre, behind slogans such as “Stop the War” and “Another World Is Possible,” in response to the environmental catastrophe or to the financial crisis, followers and activists of both religion and anarchism have been criticising orthodoxies and voicing radical alternatives. Both groups have attracted new members, and both have revived the interest of scholars and other observers. Within many academic disciplines—politics, sociology, anthropology, law, theology, philosophy, history, you name it—specialists and commentators on religion and on its relation with politics have been busy observing, reflecting and sharing their conclusions. Many of these academic disciplines have also been enriched by critiques and contributions coming from anarchist thought and practice. In short, both anarchism and politically-engaged religion have been increasingly noticed, analysed, and thought from. Yet despite this, it would seem that the overlap between the two has so far not been blessed by a similar explosion of interest. This lack of interest is even more acute for *religious anarchism*—where it is not just an overlap anymore but where anarchism is rooted in religion—perhaps in part precisely because many find rather uncomfortable approaches to religions which treat them almost as forms of political ideologies, as perspectives on the world that directly inform and enthuse political behaviour.

Indeed, some have argued that religion and anarchism do not really mix, that each stands for the opposite of the other. Religions are hierarchic and manipulative, many have insisted, and anarchism vehemently opposes such oppressive constructions. Besides, anarchists are often committed atheists, others have rejoined, which means that they reject the most basic proposition upon which a religious outlook can be developed. Yet however true both (admittedly here heavily simplified) arguments might be, and despite the prevalence of their proponents, there have also always been advocates of fruitful dialogue between the two, with many even seeing a clear continuity between religion and anarchism. One recent publication on anarchist studies even boldly remarks that “every religion supports anarchy in religious teachings.”<sup>1</sup> The *a priori* impermeable incompatibility of religion and anarchism, therefore, cannot be taken for granted. The debate is ongoing and will no doubt continue to provide measured and thoughtful contributions.<sup>2</sup> Some of these will inevitably emanate from the here central field of religious anarchism.

This field, it is worth noting, has been around for at least as long as “secular” anarchism, and has produced numerous primary sources in the form of books, articles, pamphlets and the like. The academic literature usually cites Leo Tolstoy as the most famous (sometimes even as the only) Christian anarchist writer, but there are many others, such as Jacques Ellul, Vernard Eller, Dave Andrews or those associated with the *Catholic Worker* movement. There are also anarchists from other religious traditions, although

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Kemmerer, “Anarchy: Foundations in Faith,” in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 200.

<sup>2</sup> I am not aware of a generic, in-depth and exhaustive study on the religion and anarchism debate, but good sources on it do include: “Editorial,” *The Raven: anarchist quarterly* 25 7/1 (1994); George Bradford, “Nature, Flesh, Spirit: Against Christianity,” *The Fifth Estate*, Summer 1984; Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. George W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991); Ammon Hennacy, “Can a Christian Be an Anarchist?,” in *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writings on the Anarchist Tradition*, ed. Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (Garden City: Anchor, 1966); Bill Kellerman and Bill McCormick, “Anarchy and Christianity: An Exchange,” *The Fifth Estate*, Summer 1984, 22; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1993), chap. 6; George Walford, “Through Religion to Anarchism,” *The Raven: anarchist quarterly* 25 7/1 (1994); Nicolas Walter, “Anarchism and Religion,” *The Raven: anarchist quarterly* 25 7/1 (1994); Colin Ward, “Anarchist Entry for a Theological Dictionary,” *The Raven: anarchist quarterly* 25 7/1 (1994).

their anarchist credentials are no more frequently the subject of meticulous scholarly analysis than their Christian counterparts'. Even on Christian anarchism—the religious anarchism which, for a number of historical reasons, has generated the most literature in the area—no book-length study covering most of its many thinkers or encapsulating their generic contribution has been published to date. In other words, religious anarchism has been both present and understudied for a while now.

That, however, may be changing. For a start, most introductory texts on anarchism already do include sections on religious anarchism.<sup>3</sup> More recent collections of essays on anarchism have also featured chapters on religious anarchism.<sup>4</sup> My doctoral thesis, which weaves together existing threads of Christian anarchist thought, attempts to offer precisely the sort of generic study mentioned above.<sup>5</sup> And of course, there is the present volume, which, while not offering a systematic overview of the various voices in religious anarchism “out there,” does instead gather *new* perspectives—current scholarship—on particular strands of religious anarchism.

This present volume is a proud child of the Anarchist Studies Network, part of the (British) Political Studies Association. More specifically, it is a child of the first ever conference on anarchism organised under the network’s auspices, in Loughborough, in September 2008. For that conference, I set out to convene a stream on “Religious Anarchisms” with the aims of bringing together researchers interested in religious anarchism, providing space for conversations between them and with other anarchists, and sharing ideas and projects for the future. The call for papers reaped more proposals than I had expected, and in the end nine papers were presented over three panels. The topics covered were diverse, the panels well attended, and the audiences clearly engaged by the presentations. The stream, in other words, was a success which defied any initially modest expectations.

To consolidate that success, there was a desire to create a forum for this group of like-minded people to stay connected. This led to the creation of a subgroup within the Anarchist Studies Network, which was named “Academics and Students Interested in Religious Anarchism” because the resulting acronym sounded nice. That group’s web pages and its corresponding mailing list can be accessed via [anarchist-studies-network.org.uk](http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk). The other important product of those panels was this volume.

The book contains all nine of the papers that were presented at the conference, reviewed and improved, but also three further papers from authors who did not make it to that conference. These have been spread over three parts: one on Christian anarchist “pioneers,” the second on Christian anarchist reflections on specific topics, the third on anarchism in other religious traditions.

The first part includes a chapter on Pelagius and another on Abiezer Coppe, two thinkers who predate the anarchist and hence Christian anarchist school(s) of thought by several centuries but whose thought nevertheless leans towards it; and two chapters on the Christian anarchist communities which appeared in Hungary and in the Netherlands when classical anarchism was flourishing, towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The second part explores specific themes around Christian anarchism: the Christian anarchist indifference to the state articulated by Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard; the debate over how to respond to the state in light of perhaps the two most notorious New Testament passages on it (Romans 13 and “Render to Caesar”); the anarchic tendencies at play in the religious practice of Christian Dalits; and the Christian church’s call to resist the concomitant and state-upholding concepts of race and nation.

The third part compiles four chapters on non-Christian religious anarchism: a chapter discussing of the Buddhist-influenced thought of ninth century Daoist Wu Nengzi; another on the impact of Kenneth

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<sup>3</sup> To name but a (random and diverse) few: Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism* (Encyclopaedia Britannica), available from [dwardmac.pitzer.edu](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu) (accessed 26 April 2007); Marshall; D. Novak, “The Place of Anarchism in the History of Political Thought,” *The Review of Politics* 20/3 (1958); George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Randall Amster et al., eds., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> That thesis is due to be published, slightly revised, as: *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010).

Rexroth's integration of Zen Buddhism and anarchism in post-Second World War San Francisco; a chapter making a committed and original plea for what is called an "Anarca-Islamic clinic;" and a chapter reviewing prominent publications in Islamic anarchism and offering a tentative model to classify its (and other religious anarchism's) varieties.

The book, therefore, does not include a chapter on the more general debate on the compatibility of religion and anarchism. A contribution of this sort was sought, but (unfortunately) did not materialise. Yet by presenting twelve chapters of original scholarship in religious anarchism, this book does add to the debate, if only indirectly, by demonstrating the fruitful potential of the overlaps and continuities between religion and anarchism.

Also missing are contributions on Jewish anarchism, Hindu anarchism, or other religious anarchism. Such contributions would have been most welcome, but (again unfortunately) no-one came forth with proposed chapters on these topics. In any case, this book certainly makes no claim to be offering an exhaustive coverage of religious anarchism. The aim is rather to bring attention to the area by sharing what fresh scholarship on it could be gathered, and thus to indirectly invite further research in other unexplored sub-fields within religious anarchism.

In closing, I would like to wholeheartedly thank all those without whom this book would not have come together. Top among them are: Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Dave Berry and the whole Loughborough crew which hosted the conference, for their hard work in putting together that timely and great show, and for ensuring its success; the Anarchist Studies Network (and hence the Political Studies Association) for its very existence, for its lively discussions and for its generous support; the team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing (and especially Carol Koulikourdi), for its help and encouragement with this book; and last but far from least, the other twelve contributors to this book, not just for their hard work in producing their contributions, but also for their help, for their friendship, and for politely putting up with my endless requests and abundant emails. It was demanding at times, but it is a real pleasure to be able to present this book to the wider public. I hope that readers will be as interested, provoked and inspired as I was by these twelve new perspectives on religious anarchism.

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# INTRODUCTION

PETER MARSHALL

“Neither God nor Master.”<sup>1</sup>

—Michael Bakunin

“Love, and do what you will.”<sup>2</sup>

—Augustine

Is religious anarchism a contradiction in terms? Is not anarchy the very opposite of hierarchy which in the original Greek means the “rule of the priests”? Is not an all-powerful God who threatens wayward humanity with terrible punishments necessarily evil? Is not submission or obedience to the authority of God slavish?

Given the close historic link between the church and the state in the West, it is not surprising that the classic anarchist thinkers of the nineteenth century, steeped in the humanist tradition of the Enlightenment, should have generally opposed religion as a heavy fetter holding back the liberation of humanity. For the most part, they shared Marx’s view that religion was the “opium of the people,” offering workers and peasants extravagant fantasies of pie in the sky while sapping their energy to improve things on earth. Like the *philosophes*, they generally held the practices and beliefs of religion to be part of the ignorance and superstition left over from the Dark Ages. Above all, they rejected unquestioning obedience to a supernatural power having ultimate control over their destiny. Man, they concluded, was not made in God’s image, but God in the image of some of the worst aspects of humanity.

They were standing in a long radical tradition in Europe which opposed the authoritarian and hierarchical nature of organised religion. Popular peasant revolts during the Middle Ages attempted to throw off the triple yoke of priest, landlord and magistrate who lived off their backs and who threatened, fined and whipped them into sullen obedience. As capitalism began to develop, the downtrodden and dispossessed further rejected the Protestant ethic which saw success in making money as a sign of divine grace. Many during the French Revolution looked forward to that splendid time when the last priest would be hanged by the entrails of the last aristocrat.

In the nineteenth century, the individualist Max Stirner argued that religion was a “spook” in the mind, a manifestation of our alienation from our true humanity.<sup>3</sup> But amongst the classic anarchist thinkers, it was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin who most virulently opposed organised religion, the unholy alliance of church and state, and the notion of an omniscient God. Proudhon, brought up in Catholic France, put it simply: “God is stupidity and cowardice; God is hypocrisy and falsehood; God is tyranny and poverty; God is evil.”<sup>4</sup> Bakunin, a militant atheist like Marx, was no less iconoclastic. In his view, “all religions are cruel; all founded in blood.” As for monotheism, he declared: “The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice.”

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<sup>1</sup> Anarchist slogan, usually attributed to Michael Bakunin.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, “Seventh Homily on the First Epistle of St John,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. H. Browne (Buffalo, N. Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), para 8.

<sup>3</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego & Its Own*, trans. Steven T. Byington (1963) (London: Rebel Press, 1982), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques, ou philosophie de la misère* (1846) (Paris: Rivière, 1923), I, 384.

Indeed, turning Voltaire on his head, he argued that “If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.”<sup>5</sup>

Anarchists after them have not only criticised the church as a hierarchical and authoritarian institution but have condemned its repressive morality. Its concept of sin, they have pointed out, encourage feelings of fear and guilt which can cripple the spontaneous generosity and playfulness of humans. In short, the agents of institutionalised religion have turned the sun-blessed garden of love into a mouldy cemetery of desire.

That is the main thrust of the anarchist case against religion. But have all anarchists agreed? As the wide-ranging, thought-provoking and scholarly essays in this excellent collection demonstrate, religion has in the past been and can still be a source of inspiration for anarchists. Anarchism is not inherently atheistic, denying the existence of God, or even humanist, giving a central place to humanity within nature. Nor is it wedded to any particular metaphysics, religion or even ethics; it is a wide river with many tributaries, currents and eddies. What unites anarchists is a common rejection of coercive power and imposed authority and a call for freedom to shape their own lives and realise their full potential.

Within the Christian tradition, there has always been an ambivalent attitude to government and the state. Despite Paul’s teaching in Romans 13 and Jesus’ famous “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21) many early Christians saw obedience to God and imitation of the life of Christ as taking precedence over any obligation to worldly powers or temporal authority. In this, they took inspiration from Romans 11:36: “For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things.”

Early in the fifth century, for example, the British theologian Pelagius denied original sin, emphasised free will and claimed that all human beings can achieve spiritual perfection without external assistance. They could also have their basic needs easily satisfied if it were not for the avarice of the rich. Again, in the twelfth century the Cistercian monk Joachim of Fiore predicted the imminent realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth in which free individuals would live together in loving harmony and ecstatic joy.

In the Middle Ages, there were waves of religious libertarian and millenarian movements inspired by such beliefs in north and central Europe. Most notable were the Brethren of the Free Spirit who emerged in the thirteenth century. These mystical libertarians were antinomians, believing that they could be saved by faith alone and that the bestowal of grace released them from any obligation to moral law. They took literally Augustine’s adage: “Love, and do what you will.” Many of the revolutionaries in the peasant rebellions which swept through Europe, especially the English Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 and the Hussite Revolution in Bohemia in 1419–21, were tinged with these ideas. Peter Chelplický, recognized by Kropotkin as a forerunner of anarchism and much appreciated by Tolstoy, was not only opposed to the “two whales” of the church and state but following the example of Christ turned the other cheek and refused to take up arms. During the Reformation, a loose movement of Anabaptists (who believed in adult baptism) and Spiritualists (who believed God was within) called for the separation of church and state and the building of a New Jerusalem on earth. It was not easy. When the puritanical Anabaptists in Münster in 1534 pooled their resources and tried to create a community based on love they ended up burning books and introducing a draconian new legal code.

The revolutionary and anarchistic tendency within Christianity came to a fore during the upheavals of the English Revolution and civil war in the seventeenth century. The Diggers wished only to obey the “law of righteousness” and were willing to break the laws of England and to work the land as a common treasury. Gerrard Winstanley spoke on their behalf when he declared: “True freedom lies in the community in spirit and community in the earthly treasury, and this is Christ the true-man-child spread abroad in the creation.”<sup>6</sup> The most extreme antinomians at this time however were the Ranters, lawless and masterless women and men, who believed that since they were in a state of grace, they

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Mother Earth, 1916), chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-Word to the City of London* (1649), in *The Law of Freedom and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Hill (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 128.

could commit no sin. They shared their goods and practiced free love. Abiezer Coppe in his marvellous *Fiery Flying Rolls* made clear that since God dwells within “to the pure all things are pure” and “sinne and transgression is finished.”<sup>7</sup>

At the time of the French Revolution, William Blake was an offshoot of this underground religious libertarian tradition. Rejecting the constricting, judgemental and authoritarian Jehovah God of the Old Testament, he saw Jesus as a revolutionary force of love and forgiveness, bringing balm to heal the God-beaten heads of downtrodden humanity. In his view, Jesus not only broke the Ten Commandments but was “all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules.” Indeed, for Blake, “The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & Has No Moral Precepts.”<sup>8</sup>

William Godwin, a one-time minister, may have been an atheist when he wrote his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) but it was by extending the Dissenters’ right to private judgement to the political realm that he reached anarchist conclusions. The kind of voluntary communism he advocated moreover can be traced back to the Calvinist sect of Sandemanians among whom he moved as a teenager. Later in life, he began to talk of a “Great Spirit” which pervaded all nature.

Of the great anarchist thinkers, it was however Tolstoy who was most inspired by Christianity. A radical interpretation of the “Sermon on the Mount,” with its emphasis on love and forgiveness, helped him reject all governments as immoral forms organised violence. Since the “Kingdom of God” is within us and we can all be guided by the divine light of reason, governments are both unnecessary and harmful. Tolstoy died on his way to a monastery. Among the many religious groups influenced by him were the Nazarenes in Hungary and the Christian anarchists in the Netherlands who refused to bear arms and pooled their resources in intentional communities close to the land.

While not strictly speaking anarchist, a stance of indifference to the state, developed philosophically by the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard, was widespread among Christian anarchists who believed like him that the love of God and the imitation of Christ lead to withdrawal from the state. In the twentieth century in the United States, Dorothy Day, Ammon Hennacy and their fellow Catholic Workers further argued that the law of God overrides all man-made laws and supersedes any obligation to obey governments. As Hennacy put it colourfully, a Christian anarchist is “one who turns the other cheek, overturns the tables of the money-lenders, and who does not need a cop to tell him how to behave.”<sup>9</sup> The French thinker Jacques Ellul equally claimed that Christianity means a rejection of temporal power and argued that a form of non-violent anarchism is the only sensible and moral way forward.

For Christian anarchists, if there be any conflict between God and Caesar, a benevolent God will always take precedence. Love of God and love of one’s neighbours are paramount. It is not a question of Bakunin’s “Neither God nor Master” but rather “No Master apart from God.” While they reject the church as a hierarchical and authoritarian institution, most Christian anarchists see the church in the universal sense of a community of believers as a place for resistance against the nation-state and the racism and inequality it engenders.

Although anarchism as a self-conscious body of ideas and practices was largely a product of the European Enlightenment, many indigenous peoples, from the pygmies in the African rainforest to the Dalits in rural India, have been “anarchic” in their religious practices by worshipping without leaders and institutions. Even the humanist Kropotkin argued that morality among humans had evolved naturally prior to the state and recognised that religion had played an important role in encouraging the practice of mutual aid.

As with Christianity, religious traditions and beliefs throughout the world have had their libertarian movements and have inspired anarchist beliefs. The Judaic God of the Old Testament certainly cast the sinful into hell and called for an eye for an eye, yet the Hasidic mystical tradition which developed within Judaism in the eighteenth century brought out the importance of “loving kindness” (the Hebrew

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Hopton, ed., *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings* (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Blake: Complete Writings* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 158, 395.

<sup>9</sup> Ammon Hennacy, *Autobiography of a Catholic Anarchist* (New York: Catholic Worker Books, 1954), preface.

root word of Hasidism). Many Jews have been drawn to anarchism. The libertarian philosopher Martin Buber, strongly influenced by his anarchist friend Gustav Landauer, also saw the kibbutz movement as one of the possible *Paths to Utopia* (1949). Although it has largely lost its way under the pressure of war, some Jewish anarchists still see the possibility of creating a network of libertarian communes to replace the need for the brute force of government.

Islam of course is a monotheistic religion like Judaism and Christianity whose prophets it recognises. At first sight, and certainly for many in the West, it would seem to be fundamentally authoritarian and violent. But this view is largely based on ignorance and prejudice; historically, Christianity has been no less given to violence and coercion than Islam when linked to temporal powers and misled by political leaders.

The very word “Islam” means “submission” or “surrender” and Islam calls for submission to the teaching of the Koran and surrender to the authority of God. The primary commitment of all Muslims is to obey God and God alone. Yet within Islam, there has been a libertarian tendency. The brotherhood and sisterhood of Muslims go beyond national boundaries and their morality transcends the laws of the state and the dictates of government. While *sharia* has crystallised into a rigid set of laws and rules it was originally a form of ethics for everyday life. There is moreover no institutional hierarchy in Islam and a strong emphasis on the search for consensus ( *ijma*) within the community ( *umma*).

Among Islamic sects, the Qarâmita, the Ismailis (especially the so-called Assassins) and the Sufis have all had anarchist-leaning groups. The Berbers and the Bedouin lived in a form of tribal anarchy. In the ninth century, the Najdiyya and members of the Kharijites felt that since imams had a tendency to turn into kings and rulers, it was better not to set them up in the first place. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, antinomian dervishes, such as the Qalandars and Haydarîs, went their own idiosyncratic way, either rejecting or embracing the world as unruly friends of God. Like Christian anarchists, they refused to obey any master apart from God. The mystical sect of Sufis, who preach universal love and tolerance, are particularly libertarian and egalitarian—so much so that Atatürk, the founder of the modern secular state of Turkey, banned them. Sufism has had a growing influence in the West. The anarchist Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson) in particular has espoused Islam and celebrated its heretics and outcasts.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism has no room for a supreme God in its unruly pantheon of gods and goddesses. At the same time, it stresses the divine nature of the unique individual and encourages personal autonomy. Its ethics can be summed up by the phrase *ahimsa*, meaning “no harm.” Like all the major religious traditions, it too has had its libertarian movements and thinkers. The religious philosopher Aurobindo Ghose, for example, argued that the ideal of humanity is to be found in the natural association of free individuals outside the constricting and mechanical nation-state. Although brought up as a Brahmin, Gandhi was strongly influenced by Tolstoy’s Christian anarchism. He too considered a form of “enlightened anarchy” to be the highest form of society where “everyone is his own ruler, and ... there is not political power because there is no State.”<sup>10</sup> He had a profound belief in the power of truth and like Godwin believed that it would ultimately be victorious over error. In the long run there was no need for government in a self-managing and decentralised society based on the village councils. Society would then become a community of communities. The Sarvodaya (“Welfare for All”) movement in India and Sri Lanka continues to apply Gandhian principles of non-violent resistance and the voluntary pooling of land and resources.

In the Far East, modern Daoism has taken on many of the attributes and rituals of a religion but in its original form it was a strongly libertarian philosophical and moral system. The Dao is older than any god and by its very nature escapes concepts and words. The wise person goes with the flow of the Dao. As the *Daodejing*, the most beautiful, oldest and profound libertarian text in the world, puts it: “The world is ruled by letting things take their course. It cannot be ruled by interfering.”<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Mohandas Gandhi, *Democracy: Real and Deceptive* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961), 28–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Tao te ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage, 1972), section 48.

conclusions of the Daoist text *Zhuang Zi* are even more anarchistic: to attempt to govern people with laws and regulations is impossible, “as well as try to wade through the sea, to hew a passage through a river, or make a mosquito fly away with a mountain!”<sup>12</sup> If the natural dispositions of humans are not perverted, there is simply no need for government. Some later Daoists like Wu Nengzi were prepared to accept a degree of governmental rule if not attached or deceived by its usefulness but the early Daoists were undoubtedly forerunners of anarchism when they embraced the universe as a whole, accepted the underlying unity and equality of all things and beings, and advocated letting them go their own beneficial way.

Like Daoism, Buddhism is non-theistic. In its pure form it is more of a system of ethics than a religion. Buddha is not considered divine but as a symbol and living example of the enlightened person. Buddhism does not therefore worship a personal deity or divine being but is concerned with self-development. In self-disciplined freedom, all are equally capable of enlightenment. Although it became institutionalised and sclerotic like other world religions, its original message is deeply libertarian. While recommending the teaching of the wise, as the *Kalama Sutta* makes clear, it encourages free enquiry. Its practice of personal autonomy and self-discipline makes external government superfluous. Combined with Daoism to form Zen, it can have profound nation-shaking and state-transforming implications. And as Gary Snyder and Kenneth Rexroth understood, living the life of Buddha in the East or West does not need the law or the state.

It should by now be clear that religion itself is not inherently authoritarian and hierarchical but that organised religions have an unpleasant tendency to become so. The original message of the great religious teachers to live a simple life, to share the wealth of the earth, to treat each other with love and respect, to tolerate others and to live in peace invariably gets lost as worldly institutions take over. Religious leaders, like their political counterparts, accrue power to themselves, draw up dogmas, and wage war on dissenters in their own ranks and the followers of other religions. They seek protection from temporal rulers, bestowing on them in return a supernatural legitimacy and magical aura. They weave webs of mystery and mystification around naked power; they join the sword with the cross and the crescent. As a result, in nearly all cases organised religions have lost the peaceful and tolerant message of their founding fathers, whether it be Buddha, Jesus or Mohammed. For these reasons, anarchists, whatever their religious beliefs or lack of them, have questioned and opposed the authority of religious leaders and the rule of priests. They have tried to end the close alliance of church, mosque and temple with government and the state. They have insisted on the freedom of belief as well as the freedom of thought and action.

An increasing number of libertarian socialists and anarchists, including myself, feel that the arguments against the existence of a tyrannical God and the need for hierarchical institutions have been won. At the same time, they are prepared to call themselves “spiritual” in a loose sense. While continuing to oppose organised religion, the hierarchy and domination of the church and mosque, and the imposition of a repressive morality, they recognise that life is sacred, that the cosmos is inherently good, that all is ultimately one. They believe that every created thing is divine. As mystics have always known, to attain “union with God” or to be “at one” with the universe goes beyond all organised religion, temporal laws, governments and states. It involves a transformative experience which breaks down the narrow boundaries of ego, nation and race and connects with all beings and the cosmos as a whole.

We can be spiritual without being a member of an authoritarian sect; religious without joining a hierarchical organisation; moral without obeying religious leaders or laws. We can be at one with God or the universe and at the same time work for the betterment of humanity and the well-being of the earth. We can read sacred texts and listen to the wise and still think, judge and act for ourselves. We can enjoy voluntary poverty, peace, fellowship and forgiveness in the garden of love. In short, we can be deeply spiritual and still profoundly anarchist, one strand enriching and enlarging the other in a widening circle of freedom.

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<sup>12</sup> *Chuang Tzu*, trans. H. A. Giles (London: Unwin, 1980), 87.

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# **PART I: CHRISTIAN ANARCHIST PIONEERS**

# CHAPTER ONE. THE PELAGIAN MENTALITY: RADICAL POLITICAL THOUGHT IN FIFTH CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

RICHARD FITCH

*Pelagianism is known, if at all, as an early fifth century Christian heresy. Politically radical forms of Christianity, and their secularised kin, are sometimes accused of being Pelagian in spirit and therefore heretical. Being Pelagian is taken to mean having a naïvely optimistic understanding of human nature. Following from this understanding, forms of political life are invented that are themselves wildly optimistic and thus politically unrealistic. Furthermore it is alleged that these political forms, based on a false concept of human nature, act to oppress the flourishing of real human nature. Such a line of attack has often been used against radical political theologies, anarchism, and socialism. Theologically the supposed naivety that lies at the root of these radical political theologies and philosophies is held not to be innocent, but to be an example of unchristian hubris tainted with satanic pride. However, this understanding of the Pelagian is rooted in Augustine of Hippo's polemical misrepresentation of the teaching of Pelagius. As numerous Pelagian texts have survived there is no scholarly reason to accept prima facie Augustine's misrepresentation. Indeed, when those texts are examined a far more complex, and far less heretical, Pelagianism emerges. Here the most politically radical Pelagian text, the *Epistula de divitiis* or *On Riches*, is examined. Beginning with the sin of avarice a striking political theology is unfolded. With an incipient class analysis, an awareness of the slippery logic of desire, and a sensitivity to the political problem of philosophical method, themes are raised that would not be tackled again with such sophistication until at least the late eighteenth century. In this text, and others, the Pelagian mentality reveals itself to be, within theological parameters, both realistic and radical, and as such, worthy of note by all concerned with political radicalism.*

Get rid of the rich man, and you will not be able to find a poor one. Let no man have more than he really needs, and everyone will have as much as they need, since the few who are rich are the reason for the many who are poor.<sup>1</sup>

—Anonymous, *On Riches*

In and of themselves these words, and the political sentiments they express, are unremarkable. What is certainly remarkable is that they were written between 410 and 415 *A. D.* by a follower of a British Christian thinker—indeed probably the first British thinker whose writings have survived.<sup>2</sup> The thinker's name was Pelagius (c. 360–420 *A. D.*). Today he is known, if at all, as the author of one of the great Christian heresies. Pelagius was accused, most famously by Augustine of Hippo, of teaching that human beings can achieve spiritual perfection without direct divine assistance. He denied this charge and accused his enemies of tolerating immoral behaviour within Christianity by exaggerating the effect

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<sup>1</sup> B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), 8. There is some dispute about whether Pelagius was a Briton or a Breton. His exact birthplace matters little for the purposes of this chapter.



of original sin. Pelagius lost the fight. Whenever a political radical is accused of having a naïve concept of human nature, or of designing an ideal polity for angels not humans, then there is an echo of the dispute between Pelagius and Augustine.

## Pelagius and His Context

Who was Pelagius?<sup>3</sup> If his enemy Jerome is to be believed, he was a fat foolish oaf, a “dog from Albion ... made heavy by Scottish porridge.”<sup>4</sup> Naturally there are profound difficulties in establishing reliable facts for this period, especially concerning someone who was to become a heresiarch. But we know enough not to fall for one of Jerome’s all too frequent rants.<sup>5</sup> Pelagius was born in the British Isles or Brittany, and received a sophisticated education, perhaps as a lawyer. Sometime in the 380s he began to make his mark in Rome. He became significant as a spiritual adviser to leading Christian families in the city.<sup>6</sup> He fled Rome, as many did, in anticipation of the fall of the city to Alaric and the Visigoths in 410. He thus lost his powerbase and network of political protectors. As he and his followers scattered throughout the Empire, so his ideas were more widely disseminated. This made him the target of those who did not share his theological vision. By 415 he had been formally charged with heresy but acquitted. However, his enemies, chiefly the intellectual titan of the rich and powerful North African Church Augustine of Hippo, persisted.<sup>7</sup> They bypassed the ecclesiastical hierarchy and appealed directly to the Emperor. By 418 Pelagius had been excommunicated and his ideas condemned as heresy. The Council of Ephesus of 431 provided ecumenical confirmation of this judgement. After 418 Pelagius disappears. He may have returned to his birthplace or sought refuge in the monastic communities of Egypt.

Pelagius was in essence a Christian moralist. He lacked the theological subtlety of an Augustine, and he was not directly active in politics.<sup>8</sup> As indicated Pelagius was taken to hold that salvation was simply a question of human effort not divine grace. Augustine felt that this underestimated the corporate effect of the Fall which meant that all human beings were incapable of goodness on their own, and furthermore that all are always already implicated in Adam’s crime, and thus guilty, and therefore share Adam’s punishment. For the Pelagian divine justice was a mockery without meaningful human freewill, and thus that Augustine’s position mocked God. He held that the Fall was not a crime for which we *all* become guilty through the sexual intercourse of our parents at the moment of procreation, and for which we all punished by being fated to corrupt inadequacy. For him the Fall served as the preeminent example of how easy it is to fall into sinful habits and remain trapped there. But for him this enslavement to

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<sup>3</sup> The “Life” section of Rees acts as a good basic introduction to Pelagius. Of more recent vintage, and notwithstanding a reservation expressed in this chapter, see Mathijs Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagians,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 258–279. For reception history see: C. Garcia-Sanchez, *Pelagius and Christian Initiation: A Study in Historical Theology* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1978); and Mathijs Lamberigts, “Recent Research into Pelagianism with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Julian of Aclanum,” *Augustiniana* 52, no. 2 (2002): 175–198. Further relevant literature can be found in the bibliography below.

<sup>4</sup> M. Forthomme Nicholson, “Celtic Theology: Pelagius,” in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, ed. James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 388, for the full range of anti-Briton prejudice expressed towards Pelagius.

<sup>5</sup> On Jerome: J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brown, “Pelagius and his Supporters: Aims and Environment,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no.1 (1968): 93–114; and “The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 21, no. 1 (1970): 56–72.

<sup>7</sup> On Augustine the standard biography remains Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), but to complement Brown: James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) is too invigorating not to mention.

<sup>8</sup> There is a controversial but intriguing theory that British resistance to Roman rule was rooted in Pelagianism. This explains the brief appearance of Pelagius as the young Arthur’s teacher and inspiration in the *Director’s Cut* of the lumbering 2004 film *King Arthur*. I simply lack the necessary historical competence to adequately assess this theory concerning Late and Post-Roman Britain. It originated with J. N. L. Myres, “Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 50 (1960): 21–36. Gilbert Márkus, “Pelagianism and the ‘Common Celtic Church,’” *Innes Review* 56, no. 2 (2005): 165–213, provides a recent sceptical and Augustinian response to ongoing speculation in this area.

sin in this life was not *necessary* because the human, thanks to God's creative power, could choose otherwise. He felt Augustine and others were using original sin as a licence to justify immoral and unchristian behaviour as if Christians simply could not behave better. Pelagius believed that the search for human spiritual perfection in this life was the crux of the Christian life. However, it must be stressed that Pelagius did not think that such a search was easy, or that one should ever think of oneself as perfected.<sup>9</sup> Perfection served rather as a regulative ideal for the Christian life. That it was *the* Christian task, and what it entailed, were for Pelagius to be found in the life and teaching of Jesus.

While Pelagius was not himself a political creature his ideas certainly had political implications, as does any philosophical or theological anthropology. Indeed, Leszek Kolakowski, towards the conclusion of a mild polemic against Pascal and Jansenism, endorsed the bold claim

that the entire history of European millenarian and utopian thinking, from the sixteenth century onwards or even from medieval sources, has depended consciously or not, on the Pelagian mentality, on the refusal to admit that evil cannot be rooted out on earth by human effort ... According to this view our modernity is fundamentally Pelagian and this includes its Promethean hope for a perfect human city without evil.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that Kolakowski is working with the Augustinian conception of Pelagianism as a Promethean and proto-modern mentality.<sup>11</sup> The preliminary reading of a Pelagian text undertaken below hopefully demonstrates that such a conception is a misconception. Yet I still think the substance of the claim concerning its influence is correct. Given this purported influence a greater appreciation of the implicit Pelagian political theology can only enrich, and help reconceptualise, radical thought. The political implications of Pelagian ideas were explored by at least one who followed him.<sup>12</sup> Of him little is known except that he was probably the author of a number of letters known as the *Caspari Corpus*.<sup>13</sup> It is only through the care and tolerance of librarians that one can once again listen to what Peter Brown described as the "distant music" of the social radicalism of early Christianity.<sup>14</sup> One of the Caspari texts is explicitly political as it deals with the social significance of the sin of avarice. But the unpacking of these political implications, and the attendant sketching of a political theology, were not merely logical exercises, as they were undertaken at a moment of profound political turmoil.

What is now taken to be unquestionably orthodox was in the late fourth century still just one option amongst many, and this was especially true in the sphere of political theology. It is only in retrospect that it is Pelagius and not Augustine who appears the obvious heretic. In the early fifth century the marriage of Christianity and Empire was less than a century old. It was a relationship that was both fluid and fragile. The transformation of Christianity into a political institution was very much a work in progress. Indeed, the relationship of the Christian religion to the world as such was in question. In 410 the Empire experienced a profound ideological trauma. Rome was sacked by the barbarian Alaric. Gibbon's words capture something of this shock:

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<sup>9</sup> Rees, 67.

<sup>10</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 183. Kolakowski, a thinker shaped by the Cold War, is convinced of the centrality of the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius for the development of European culture, and it structures his understanding of political radicalism especially in its Marxist form. See also "Can the Devil be Saved?" in *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 75–85.

<sup>11</sup> Pelagianism is often taken as a proto-modernism so that its critique can also function as a critique of modernity. See Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), *passim*, or John Passmore, *The Perfectability of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970), 94–115.

<sup>12</sup> Recent research shows that the idea of a Pelagian school or movement is probably an overstatement. So "follower" should be minimally understood in the sense of participating in a mentality, a shared attitude or ethos. In the articulation of this ethos Pelagius comes first and the author of *On Riches* builds on his ideas. See Lamberigts, "Recent Research into Pelagianism," 198.

<sup>13</sup> Robert F. Evans, *Four Letters of Pelagius* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 24–31.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), 112.

Eleven hundred and sixty-three years after the foundation of Rome, the Imperial city, which had subdued and civilised so considerable a part of mankind, was delivered to the licentious fury of the tribes of Germany and Scythia.<sup>15</sup>

The sack itself was not the problem. Alaric left the city after a few days, and as an Arian Christian he had tried to restrain his troops. The problem was the symbolism. More of Gibbon's eloquence:

This awful catastrophe of Rome filled the astonished empire with grief and terror. So interesting a contrast of greatness and ruin, disposed the fond credulity of the people to deplore, and even to exaggerate, the afflictions of the queen of cities. The clergy, who applied to recent events the lofty metaphors of Oriental prophecy, were sometimes tempted to confound the destruction of the capital, and the dissolution of the globe.<sup>16</sup>

The catastrophe provoked much political soul-searching. What was its cause? Was it the adoption of Christianity by the empire? The event was of profound ideological significance as it threatened emergent Imperio-Christian normative structures. To some in the Church all that had been achieved since Constantine was in peril. But as the old "eternal" order tottered it was also a moment of opportunity for those who sought different forms of political and spiritual order. The most famous response to the catastrophe may have been Augustine's *The City of God against the Pagans*.<sup>17</sup> But there were other responses. In his letter *To Demetrias* Pelagius himself asked

Where stood our order of nobility then? Where were the occupiers of the fixed, distinct grades of their hierarchy? Everything was thrown into confusion and disorder by fear, in every home there was lamentation, and terror was spread through all alike. Slave and noble were on the same footing: all saw the same image of death, except that those whose life was more pleasant feared it more.<sup>18</sup>

He was concerned not so much by the sack of Rome but by what the Roman reaction to it revealed of the moral health of the Christian Empire. The trauma exposed the weakness of contingent normative structures, such as those rooted in the existing social hierarchy, while spiritual equality endured. One follower of Pelagius took this analysis further to analyse the interrelation between spiritual equality, sinfulness, and the structures of social normativity.

Sicily appears to have been a hotbed of radical Pelagianism in the years immediately after the sack of Rome. In 415 Hilary of Syracuse wrote a panicky letter to Augustine seeking advice about combating dangerous ideas that were abroad in Sicily at the time.<sup>19</sup> He reported that some local Christians argued

that a rich man who contrives to live rich cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless he sells all he has, and that it cannot do him any good to keep the commandments while keeping his riches.<sup>20</sup>

Augustine gave him much advice in a lengthy response. The teachings on riches that Hilary reports can also be found in the Pelagian letter *On Riches*, hence the conclusion that the letter was either sent to or from this Sicilian Pelagian community. The letter is the most politically radical Pelagian text that

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (London: Penguin, 1995), 201.

<sup>16</sup> Gibbon, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Rees, 69.

<sup>19</sup> See Otto Wermelinger, *Rom und Pelagius: Die theologische Position der römischen Bischöfe im pelagianischen Streit in den Jahren 411–432* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1975), 29 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *Letters* vol. 3, trans. Sis. Wilfred Parsons SND (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 318. This is letter 156. Augustine's reply is letter 157 (319–354). He defends the possession of riches at 340 ff. The best that can be said is that this passage is not one of Augustine's better moments.

survives. Indeed, the inflammatory language of *On Riches* may have prompted the Imperial edict of 30 April 418 whereby Pelagians were banished from Rome as a threat to peace.<sup>21</sup> What follows is an attempt to sketch the outlines of this most politically radical expression of the Pelagian mentality. It is not its most representative expression but the chief goal of this chapter is not represent the Pelagian mentality as such but to give a snapshot of one of its manifestations. This should show how even in its most radical expression it is very different from its pejorative representation in Augustinian texts.

There is a recent line of thought that holds that Pelagian texts such as *On Riches* might be better understood not as Pelagian texts at all but as expressions of mainstream Christian asceticism.<sup>22</sup> At one level this does not affect the thrust of the argument of this chapter which is concerned with exploring the content of the piece rather than determining its precise position in early Christian thought. With regard to this latter task I defer to the historian. But I suspect there is a problem in pigeonholing *On Riches* as simply a text in Christian asceticism. It certainly has ascetic aspects but they are not what make the text distinctive. It is rather the political theology it expresses that marks it out. *On Riches* is itself rich not when expressing a technology of the self, but when exploring the radical social and political logic implicit in Christ's teaching. Furthermore I suspect the unpacking of this logic is intimately related to the themes of the core Pelagian texts.<sup>23</sup>

## “On Riches”

The *Epistula de divitiis* contains positions and arguments that were radical even at the time of the text's rediscovery in the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> But for the early fifth century they appear extraordinary. This raises the question as to how widespread radical political ideas were at the time. There is a tendency, based on the available evidence, to date significant political radicalism to the Enlightenment with precursors on the fringes of the Reformation.<sup>25</sup> *On Riches* raises the possibility that sophisticated political radicalism has a far longer history. It is simply that little evidence of it has survived. Naturally, given the lack of substantial evidence this remains speculation. But it is a possibility that should at least be kept in mind when contemplating the history of political thought and theology. And with *On Riches* there is at least some evidence for ancient radicalism.

*On Riches* prompted John Morris to write:

The crisp argumentation that wealth and property had arisen in the past through “oppression;” that the existence of the rich, the fact that society is divided into such “genera,” is the cause of poverty, cruelty and violence; and that society should be wholly reshaped, now and in its present substance, by abolishing the rich and redistributing their property to the poor—is by any textbook definition socialism. Further it is socialism of a coherence and urgency that was hardly to be met again before the nineteenth century, or at earliest the end of the eighteenth.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> As suggested by Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1990), 251.

<sup>22</sup> W. Liebeschuetz, “Did the Pelagian Movement Have Social Aims?” *Historia* 12 (1963): 227–241; Andreas Kessler, *Reich-tumskritik und Pelagianismus: Die pelagianische Diatribe de divitiis: Situierung, Lesetext, Übersetzung, Kommentar* Paradosis 43 (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universität Verlag, 1999); Lamberigts, “Recent Research into Pelagianism,” 180, and “Pelagius and Pelagians,” 261–2.

<sup>23</sup> Regardless of this concern any deeper investigation into *On Riches* requires careful engagement with Kessler's work, and Lamberigts' demand for further research into the relationship between quasi-Pelagian texts and wider Christian asceticism must be wholeheartedly endorsed (Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagians,” 274).

<sup>24</sup> The original text can be found at C. P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Altertums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Christiania: Mallingschen Buchdruckerei, 1890), 25–67; R. S. T. Haslehurst, ed., *The Works of Fastidius* (London: The Society of SS. Peter and Paul, 1927), 30–107.

<sup>25</sup> For example Murray Bookchin identifies the beginning of the revolutionary tradition with the late mediaeval peasant revolts but things do not really get started for him until the 1640s. *The Third Revolution: Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1996), vii.

<sup>26</sup> John Morris, “Pelagian Literature,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 16, no. 1 (1965), 50–51.

Though Morris is broadly correct, there is the danger of treating the text in an anachronistic or narrowly anticipatory manner. To repeat: the attempt is to sketch the faint outlines of one example of the Pelagian mentality rather than directly claim the text and its contents for socialism, anarchism or any other form of modern political radicalism. Yet despite this aspiration the very richness of the text itself works against any hermeneutic Puritanism.

A similar tension can be found in the ebb and flow of the text's rhetorical structure. It takes the form of an intervention in an existing conversation about the place of wealth in Christianity. The rhetorical defences put up by two overlapping constituencies are considered: Christians who defend, and entrench, their existing possession of riches, and those who seek to acquire riches. It starts in sober and sophisticated, even sophistic, analysis but then anger builds up to a rhetorical crescendo. The anger is prompted by the casual obscenity of everyday life. It is an obscenity that is for the author rooted in both socially systemic sin and individual sinful acts. Morris uses oppression instead of the usual sin to translate *iniquitate*.<sup>27</sup> This can be misleading but this misleading can also be useful. As will be explored below oppression follows from sin, usually the sin of avarice. Sin, its effects, and its causes, are not confined to the individual will. They are also social. Oppression can be useful in capturing this aspect of the Pelagian understanding of sin. After these rhetorical eruptions of righteous indignation there comes a moment of calm where wits are gathered. The discourse switches back from moral to intellectual intensity until indignation builds again. "The argument," Morris comments,

is built up with compromising logic, shot through with fierce moral indignation, but relieved by stern dry humour, and culminates in a causal analysis quite alien to its age.<sup>28</sup>

The central message of *On Riches* appears simple: the possession of riches prevents salvation. This is an expansion of the message of Matthew 19:16–24 and other gospel passages. It lingers on New Testament verses such as Matthew 19:21:

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."<sup>29</sup>

But the novelty of the text does not lie in its defence of the virtue of poverty. The early Christian valuing of poverty is well-known.<sup>30</sup> What is striking is its analysis of the sources of sin and injustice which it explores with both an incipient class analysis and a hard-headed anthropology. In short, it is in the analysis of causal processes that the text's significance can be found. And in these processes spiritual, moral, political and economic causation are found to be intertwined if not equivalent. There is an appreciation of both the questions of economics and of power. And both are rooted in the sin of avarice.

*On Riches* opens with an exploration of the corrupting power of avarice in relation to that of lust and gluttony. It is argued that greed/avarice is the most dangerous of the three as:

lust and gluttony are more easily overcome than avarice, because in their case satiety arouses a certain feeling of repugnance, whereas avarice, since it is insatiable, is never wholly repugnant to those who love it; rather, the more it increases the more completely they love it ... Greed is like a fire that derives its kindling from the materials provided by worldly things.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The passage in question is from section 7.5 of *On Riches* ( cf Rees, 182): *Non dico, quod ipsae iniquitates sunt, sed existimo, quod vel maxime ex iniquitate descendunt*. Haslehurst, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Morris, 46–7.

<sup>29</sup> *The New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition: Anglicised Text* has been used for this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> See Brown, *Poverty*; Martin Hengel *Property and Riches in the Early Church*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974); Justo L. González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Rees, 175. The distinction between greed and avarice can be ambiguous. Are they synonymous? Are they both manifestations of warped desire with greed concerned with the physical and avarice the mental? Or is avarice a particular manifestation of greed: greed for wealth and power? In this chapter avarice is understood as desire for excessive wealth and power.

Here is recognition of the potentially pernicious logic of desire. It is a logic that, logically, can never be satisfied. The starting point of the text is thus not a naïve view of the perfectibility of human nature. It starts with an acknowledgement of the overwhelming power of desire. It is a power that can enslave, and the excesses of which only a Christian can avoid through baptism and a proper Christian life. Desire in itself is not bad. It can be formed as love. The Pelagian is eager to counter the Origenist tendency to see life itself as a sin, and also the Manichean view of matter as evil with which Augustine tarried prior to his conversion.<sup>32</sup>

## Excursus: Avarice in Political Thought

Avarice is a vice that effects thought as well as action:

All human beings suffer from the vice of thinking that what they love is better than anything else and of identifying deep down in their minds as the greatest good what they espouse with such love that they become totally incapable of being separated from it.<sup>33</sup>

It is striking to think of avarice as a vice of thinking as well as of desire. How one thinks can then be as sinful as what one thinks about. Thus, even when one is thinking about virtuous matters one might be sinning by thinking about them in a sinful manner. The sin of avarice can then be understood as potentially resulting in corrupted political or theological thought.

It is often asserted that one of Pelagianism's vices is that it is barely Christian and better grasped as a thinly veiled version of Stoicism.<sup>34</sup> In particular it is alleged that it depends on the vulgar appropriation of the Stoic ethical goal of *apatheia*. Rist, for example, states that:

Pelagianism is a syndrome rather than a theory, at least in Augustine's view. Its underlying philosophical claim is an axiom of Greek philosophy and thought generally: the possibility of heroic perfection in this life.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine's true "Pelagian" enemy is in fact not Pelagius but classical virtue.<sup>36</sup> It is worth considering for a moment the difference between Christian theology and philosophy before going on to see if the Pelagian mentality greedily consumes forbidden Greek philosophy.

The excursus proper can begin with an examination of how the sin of avarice might manifest itself in the practice of thinking both theologically and philosophically. Philosophy aspires to human truth and knowledge. Even philosophies that hold that human truth and knowledge are impossible orientate themselves with respect to this impossibility. They work out what follows from the impossibility of truth and knowledge for thought and life. In a sense philosophical activity is defined as philosophical by the concern with truth and knowledge. Truth and knowledge are desirable for human beings for at least two basic reasons. First each human being experiences the world differently. They experience it as relative to themselves. This means that the appearance of an object to me is on investigation revealed to be different from another's experience of what is, in some sense, supposed to be the same object. Communicating with fellow self-conscious creatures makes us aware of these differences.

Despite the fact that we experience life differently some manner of living together is required. Social normativity is required. That is perhaps the most basic problem of political philosophy. Together with

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<sup>32</sup> On Origen and Pelagius see Evans, 6–26.

<sup>33</sup> Rees, 174. See John H. Beck, "The Pelagian Controversy: An Economic Analysis," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 66, no. 4 (2007): 681–696, for an examination of how economic self-interest might have contributed to the attacks on the Pelagian mentality.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Hanby. But see note 51 at 235 where Hanby is forced to admit that his claim of Pelagian consonance with Stoicism is historically shaky.

<sup>35</sup> John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 18.

<sup>36</sup> See also: Paula Fredriksen, "Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians," *Recherches augustiennes* 23 (1988): 97–114.

the problem of different experiences comes the problem caused by disagreement. This means that, even when different self-conscious creatures' experiences appear similar enough not to cause serious problems, the self-conscious creatures that we are still disagree about things. This disagreement makes social life even more difficult.

There are many possible solutions to this problem. One can diminish the problem of difference and disagreement by persuading everyone to accept a common standard. In this one puts aside one's personal experience and accepts the standard in order that difference and disagreement cease to be severe problems. The philosopher thinks there are better and worse ways of positing this standard and getting people to accept it. A way is better if the acceptance is deeper. For example a better way would be if a person accepts that their perspective is not wrong but merely perhaps distorted. If we think for a while one can see "how things really are, objectively" and recognise that we were perhaps mistaken when we lived rooted in difference and disagreement. This involves the recognition that there is a difference between personal opinion and experience on the one hand, and truth and knowledge on the other. We accept knowledge as superior to our immediate opinion and experience because knowledge is, say, justified true belief.

Now this is one possible superficial but still philosophical response to the problems of difference and disagreement. There are of course many more that are much more sophisticated. I clumsily sketch it here only to contrast it with another response which, following *On Riches*, one can understand as being rooted in avarice. In this response when faced with difference and disagreement one does not try to uncover answers to the problem that are true or that would be equally acceptable to all. Instead one takes one's own experience, opinions, and values as given, and then tries to impose them on everyone else, often by force. Personal opinion or prejudice is elevated to the status of social normativity. One's own experience (or that of a group such as a social class) is imposed as the standard by which the experience of all is judged. This can be done in a Machiavellian manner.<sup>37</sup> But it can also be done unconsciously. Those who practice this assume that what they think is of value is automatically of value to everyone else. They might impose these values out of what they take to be charity or goodwill towards others. But in fact it is actually avarice that is at work. These have forgotten, thanks to their avarice, the basic philosophical problems of difference and disagreement and move too swiftly onto the problem of how to establish *their* values which they have too swiftly taken to be effectively universal and absolute. This swiftness is a prejudgement. They have decided too quickly what is of value to all. They have simply decided and not thought carefully. In this they establish the good on the basis of their prejudice. And prejudice is thoughtless opinion and thus far from truth and knowledge. Prejudice cannot solve the problems raised by difference and disagreement. So a political system will sooner rather than later have to rely on oppression to solve the problem of difference and disagreement if it is rooted in prejudice.

Modern philosophers have struggled with this problem. For example Kant thought he could solve it through the means of the transcendental deduction. One could deduce from one's own experience that which all human experience must have in common. Hegel thought that, while Kant was on roughly the right track, this was just another case of the elevation of one's personal prejudices or particularities to the status of the universal, or in Kant's case the transcendental. Hegel felt that philosophy had to strive to avoid *all* prejudices if it were to be successful in dealing with philosophical problems. He felt that philosophy should be presuppositionless.<sup>38</sup> However, Hegel's approach threw up as many questions as it answered. Much modern Western philosophy inhabits the terrain established by Kant's and Hegel's efforts and failures.

These problems are not the chief concern of the Christian theologian. They have an answer. It is an irresistible answer for theologians in that if they resist it they cease in a profound sense to be

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<sup>37</sup> Machiavellian understood not in a philosophical sense as referring directly to the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli but in the quotidian sense of unscrupulous and devious action.

<sup>38</sup> On Kant: Michael N. Forster, *Kant and Scepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). On Hegel: Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (West Lafayette, In.: Purdue University Press, 2006), 29–42.

Christian theologians. Straightforwardly the answer for the Christian is of course God and especially the incarnation of Jesus Christ. For the philosopher the “avaricious answer” to the problem of difference and disagreement is a bad answer because it is philosophically incompetent: it only exacerbates the problems it claims to be solving. For the Christian theologian it is a bad, sinful, even evil, answer, because it is contrary to the teaching of Christ or divine law. This puts the lie to the claim that Pelagianism is fundamentally a form of paganism or classical philosophy, because it is rooted not in philosophical investigation but in its interpretation of the teaching of Christ. Of course this is where problems start again. As soon as one has solved the problem of difference and disagreement through Christ one is faced by the hermeneutic problem of how to correctly interpret the teaching of Christ. But this is a theological rather than philosophical problem í though it should be recognised that there is nothing in the above that means that philosophy and theology cannot be complimentary practices. This can be found in the unproblematic and complementary relationship between theology and philosophy of religion. Theology begins with axioms of a particular religion. Philosophy of religion should attempt to proceed without unnecessary prejudgements or axioms. The two practices can enrich each other if their basic differences are remembered.

*On Riches* is a theological text. It begins with avarice which is a sin according to God’s will and law. It proceeds rigorously to unpack what is implied by the fact that avarice has a social aspect. It thus swiftly becomes a political theology. It would be a category mistake to think of it as political philosophy. But how is it essentially different from Augustinian political theology? Ultimately any authority they have as political theologies rests not directly on the rigour and logic of their arguments, but on the question as to whether, and to what extent, their arguments are rooted in, and draw nourishment from, the fundamental axiom of the Christian religion: the incarnation. At the heart of Christian thought there are incarnational rather than transcendental deductions. Of course the incarnation is not a logical principle or a simple proposition. It was a complex event and thus opens up a number of possible deductions of greater and lesser validity. The Pelagian allegation is that the Augustinian deduction misses a significant aspect of that event: the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The Augustinian accusation is that the Pelagian deduction misses a different aspect of that event: the redemptive efficacy of crucifixion and resurrection; the absolute majesty and sovereignty of the divine and the devastating consequences of the human rejection of this majesty and sovereignty in the Fall. What should be noticed is that this is a dispute within theology. The Augustinian has usually sought to represent it as an argument between theology and philosophy, most recently between theology and Promethean modernity. Such arguments certainly do exist but they are not the argument between the Augustinian and the Pelagian. This is a misrepresentation that leaves the Augustinian interpretation of the incarnation unchallenged as a theological interpretation. The whole motivation of the Pelagian mentality is to challenge the perceived narrowness of this theological interpretation from within theology. It seeks to widen it theologically to better grasp the full significance of the incarnation by paying more attention to the life and teaching of Christ than to the more metaphysical mechanics of redemption. If the Pelagian mentality is misunderstood as philosophical and not theological then it is drained of all theological power. That is why if one only reads the Augustinian version of the dispute there can be only one just and right winner: Augustine. But if one takes what actually survives of the Pelagian mentality at face value as theology then the situation is much more complex.

This tension was conceptualised by Lessing as one between the *religion of Christ* and the *Christian religion*. “The former, the religion of Christ, is that religion which as man he himself recognized and practiced.”<sup>39</sup> This is the religion of the Pelagian mentality. It can be a radical religion as the teaching of Jesus was radical. As Hegel noted “We may say that nowhere are to be found such revolutionary

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<sup>39</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “*Nathan the Wise*,” “*Minna von Barnhelm*,” and *Other Plays and Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz. (New York: Continuum, 1991), 334–335. The relevant fragment dates from 1780. See also Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 124–126.



utterances as in the Gospels.<sup>40</sup> The Augustinian mentality, as an example of the *Christian religion*, focuses on the significance of the fact that Christ is Christ. This division is also reflected in political theology. The *religion of Christ* tends towards a theology of community, the *Christian religion* towards a theology of sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> These tensions can be resolved by recognising that both religions depend on the fact of the incarnation. They both capture aspects of the incarnation. They are both examples of incarnational deduction. In this they are both essentially Christian.<sup>42</sup>

## Back to the Text

One can sense that the author wants to denounce riches and the rich as simply evil. But he, not always entirely successfully, holds himself back. Perhaps he recognises that to do so would be to indulge his own prejudice and thus succumb to the sin of conceptual avarice resulting in an enslavement. So possessing riches is not the nub of the problem. It is rather how riches are amassed that is the occasion for sin. However, the author wants to argue that this problematic causation of riches permits him to condemn all riches and all those that riches possess. “I do not know ... how the fruit can be harmless in a tree whose flowers have grown from sin.”<sup>43</sup> In this the text follows 1 Timothy 6:9–10:

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

It is in the desire for riches that the danger is to be found. Avarice is the root. A necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, sign that somebody is no longer avaricious is that he is no longer rich. This will be because he will have given away his possessions until he has only what he needs. So it is not possession but coveting that is the problem with riches—though the author doubts if “an avaricious man can be said to possess rather than be possessed.”<sup>44</sup>

This is straightforward but what is novel about the text is that the social implications of this passage are unfolded. There is the recognition that the evil enabled is a social evil, and a social evil that can, and should, be remedied. This is more than the early Christian valuing of poverty. *On Riches*’ concern is *not* that everyone should be poor. From the perspective of combating avarice poverty is not a goal in itself. True, those who are poor may suffer less temptation. But it is not necessarily a state that the Christian should aspire to for its own sake. The logic of *On Riches* leads onto the task of ensuring that poverty is abolished and that everyone has *enough*. It proceeds by looking at the cause of poverty. The cause ultimately is greed but this is mediated through a primitive class system. Poverty entails suffering inflicted on those who are poor, and this suffering is caused directly or indirectly by the rich. Even the rich who are good cause the poor to suffer through the social organisation that enables them to be rich. Hence the good rich person is an illusion, whatever the apparent goodwill the rich person might have towards their fellow creatures. How does this indirect infliction of suffering come about?

Mankind is divided into three classes: the rich, the poor, and those who have enough, for every man must be accounted to be either rich or poor or self-sufficient. To be rich, so far as my meagre understanding is able to determine, is to have more than is necessary; to be

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<sup>40</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 328.

<sup>41</sup> On this distinction and its genealogy see Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 140–142.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps a central theological task is to understand, without avarice, how these incarnational deductions relate?

<sup>43</sup> Rees, 176.

<sup>44</sup> Rees, 175.

poor is not to have enough; and to have enough, the mean between these two extremes, is to possess no more than is absolutely necessary.<sup>45</sup>

The author is always aware that behind his analysis is avarice and behind avarice there is the fact that humans desire. He states that by “sufficient, I mean, not for the demands of avarice but for the needs of nature. For nothing can ever be sufficient for avarice, even if it possessed the whole world.”<sup>46</sup> He has an objective rather than subjective concept of poverty. Here the text appeals to Proverbs 30:8: “Remove me far from falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need.” Behind this primitive class system lies the concept of need. Poverty occurs where those needs are not satisfied. Poverty is a thing to be remedied. There is no excessively ascetic, or naïve, valuing of poverty. Indeed, there is the admission that “folly and knavery are to be found among the poor.”<sup>47</sup> There is also, as ever for the Pelagian, the example of Jesus who though he lived a frugal life always ensured that his followers had enough to eat, hence the numerous feeding miracles in the Gospels. From the perspective of the requirements for a basic decent human life this is not an asceticism. It is only ascetic if one views it from a perspective of over-indulgence, from the perspective of being possessed by the desire for excess, by the desire for riches and power. The concept of wealth deployed here should not be understood in a narrow manner: “Riches are not gold or silver or any other created thing but the superfluous wealth that is derived from unnecessary possessions.”<sup>48</sup> Admittedly the definition of what is necessary is left open but that is a subsidiary question.

These injunctions are rooted in the examination of the life and teaching of Christ. For the Pelagian mentality the chief goal of the Christian life is to imitate Christ. As human beings have freewill and are not entirely corrupted then this imitation is possible if extremely difficult given the enslaving power of sin. The injunction found at 1 John 2:6 is appealed to: “whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.” Also Luke 14:27: “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” And most pertinently Matthew 19:21: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” The last passage was the focus of disputes with Augustine. Augustine made much of the distinction between what is required to be good and what is required to be perfect. He claimed that goodness, keeping the commandments, was sufficient. For the Pelagian the aspiration to perfection is what really matters. If “ought implies can” then perfection is possible for the human. Whatever the anthropological naivety of the position, or the difficulty entailed in its achievement, the possible and desirable attainment of human perfection is attributed to Christ himself in Matthew 19:21. For the Pelagian mentality this means that whatever the effect of the Fall there is an obligation on the Christian to try to be perfect and that there is no necessary reason why this state cannot be achieved by a Christian.

Augustine was wont to dismiss Pelagianism as nothing but “law and teaching.” But the role of Christ as teacher is central to the Pelagian mentality as for it: “surely everyone who is called a Christian professes that he is Christ’s disciple, and Christ’s disciple should follow his teacher’s example in all things.”<sup>49</sup> Human perfection is not about being divine. It is not promethean in that sense. It means aiming for what Jesus described as human perfection. For the Pelagian human perfection is existential, a way of living, a way of *being* Christian. It does not mean cohering to something like an absolute platonic form of perfection. Human perfection is still far short of the perfection of the divine.

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<sup>45</sup> Rees, 177.

<sup>46</sup> Rees, 178.

<sup>47</sup> Rees, 210.

<sup>48</sup> Rees, 190–1.

<sup>49</sup> Rees, 179.

## The Perils of Avarice

Another crucial concern of the text that marks it out from some other early Christian ideas on poverty is that it recognises that power as well as riches is an object of avarice, and thus both are aspects of the same social and spiritual problem. In this one finds not only the concern with economic organisation that anticipates socialism, but also a concern with the problem of power that anticipates anarchism.

Note carefully, I beg you, what a great sign of arrogance and pride it is to want to be rich when we know that Christ was poor, and to take upon ourselves any of the power that comes with lordship when he took on the outward form of a servant.<sup>50</sup>

The author may have had a legal education, and this might well explain why his ire when it comes to abuse of power is focused on the law. Then, as now, the overlap between the categories of the rich, lawyers, and those who exercise political power was extensive. And there is no more vicious critique of law and lawyers than that provided by the disillusioned lawyer:

the rich ... are sometimes accustomed to solicit earthly power and to take their seat upon the tribunal before which Christ stood and was heard. How intolerable is the presumption of human pride ... This is not the pattern given by your teacher. *He* stood humbly before the tribunal; you sit on the tribunal, above those who stand before you, propped up by your pride, perhaps about to judge a poor man. *You* ask the questions, *he* was heard; *you* judge, *he* was subjected to a judge's decision; in your presumption *you* utter your judgement, in his innocence *he* received it, as if guilty; *he* said that his kingdom was not of this world, but to *you* the glory of a worldly kingdom is so desirable that you procure it at vast expense or acquire it with unworthy and wearisome servitude and flattery.<sup>51</sup>

The text goes on to consider judicial evils and the hypocrisy of the willing inhabitants of legal systems, such as those who claim they are only doing their duty when they inflict cruel tortures on the accused, as if judges and lawyers were under weaker moral obligations than any other member of society.<sup>52</sup>

The text then proceeds to counter the suggestion that inequality is either justified or even divinely ordained. The author gives full rein to his rhetorical talents:

Observe whether the rich man enjoys the benefit of this air of ours more than the poor, whether he feels the sun's heat more or less, or, when rain is given to the land, whether larger drops descend on the rich man's soil than upon the poor man's, whether the glowing lights of the moon or the stars serve the rich man more than the poor. Do you not see then that we possess equally with others all the things which are not under our control but which we receive by God's dispensation, and on unjust and unequal terms only the things which are entrusted and subjected to our own rule for the sake of free choice and to test our righteousness?<sup>53</sup>

Thus inequality is the result of the exercise of human freewill. There is equality before the divine law: "Let us see if there is one law for the rich and another for the poor, if the former are reborn by one kind of baptism and the latter by another."<sup>54</sup> To those who claim that the virtue of charity would be

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<sup>50</sup> Rees, 179.

<sup>51</sup> Rees, 179 (emphases in the original).

<sup>52</sup> Pelagians had such suspicion of the legal system that they were encouraged not to swear oaths. See Rees, 205.

<sup>53</sup> Rees, 183.

<sup>54</sup> Rees, 184.

meaningless in a just society he notes that spiritual perfection is the highest goal. Charity is but one step towards that goal and one should not sacrifice the end for the sake of a temporary means.

Towards the end of the text there is a mellowing of sorts. As the author draws back from his rhetorical heights there is an acceptance that riches themselves might be without evil. But this point is still conceded reluctantly and it is a position that is still far from perfection if not entirely sinful.

Not that they [riches] are sin in themselves but that they offer an occasion of sin so long as they are acquired by evil means or are possessed improperly, or the cares attached to them give rise to neglect of the heavenly commandments or result in a need to commit crimes more often.<sup>55</sup>

Even in the unlikely event that their riches are not impure then their example will encourage others to sin in their search for riches.<sup>56</sup> When others see the rich person they will seek to imitate him. They will seek to amass riches themselves. Even the innocent possession of riches then has a sadistic aspect. While it might leave the possessor's subjectivity untainted by sin, it tempts others into the path of sin as they succumb to their desire for riches. Here the role of mimetic desire is acknowledged to remove the final argumentative citadel of those who defend the possession of excessive wealth and power.

It is difficult to acquire riches without committing every kind of evil ... How can we imagine that something which is acquired by such a variety of crimes has the sanction of God?<sup>57</sup>

The text concludes by returning again to the perils of greed:

For what wise or sensible man would doubt that greed is the occasion of all evils, the root of crimes, the fuel of wrongdoing, the source of transgressions? ... For its sake the earth is daily stained with innocent blood.<sup>58</sup>

It corrupts every good feature of human nature. It corrupts even one's sense of one's own nature. Greed prompts one to seek to become not what one truly is, but the opposite of what one truly is. "And so in his wretchedness, in his desire to cease to be the man he is, the worse he becomes the better he thinks he is."<sup>59</sup> All valuations are inverted. Even the criteria of political wrong-doing become corrupted resulting in the righteous indignation displayed when those who feel absolutely entitled to riches and power (by divine right?) are criticised.

Listen to him [the rich man] saying, "Just look at him, outcast, ragamuffin, and baseborn; and *h e* is the one who dares to say anything in the presence of people in *our* position and, in his rags and tatters, to discuss *our* morals and conduct and to try to disturb *our* consciences and force them to recognize the truth by rational debate!" As if the rich alone were permitted to speak, and riches, rather than thought, had the right to reason out the truth!<sup>60</sup>

Here spiritual egalitarianism meets the egalitarianism of the careful and carefree exercise of reason well over a millennium before the Enlightenment. Here the right to philosophy and free expression is as much a part of a just society as economic justice.

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<sup>55</sup> Rees, 206.

<sup>56</sup> Rees, 207.

<sup>57</sup> Rees, 199.

<sup>58</sup> Rees, 199.

<sup>59</sup> Rees, 200 (emphases in the original).

<sup>60</sup> Rees, 200.

## The Church

Social evils have roots in the unjust distribution of wealth and power, but also, and more fundamentally, in the un-resisted distortion of human subjectivity through greed. And this distorted subjectivity seeks to make itself as one with social normativity, especially as embodied in human law:

through false interpretation of the law and the use of every stratagem which their natural wit can devise, to protect what they love, not so much ordering their conduct according to the precepts of the gospel as modifying their understanding of the commandments of the gospel to suit their habitual actions. What they want is not so much to submit their way of life to the law as to subordinate law to the way in which they conduct their own lives.<sup>61</sup>

But this subjectivity is always social. And for the Pelagian Christian sociality is the Church.

Peter Brown, the most astute investigator here, reminds us that what is essentially at stake in the Pelagian dispute is the idea of the Church as the community of all Christians. The Church is the institutional name for the being-together of those who are Christians.

The Pelagian's sense of the free will enjoyed by the Christian, his promises of perfection, his inexorable insistence on obedience to the just law of God—all this is firmly based on a distinctive idea of the Church. For Pelagius and the Pelagian the aim remained not to produce the perfect individual, but, above all, the perfect religious group ... Thus the most marked feature of the Pelagian movement is far from being its individualism: it is its insistence that the full code of Christian behaviour, the Christian *Lex*, should be imposed, in all its rigours, on every baptised member of the Catholic Church: "There is *one* law for all ..."<sup>62</sup>

The life of Jesus is the regulative ideal of the life of the Christian and of the Christian community. It is only within the Church that free will can be enjoyed. Not any human can achieve human spiritual perfection. Conversion and baptism are required before this is even possible. As Brown explains

there is no out-and-out naturalism in Pelagius, for the simple reason that the man who has recovered his natural capacity to act, inside the Christian Church, is discontinuous with any "natural" man outside the Church.<sup>63</sup>

The Pelagian mentality is rooted in a sober awareness of the corruptibility of human nature. This corruptibility is itself an effect of the fluidity and fragility of created human subjectivity. Yet it is this very fluidity and fragility that also allows this subjectivity to be enhanced, even perfected. This is achieved immediately by the exercise of the human will.

His criticism of the doctrine of original sin, therefore, was determined by the fear that once a sin was regarded as "natural" rather than "voluntary" it would be allowed to survive the geological fault between a man's past and his present that Pelagius associated with conversion and with the rite of baptism.<sup>64</sup>

Original sin can belittle what it is to become and be a Christian.

The Pelagian naivety is not anthropological naivety. It is the deliberate and unapologetic naivety of their faith that Christ was Christ.

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<sup>61</sup> Rees, 204.

<sup>62</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 102.

<sup>63</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 103.

<sup>64</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 105.

Augustine's support was thrown on the side of toleration for human shortcomings, not so much in private morality (for the Church of his day had stern disciplinary standards) as in a broader structural way; by resisting too close a scrutiny of the actions of the Church and the Empire and the implications of their mutual involvement.<sup>65</sup>

Divine sovereignty and its just exercise are a given for the Pelagian. But the organisation of worldly economic and political power is not a given. What the worldly pattern of social, economic and political power should be follows from the logic implicit in the life and teachings of Jesus. But it is up to the Christian to work to ensure that this organisation comes to pass.

Augustine, in a scrupulous examination of his abiding weaknesses, in his evocation of the life-long convalescence of the converted Christian, had tacitly denied that it was ever possible for a man to slough off his past: neither baptism nor the experience of conversion could break the monotonous continuity of a life that was "one long temptation." In so doing, Augustine had abandoned a great tradition of Western Christianity. It was Pelagius who had seized the logical conclusions of this tradition: he is the last, the most radical, and the most paradoxical exponent of the ancient Christianity—the Christianity of discontinuity.<sup>66</sup>

With the passing of this vision the clergy asserted control. The Church became in practice less than the community of all spiritually equal Christians. It became an institution with all its hierarchies and powers, rather than a being-together. So that for Brown finally: "The significance of the death of Pelagianism, therefore, lies in the idea of the Church in Western society."<sup>67</sup> And with this the "laity sinks into the background."<sup>68</sup> Something was lost.

## A Radical Political Theology

To conclude: *On Riches* expresses a Christian political *theology*. It is not pagan or Stoic. It is rooted in an understanding of the incarnation. It orientates itself with respect to the question of how a Christian life can be lived. It struggles with the problem of how desire can be more than greed and avarice—can even be love—can even undertake the work of justice. The Christian life can be different from other lives because of the break wrought by baptism. Baptism invigorates and enables the free will in its struggle with sinful habit. Baptism is what enables the will to will freely. But the free will must be complemented by a free and equal society. Personal spiritual virtue alone is not sufficient for the Christian life or the Christian society—a society that aspires to, and actively works toward, being without avarice—a Christian community that aspires to be Christian in the sense of behaving as Christ instructed his followers to behave.

More tendentially I have suggested that the text implicitly opens up the relation between what is thought politically and how it is thought. Consider anarchism, which of the modern political philosophies might appear ideologically closest to the Pelagian mentality. Anarchism can be, and indeed often is, conceptualised or defined dogmatically. Certain values might be taken as axiomatic: the overriding value of the particularity of each human subject, and of the liberty and equality of such subjects; scepticism concerning the desirability and efficacy of any authoritarian form of political organisation, and so on. This would be recognisably anarchism. But there is a danger of a performative contradiction here as it is a dogmatic definition of anarchism, and I submit that there is something in anarchism

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<sup>65</sup> Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 273. At 274 TeSelle goes so far as to admit that this "does disclose a tragic flaw in his personality, for unlike Ambrose he was not prepared to stand up against civil authority." The words submissive and cowardice are even deployed.

<sup>66</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 107.

<sup>67</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 113.

<sup>68</sup> Brown "Pelagius and his Supporters," 114.

that finds dogmatism to be absolutely foreign to its basic sensibility, to its mentality. For the Pelagian dogmatism is implicitly an expression of avarice if the dogmas are not given by Christ (and not only greed but other sins such as pride). Is not dogmatism a “sin” for the anarchist? I use “sin” well aware of how problematic a use it is. But if dogmatism is problematic to the anarchist because it entails arbitrary assertion that without justification seeks to arrogate the authority of social normativity to itself then can it not be understood as the expression of avarice? Such an awareness can enrich not only anarchist thinking, but any political thinking.

Does the Pelagian mentality matter to those who are not Christian, to those who do not accept the incarnation as axiomatic for life? Radical political thought is always about more than the setting forth of a programme, more than the diagnosis of the ills of a society, more than the sketching of the architecture of a just polity. It should also be about the education of political desire (not political avarice) and the expansion of the social imaginary. This is not a question of positing the impossible but realistically and rigorously both exploring and expanding the ever changing limit of the possible. As a result the politically “possible but difficult” cannot erroneously be posited as politically impossible. These two practical aspects: the political/critical and the pedagogic/utopian should enrich each other. The Pelagian mentality as it is expressed in *On Riches* may as political/critical be exclusively theological, but as pedagogic/utopian it bears witness to the fact that in the early fifth century there was a fearless political imagination that rigorously followed its own logic to demand the spiritual and material transformation of both self and world. Its like would not be found again for many a century.

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## CHAPTER TWO. A THEOLOGY OF REVOLUTIONS: ABIEZER COPPE AND THE USES OF TRADITION

PETER PICK

*This chapter attempts to place Abiezer Coppe in his historical and social context and outline some of the strategies he employs to justify both his theological positions and his actions. The main focus is on Coppe's use of the Bible as both a supporting text and a template for action. In Coppe's hands the Bible becomes a storehouse of subject positions and narrative resources which are used to support highly heterodox doctrines and activities. Coppe thereby exposes and exploits contradictions within the text and in the uses made of it in contemporary political discourse. I seek to show that Coppe was an anarchist at a time when even "democracy" was thought contemptible, and to show the reasoning underlying his position. Both sides in the English Civil War used Biblical precedent and religious doctrine as a support for their conflicting positions, which itself opened the text to further strategic reading, and Coppe's education and training equipped him to understand the unstable and contingent nature of the text itself, a text full of conflicting opinions which had been subject to more than 1,000 years of interpretation and commentary and yet was held to represent—indeed to be—unchanging and eternal truth. In contrast to the assumptions and accommodations of orthodoxy Coppe stresses God's unlimited and arbitrary power and adopts Pelagian and Joachite positions. The Bible becomes a weapon against all earthly authority, an unstable document of multi-valent interpretation in a time of profound political and religious instability.*

My chapter will attempt to place Abiezer Coppe in his historical and social context and outline some of the strategies he employs to justify both his theological positions and his behaviour. My focus is on his use of the Bible as both supporting text and template for action. In Coppe's hands it becomes a storehouse of subject positions and narrative resources which are used to support highly heterodox doctrines and activities. Thus Coppe exposes and exploits inherent contradictions both within the text and in the uses made of Biblical texts to support authority in contemporary political discourse.

That both sides in the English Civil War used Biblical precedent and religious doctrine as means of support for their conflicting positions opened the Bible to strategic reading, and Coppe's education and training equipped him to understand the unstable and contingent nature of the text itself, a text full of conflicting opinions and different viewpoints which was subject both to the vagaries of translation and to more than 1,000 years of interpretation and commentary and yet was held to represent—indeed to be—unchanging and eternal truth.

In contrast to the assumptions and accommodations of orthodoxy Coppe stresses God's unlimited and arbitrary power and adopts positions that might show Pelagian and Joachite influence.<sup>1</sup> Coppe's theological studies will have allowed him access to such authors and their controversial positions, an access not available to the majority of his contemporaries, radical or not.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pelagius was a British monk of the fifth century who taught that God, in requiring men to behave perfectly, could not be asking the impossible of them. He therefore denied original sin and instead emphasised free will. This apparently liberal position nevertheless led him to condemn all who sin in the slightest; they are damned and should be expelled from the Church. "Such severity is only too characteristic of 'universal' perfectibilists. If all men can be perfect, given only that they seriously try, it [ sic] a short step to the conclusion that they deserve damnation—or execution—for not being perfect." John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 95.

<sup>2</sup> For Joachim of Fiore, see below, note 46.

The English Civil War, sometimes also called the “English Revolution” and its immediate aftermath—the Commonwealth or Protectorate—took place from 1642 to 1660, whereupon Monarchy was re-imposed, or, as the English like to say “restored.” Even after all this time the period remains the site of much conflict, though fortunately this is now confined largely to historians. The middle of the seventeenth century was a crucial time in English, British and Irish cultural history, and it is at this time that Abiezer Coppe, seemingly the child of a respectable Presbyterian family who was undergoing a highly privileged education at the University of Oxford (then as now a fairly conservative institution) turned radical preacher, first within the “New Model Army” of Oliver Cromwell and then freelance, wandering the counties of the West Midlands.<sup>3</sup>

That there was much radical religious and political activity during this time is well known through the work of such authors as Christopher Hill, and the best known movements or tendencies of the period in rough chronological order include the “Levellers” (who spent much of their effort denying that they intended a “levelling of estates” in seventeenth century terms), the “Diggers” (who in contrast call themselves “True Levellers”) the “Ranters” (who many historians deny even the existence of) and the “Quakers” (who still prefer to be called “the Religious Society of Friends”).<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that all these names, now fixed by years of use, were originally terms of abuse coined by their opponents, tokens in a propaganda war. Abiezer Coppe himself was what is called a “Ranter.” Even those who repudiate the existence of the Ranters as a movement, church or coherent theological grouping could scarcely deny that.<sup>5</sup>

To treat these movements briefly, the Levellers were an increasingly well-organised campaigning movement which attempted to push the Parliamentary leadership towards greater reforms than they had ever intended. They gained popular support especially in London and later in the New Model Army, and some degree of influence through pamphleteering, rallies, “agitation” and lobbying within the increasingly numerous and influential Independent religious groupings—“gathered churches”—disaffected with mainstream religious practice, especially the Baptists and the Presbyterians. Increasing radicalism led to the Levellers losing the support of the Presbyterians (who had authoritarian tendencies) and most Baptists, and attempts to raise a mutiny in the Army were crushed by Cromwell after attempts at negotiation had largely failed in the famous “Putney Debates” of October 1647.<sup>6</sup> For many it must now have seemed that whatever gains the struggle with the King had promised they would not accrue to those who had borne the brunt of it.

Not all shared this pessimism, however. The failure of the Levellers to force universal male suffrage or relieve the burdens of those less privileged in a relatively immobile society led to the direct action movement known as the Diggers. These agricultural communalists seized land that had been enclosed and began to farm it, most famously at St. George’s Hill in Surrey. Their chief propagandist, prophet, ideologue or mystic Gerrard Winstanley shared much of the Leveller affection for Saxon common law and combined it with visionary Christianity in a series of poetic pamphlets. Describing the earth as “a common treasury” he opposed the private ownership of land and property which he equated with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Like Gerrard Winstanley both Abiezer Coppe and the Quakers felt that a new age was dawning, perhaps indeed that of the direct rule of Christ on Earth. All felt justified and driven, even “called” to enact their beliefs, to instantiate the community and Christian charity they envisaged as the ideal society. Coppe’s ecstatic prophecies in *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649/50) explicitly predict the end of all

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<sup>3</sup> Nigel McDowell, “A Ranter Reconsidered: Abiezer Coppe and Civil War Stereotypes,” in *The Seventeenth Century* 12, no 1 (Spring 1997): 173–205.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Principally J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Pre-eminently A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–9) from the Clarke Manuscripts, with Supplementary Documents* (London: J. M. Dent, 1938).

power, not just the power of the recently beheaded King, “your forerunner who is gone before you” but of all those who seek dominion over others, the “great ones.”<sup>7</sup>

The ferment of radical ideas set loose by the Civil Wars and the symbolic and actual beheading of the body politic threatened the very Parliamentary Grandees whose argument with King Charles’ autocratic rule and Catholicising religious tendencies had initiated the conflict. The lack of a King threw the question of government wide open, and many sought historical precedents in Roman and particularly Biblical history for ways to proceed. The equal and simultaneous lack of a centrally controlled National Church also threw open the question of what constituted proper theology and forms of worship. The breakdown of pre-licensing and central control over publication which was a direct result both of the conflict and the propaganda war accompanying it led to an unprecedented flood of publication, one of the richest periods of independent production ever seen in England. Sections of society previously assumed to be illiterate reveal in unlicensed print cogent and forceful opinions often of a heterodox religious and millenarian nature.

The Ranters were only one of a profusion of sects recorded, abused and perhaps invented in sensationalist pamphlets by Puritan moralists, but Coppe was singled out for special attention.<sup>8</sup> His period of preaching in London in 1649 where he set himself up as “a signe, and a wonder,” the messianic tone of *A Fiery Flying Roll* and his status as a renegade member of the nascent ruling class might all have contributed to his arrest and imprisonment by order of Parliament itself.<sup>9</sup> *A Fiery Flying Roll* was ordered to be burned by the hangman. Coppe claims in his first “retraction” (a notably incomplete apology called “A Remonstrance of the Sincere and Zealous Protestation”) that the two Blasphemy Acts of 1650 “were put out because of me.”<sup>10</sup> The unique flavour of Coppe’s most notorious work *A Fiery Flying Roll*, in a time that produced a gigantic outpouring of pamphlet literature of all persuasions is at least partly encoded within its structure, so hedged about by interpolations, predictions and introductions as to make the act of first reading the text seem itself like a repetition. The promised secret seems endlessly deferred, and indeed it has already been stated, the process of deferral is a ritual, a baptism, the text an invocation so enmeshed in repetitions that the contents pages and chapter headings sometimes exceed in detail the subject of their advertisement. This is a text of hints and elisions, of, as John Dury observes later, insinuations.<sup>11</sup> Its structure subverts expectation, mixing denunciation, prophecy and biographical narrative with an extensive array of marginal notes, learned references and Latin tags: all the paranoid accoutrements of the academic text.

*A Fiery Flying Roll* is from the outset a double work, containing its own supplement (there is included in the original publication a second part) and commentaries. It begins with a title page announcing the work as “A Word from the Lord to all the Great Ones,” proceeds to a preface, which is followed by a detailed account of the contents of both subsequent “Rolls.” The first Roll (or book) begins with a reiteration of the title page and then proceeds again to recount the forthcoming contents of the body of the text, which is a series of threats to the powerful delivered in the voice of God. The structure is of Chapters divided into verses, plainly modelled on the Bible. Each Chapter is preceded and prefigured by an account of its contents which differs slightly from that already given in the introductory account in the contents pages.

Coppe’s greatest point of divergence from the majority of the pamphlet literature stirred up by the Civil War derives from his academic training. The great outpouring of unlicensed publication over this period derives in large part from areas of society that have traditionally been considered by historians to be illiterate; small farmers, artisans and suchlike who had previously been denied the means to

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<sup>7</sup> Abiezer Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” in *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Edwardes, *Gangraena*, 3 vols. (London) (1646).

<sup>9</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 32.

<sup>10</sup> Abiezer Coppe, “A Remonstrance of the Sincere and Zealous Protestation,” in *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 58.

<sup>11</sup> Coppe, “A Remonstrance of the Sincere and Zealous Protestation,” 86.

publish their opinions, or to otherwise preserve whatever writings they might have made. Historians are forced to rely on written records, and since central licensing of publication prevented anyone not explicitly approved by authority from publishing and poverty and obscurity inhibit the preservation of the written word it has been generally assumed that the vast majority of the population was illiterate (and thus in a very real sense beneath notice). Reading is thought to have been more common than the ability to write, as the skills were taught separately, but it is generally thought that the artisan and smallholder were functionally illiterate throughout history until the late eighteenth century. This assumption is thrown into doubt by the evidence of this window of unrestricted publication, within which many who have had no access to formal education produce cogent and often eloquent accounts of their beliefs, desires and expectations.<sup>12</sup>

Coppe is not one of these peasant prophets. He attended Oxford University and received the benefit of tuition in theology and the classical languages, even it seems a little Hebrew. He recounts a personal history in which a youth once tormented by his own sinfulness throws the burden of Calvinist guilt aside and comes to violate social norms, to transgress. At this time he is already an itinerant preacher, the once respectable Presbyterian is already among the most free of the Baptists according to Richard Baxter.<sup>13</sup> He is a married man, he preaches to scattered sympathisers he reaches on horseback and from whom he must be somehow collecting funds. He goes to London, where he preaches in the streets, charging down carriages filled with notorious cavaliers by his own account and getting into a trouble for making a disturbance at a “gathered church,” probably strict Baptists not attracted by Coppe’s ecstatic liberation. He falls ill, he sweats, he has visions, he experiences a sudden and imperative call to “write, write write”—he borrows his commission from the Lord in part from Isaiah, to whom he also seems to owe a good deal stylistically.<sup>14</sup>

Coppe’s expressed doctrines, although somewhat obscured by the heated tone and convoluted style of *A Fiery Flying Roll* are distinctly anarchist in tone. They are less authoritarian than Winstanley became over time, but share a repeated stress on communality. “True communion,” according to Coppe is to be found in the breaking of bread together, and true religion in not thinking of what you have as your own.<sup>15</sup> He pours scorn on any religious practice which concentrates on the formalities of religion rather than this essential charity.

It is difficult to accurately backdate our current political positions onto a previous era. The maps we use to navigate our modern-day political landscape distort the image of the past. To describe Winstanley as a communist or Coppe as an anarchist poses such difficulties, since among other factors we are looking back at an era when most political discourse was framed in religious terms, and most political positions were defended on theological grounds. Coppe’s conviction that the millennium is imminent is intimately connected to his communalist demands.

The time’s coming, yea now is, that you shall not dare to say, your silver or your gold is  
your owne.  
It’s the Lords.  
You shall not say it is your own, lest the rust of it rise up in judgement against you, and  
burn your flesh as it were fire.  
Neither shall you dare to say, your oxe, or your asse is your owne.

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<sup>12</sup> Recent research, led by that of David Cressy, has suggested that rates of literacy were greater in the period than had previously been assumed. See David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof* (London: Robert White, 1651), 148.

<sup>14</sup> Part of Coppe’s autobiographical account is to be found in the Preface of “A Fiery Flying Roll,” Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 17. His “commission to write” is also given at the beginning of the second part of “A Fiery Flying Roll,” Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 36. A further autobiographical account is given in the early part of Abiezer Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth” in *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 67–70. His behaviour in London is alluded to in Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 42–43, Chapter V of the second Roll. His conflict with the Anabaptist “churches” is recounted in Chapter VI of the first Roll, Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 32–34.

<sup>15</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 50–51.

It's the Lords.<sup>16</sup>

Coppe is taking up the prophecy of James Chapter 5 here, which begins:

Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.  
Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten.  
Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be a testimony against you, and  
shall eat your flesh as fire.<sup>17</sup>

Coppe continues:

All your former sweets shall be mingled with gall and wormwood. I give you but a hint.  
It's the last daies.<sup>18</sup>

“Gall and wormwood” are mentioned by Isaiah, and in the following excerpt it is clear how Coppe’s text interpenetrates with Biblical models, in this case James 5, as above:

Howl, howl, ye nobles, howl honourable, howl ye rich men for the miseries that are coming  
upon you.  
For our parts, we that hear the APOSTLE preach, will also have all things common; neither  
will we call any thing that we have our own.  
Do you [if you please] till the plague of God rot and consume what you have.  
We will not, wee'l eat our bread together in singlenesse of heart, wee'l break bread from  
house to house.<sup>19</sup>

In verse 2 of *A Fiery Flying Roll* he claims that “that excellent Majesty, which dwells in the writer of this Roule hath reconciled ALL THINGS to himselfe” but

sword levelling or digging-levelling are neither of them his principle ... although he hath  
more justice, righteousness, truth, and sincerity, shining in those low dung-hills (as they are  
esteemed) then in the Sunne, Moone, and all the Stars.<sup>20</sup>

This praises the Levellers and the Diggers in high terms, and also, even more controversially perhaps, makes two claims about God, the first that he dwells within Coppe (the writer of this roule) and that everything is equal in his view. Coppe was later forced to justify this first claim in his first prison retraction *A Remonstrance of the Sincere and Zealous Protestation*.

I do not vainly, ignorantly, and blasphemously affirm myself, or any other meer creature, to  
be very God: neither was this Tenent (or any of the rest that follow) ever mine.  
But this I have and do affirm, and shall still upon the house tops affirm, and shall expire  
with the wholesome sound, and orthodoxal opinion That God Christ is in the creature.  
[— *CHRIST IN YOU except you are reprobates*, 1 Cor]  
The contrary assertion is the Blasphemie of Blasphemies, &c.<sup>21</sup>

The language he adopts here not only echoes Biblical models, but also utilises the text of the Blasphemy Acts of 1650. He also uses the Bible in order to justify his apparently eccentric behaviour. The Bible provides him with a range of narratives, behaviours and subject positions with which he can make identification. In *A Fiery Flying Roll* he frequently adopts the voice of God, a voice so closely allied to his own that his act of ventriloquism exceeds that of the Hebrew Prophets from whom it is derived.

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<sup>16</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 48.

<sup>17</sup> James 5:1–3. King James Version.

<sup>18</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 48.

<sup>19</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 50.

<sup>20</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 22.

<sup>21</sup> Coppe, “A Remonstrance of the sincere and zealous Protestation,” 60 (Coppe’s emphasis).

Thus saith the Lord, *I inform you, that I overturn, overturn, overturn.* And as the Bishops, Charles, and the Lords, have had their turn, overturn, so your turn shall be next (ye surviving great ones) by what Name or Title soever dignified or distinguished) who ever you are, that oppose me, the Eternall God, who am UNIVERSALL Love, and whose service is perfect freedome, and pure Libertinisme.<sup>22</sup>

“Pure Libertinisme” is something more than freedom, it suggests that any act is permitted to the elect.

The nature and root of this “pure Libertinisme” is revealed more clearly in Chapter 2, verse 7 of *A Fiery Flying Roll* where Coppe announces:

That sinne and transgression is finished, it's a mere riddle ... some there are who ... see no evill, think no evill, doe no evill, know no evill.  
ALL is religion that they speak and honour that they do.<sup>23</sup>

And further: “Well! To the pure all things are pure.”<sup>24</sup>

In his second prison retraction, the much fuller and more detailed *Copp's Return to the wayes of TRUTH* he is forced to affirm the reality of sin, but the sins he chooses to emphasise seem unlikely to offer great comfort to his accusers.<sup>25</sup>

All are Sinners.

Thieves, little thieves, and great thieves, drunkards, adulterers, and adulteresses. Murtherers, little murtherers, and great murtherers. All are Sinners, Sinners All...

As is written, there is none righteous; no, not one;—there is none that doth good; no, not one.<sup>26</sup>

EVERY ONE loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards—

And now O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face, to thee my God. For we have sinned.

We, our Kings, our Rulers. Our Priests, our Judges.

All have sinned, and gone astray.

Do sin, are sinners.

Wo be to the inhabitants of the Earth—

The EARTH is full of sin.

There is sin, sin with a witness.<sup>27</sup>

... murther of all sorts, is a sin.

*Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.*

And so is pride, covetousness, hypocrisie, oppression, Tyranny, cruelty, unmercifulnesse, despising the poor and needy, who are in vile raiment, &c.

A sin.

*Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.*

And so is doing unto others, as we would not be done to ourselves, &c.

A sin.

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<sup>22</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 21–22 (Coppe’s emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 27.

<sup>24</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 27.

<sup>25</sup> Abiezer Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth” in *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 63–97.

<sup>26</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 74.

<sup>27</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 75.

*Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.*

And the laying of Nets, Traps, and Snares for the feet of our neighbours, is a sin.

*Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.*

And so is the not undoing of heavy burthens, the not letting the oppressed go free: the not breaking every yolk, and the not dealing of bread to the hungry, &c.<sup>28</sup>

It should be noted that the recurring refrain in this excerpt “*Whether men imagine it to be so, or no.*” is derived from the letter sent to Coppe by his Parliamentary inquisitor John Dury and reprinted in *Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth*.<sup>29</sup> It is clear I think that Coppe intentionally chooses examples of sinfulness which he feels can be directed at Dury and the Parliamentarians he represents.

Although he denies contemptuously that God dwells exclusively within any creature, or that any “meer creature” is God, Coppe continues to maintain a doctrine of “filiation,” whereby

We are partakers of the divine nature.

Through that glorious, Mystical, unfathomable, Spiritual union which we have with Christ, and his in-dwelling in us, &c.<sup>30</sup>

And being in him dwells *ALL* the fullness of the God-head bodily——&c.

Of his fullness we all receive, Joh.1.Colos.

Whereof I say, of and from, and through him—through mystical, spiritual, filiation, fraternity, unity and in-dwelling. *We are partakers in the Divine nature.*<sup>31</sup>

In *A Fiery Flying Roll* part 1, Chapter 2, verse 15 he hints at his belief in a new dispensation.

Never was there such a time since the world stood, as now is.

Thou knowest not the strange appearances of the Lord now a daies. Take heed, know thou hast been warned.<sup>32</sup>

Coppe makes this striking comparison between different sorts of morality, the kind of observation common among adolescents:

... we (holily) scorn to fight for anything: we had as live be dead drunk every day of the weeke and lie with whores i’ the market place, and account these as good actions as taking the poore abused, enslaved ploughmans money from him (who is almost everywhere undone, and squeezed to death; and not so much as that plaguy, unsupportable, hellish burden, and oppression, of Tythes taken off his shoulders, notwithstanding all his honesty, fidelity, Taxes, Freequarter, petitioning &c. for the same,) we had rather starve, I say, then take away his money from him for killing of men.<sup>33</sup>

Here Coppe attacks the tithes collected by the Church as well as the added financial burdens of the Civil War and balances an extreme example of purely sexual immorality against the repressive financial and political impositions of the governing class.

Coppe defends his eccentric behaviour in London (some of which he recounts in *A Fiery Flying Roll* with a mixture of bravado and astonishment)<sup>34</sup> by reference to the “many” “pranks” of Ezekiel,<sup>35</sup> who

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<sup>28</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 90 (Coppe’s emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 85–87.

<sup>30</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 93 (Coppe’s emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth,” 93 (Coppe’s emphasis).

<sup>32</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 28.

<sup>33</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 24–25.

<sup>34</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 42–43.

<sup>35</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 41.

“was more seraphicall than his Predecessors” and, Coppe recounts was “the son of contempt; it pleases me [right well] that I am his brother.”<sup>36</sup>

This involves a well-understood Biblical precedent for strange but “prophetic” symbolic actions. Such behaviour might contain a divine message. Coppe invokes Isaiah at the beginning of *A Fiery Flying Roll* and states that “the Author has been set as a signe & a wonder, as well as most of the Prophets formerly.”<sup>37</sup> By association with these models Coppe seeks both to normalise his own behaviour and claim divine sanction for it. The appeal is in two directions, both bringing prophecy and Prophets into the present and pushing Coppe’s particularity into a distant cultural background. This effect of honour by association is also attempted in the retractions, where he compares his previous wild behaviour to the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel.<sup>38</sup> While admitting to error and transgressive behaviour his association of it with familiar figures within a Biblical template allows it the sanction of tradition, even a sort of respectability it could not otherwise claim.

This template is to be applied to all the circumstances of life. It is part of a common seventeenth century hermeneutic, often coupled with providentialist belief, and is common among some Christians to this day—within America’s religious right, for example. Coppe simultaneously reserves the right to supersede and overrule Scripture as the Spirit moves him, and this moving by, or occupation, — possession—by spirits is invoked to emphasise his helplessness as a Prophet moved by the Lord. We, as twenty-first century post-Freudians may read other diagnoses in Coppe’s account of his actions, but for Coppe the explanation that he has been the passive instrument of supra-normal forces provides a coherent and empowering narrative. Thus “he was strangely acted by that omnipotency dwelling within him” and “The same most excellent Majesty (in this forme) hath set the Forme in many strange postures lately.”<sup>39</sup>

Coppe also reserves the right to Biblical interpretation according to the “mystery” rather than the “history,” both elements coexisting throughout the Bible. This esoteric principle is repeated in the notion of “inward” and “outward” or “religious” and “civil,” a binarism constantly repeated and reinforced by Coppe, although he is equally capable of attacking those who rely on “the mystery” as being “void of understanding.” The distinction is a commonplace in seventeenth century Biblical interpretation. A further expression of this binarism Coppe employs is between “the jewel” and “the Cabinet.”

The mystery is mine, [mostly] that which I delight in, that’s the Jewel. The historie’s mine also, that’s the Cabinet. For the Jewels sake I will not leave the Cabinet, though indeed it’s nothing to me.<sup>40</sup>

And in the next verse he makes his case more plainly still:

The inwardness is mostly mine, my prime delight is there; the outwardnesse is mine also, when thou for thine own ends, standest in competition with me about it, or when I would confound thee by it.<sup>41</sup>

The Biblical text is a weapon he can use to “confound” his opponents as well as a territory to be fought over, the site of struggle, the battlefield itself. As a trained scholar he is in a position to use the text and its interpretation against others.

Coppe’s experience of himself as the puppet of the Divine causes him to perceive his body as a “corps,” a “worm eaten chest,” something itself inanimate which is moved only by the spirits which occupy it. This is also a common psychological position in the writings of Quakers, and prefigures Descartes’ “ghost in the machine.”

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<sup>36</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 41.

<sup>37</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 41. Isaiah 20:3.

<sup>38</sup> Coppe, “Copp’s Return to the Wayes of Truth” 68–69.

<sup>39</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 42.

<sup>40</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 50.

<sup>41</sup> Coppe, “A Fiery Flying Roll,” 50.



"I am about my act, my strange act, my worke, my strange work, that weosoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle."<sup>42</sup> Coppe declares, claiming that the heavens blush and the earth reels to and fro like a drunken man at the rising of the spirit. Coppe is

confounding, plaguing & tormenting nice demure, barren Mical with David's unseemly carriage ... dancing like one of the fools ... and uncovered too before handmaids.<sup>43</sup>

Coppe here again compares himself with a Biblical figure, but soon advocates a moral or spiritual particularism: he is himself above or beyond sin. "I can if it be my will, kisse and hug Ladies, and love my neighbours wife as myselfe, without sin,"<sup>44</sup> and he attacks conventional displays of morality

nasty stinking formall grace before meat ... give over thy stinking family duties, and thy Gospell Ordinances as thou callest them, for under them all there lies snapping, snarling, biting, besides covetousnesse, horrid hypocrisie, envy, malice, evill surmising.<sup>45</sup>

As we have seen, in his retractions Coppe is forced to acknowledge sin, but his subtle and convoluted argumentation seems to conceal some reservations:

Now we know, that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them that are under the Law; that every mouth may be stopped; and all the world become guilty before God. Therefore by the DEEDS of the Law, shall no flesh be justified in his fight, &c. But NOW the righteousness of God WITHOUT the LAW is manifest.<sup>46</sup>

This surely still leaves open the possibility that there are those who are *not* under the law, those who are under the influence of the righteousness of "God without the law."<sup>47</sup> In a world where unheard of upheavals were taking place, where the King, often thought of in England as a Divine appointee, being Head of the Church as well as the State, had been himself decapitated, leaving both Church and State in headless turmoil and where Providentialism, the belief that God's will was behind all earthly events was all but universal, it must have seemed possible that the Millennium was imminent, and Coppe felt this upheaval within him. Thus Coppe in his retraction stresses at great length God's unlimited almightiness, his tendency to "overturn, overturn, overturn" all that had been certain, the arbitrary and inarguable nature of the supernatural.

He sets up a brazen Serpent when he pleaseth, *Numb* 21.8,9  
And grinds it to powder when he pleaseth, *2 Kings* 18.4.  
He institutes Circumcision when he pleaseth, and commands it, upon pain of Excommunication and death, &c.<sup>48</sup>

Coppe then includes a slew of Biblical citations intended to illustrate the importance previously attached to circumcision and continues:

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<sup>42</sup> Coppe, "A Fiery Flying Roll," 43.

<sup>43</sup> Coppe, "A Fiery Flying Roll," 43.

<sup>44</sup> Coppe, "A Fiery Flying Roll," 44.

<sup>45</sup> Coppe, "A Fiery Flying Roll," 45.

<sup>46</sup> Coppe, "Copp's Return to the Wayes of Truth," 75.

<sup>47</sup> Such thinking seems to be influenced by the theory of successive dispensations as set out by Joachim of Fiore, a monk from the twelfth century, who divided history into The Age of the Father, which was the Kingdom of Law, in which men lived as slaves to the Law, in fear; the Age of the Son, which was the Kingdom of Grace, in which men lived in the servitude of sons, in faith; and to come was the age of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of Grace Abounding, wherein men were to live as "friends to God," in love. It seems likely that Coppe might have come across such teachings in his studies, and sectarian groupings like the "Family of Love," the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and some Anabaptists seem to have shared something of this feeling. See Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 212.

<sup>48</sup> Coppe, "Copp's Return to the Wayes of Truth," 78.

But unlimited Almightyness dasheth that to pieces, which he made. Nuls his own Acts, Statutes, Laws and strict Ordinances. Nothings this great thing, Circumcision. As it is written. Verily Circumcision is nothing, &c 1 Cor.7.19.<sup>49</sup>

From this example Coppe draws the following moral, and goes on to further demonstrate God's inconsistency by reference to Abraham:

And sure there's something I'the'winde—  
Certainly the meer creature is not very God.  
For the meer creature is limited, and weakness.  
But God is unlimited Almightyness.  
He doth what he pleaseth.  
He saith, thou shalt not kill, *Exod.20*  
And yet he bids Abraham slay his son, &c.<sup>50</sup>

This is not only a revolutionary theology, it is a theology of revolutions: nothing is permanently fixed, all certainties are conditional and contingent. In his hands the Bible becomes a weapon against all authority, an unstable document of multi-valent interpretation in a time of profound political and religious instability. The direction of Coppe's argument is to reduce the authority of the text. As the text is contradictory, so God's will is contradictory. The Bible becomes a great play of the possible, a range of options, a delicatessen counter. God's incalculable will—or historical necessity, perhaps—will decide the issue and it will soon be, indeed it is being decided. The just society is being enacted by just men behaving justly. This may be a prefiguration or an early flowering or a bringing into existence. The Diggers sought to make their city on the hill by the work of their hands, Coppe seems to speak it into being. The sudden release of the pressure of sinfulness in Coppe's personal outlook combined with the physical removal of the actual head of the head of government in the public sphere were absolute proof in the here and now of God's changing purpose, of his revolutionary force.

Coppe was released from his imprisonment to preach a recantation sermon in Burford, where the Leveller mutineers in the army had been confined in the church, and some of them shot. Hostile contemporary reports suggest that he recanted but little.

Coppe seems to me one of the most interesting of seventeenth century writers, full of energy, humour, satirical force—even violence—and real religious feeling. His writing is interestingly characterised by sudden shifts of register and mood, by deferrals and discursive asides. He generates an undeniable rhetorical power in his angry denunciations and threats to the powerful and in his urgent ventriloquising of the Divine voice:

Behold, Behold, Behold, I the eternall God, the Lord of Hosts, who am that mighty Leveller, am comming (yea even at the doores) to Levell in good earnest, to Levell to some purpose, to Levell with a witnesse, to Levell the Hills with the Valleyes, and to lay the Mountaines low.<sup>51</sup>

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# CHAPTER THREE. RELIGIOUS DISSENTERS AND ANARCHISTS IN TURN OF THE CENTURY HUNGARY

BOJAN ALEKSOV

*This chapter compares political and religious responses to pressing social problems in Hungary in the decades preceding the First World War and the dissolution of Habsburg monarchy. Anarchist revolutionaries such as Várkonyi or Tolstoians such as Schmitt explained the origins of widespread injustice in social and power relations and offered class struggle or utopian communities as a solution. By contrast, the neo-Protestant Nazarenes answered the problem of class exploitation and social marginalisation through their community of spiritual equals. Theirs was also an egalitarian community, but one based on religious rather than class or political consciousness. While the followers of both approaches strove for personal reassertion and emancipation, their paths and methods used differed radically. The Nazarene faith was based on pietistic quietism that wanted to change the world by one's own inner change. While on the conversion path many could be led with similar aspirations as political revolutionaries or rebels, but once they became Nazarenes, they believed that only spiritual salvation could provide the basis for the egalitarian society they sought. In the first decades of their existence in Hungary, and despite their similar social constituency, the Nazarenes grew more rapidly and remained firm in their resistance to adaptation to political impetuses of other radical movements and ideologies.*

This chapter revisits the relationship between anarchist thinkers and activists and the Nazarenes, who were the first religious movement or sect to arise in Hungary after the sixteenth century and who became distinguished for their rejection of priesthood, infant baptism and transubstantiation, for refraining from military service and politics, and for refusing to take oaths.<sup>1</sup> The new religious ideas were brought to Hungary by itinerant locksmith apprentices coming back from Switzerland in 1840s. After the 1848 Revolution in Hungary a new religious movement appeared acquiring its own dynamic and outgrowing massively a modest following in the country of origin.<sup>2</sup> A few congregations sprouted in Northern Hungary (today's Slovakia), in Transdanubia and later in Bosnia and Croatia, but they were short lived. The bulk of the converts were found in Central and South Hungary, or the regions of today's province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The Nazarenes especially attracted members of numerous ethnic minorities living in Hungary at the time, the Orthodox Serbs being the most prone to conversion. These Serbian converts were in fact the first Protestant Serbs. Though now largely forgotten, at the time of their greatest expansion at the end of the nineteenth century, the Nazarenes were the focus of much political and church attention. They provoked castigation and condemnation by state and church authorities, and inspired some of the greatest Hungarian and Serbian writers of the time, like Mór Jókai

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<sup>1</sup> Although the terms sect and sectarian initially had a neutral meaning deriving from Latin *sequi* meaning to follow, they have acquired a derogatory connotation over time. Bryan Wilson uses the terms "sects" and "sectarians" without any negative implications to designate mainly those which have come into being through schisms from the established Christian churches while Rodney Stark further differentiates and defines some that came into being through the activities of new visionaries; others as a result of the activity of "seekers;" other as spin-offs of interdenominational revivalism; yet others as a result of internal revitalization. See Bryan Wilson, "Introduction," in *Patterns of Sectarianism*, ed. Bryan Wilson (London: Heinemann, 1967), 17.

<sup>2</sup> The Nazarenes in the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states, as they were referred to in scholarly literature in English, are to be distinguished from the American denomination known as the Church of the Nazarene.

and Károly Eötvös or Jovan Jovanović Zmaj and Simo Matavulj, as well as the intercessions of famous Czech writer and humorist Jaroslav Hašek and most notably the great Russian author Lev Tolstoj.<sup>3</sup>

Following in the steps of the late British-born historian Peter Brock this chapter will examine nonconformism and conscientious objection of the Nazarenes as their most significant features, which denied them recognition, provoked bans and arrests and destined their men to long-term imprisonment.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, using some sources unavailable to Brock it will explore their attitudes towards politics or more precisely towards these ideas and movements in their surrounding, which aimed at political and social change in order to improve the lot of the deprived. On the theoretical level it will draw from the debate on parallelism between political or social and religious movements and offer new insights to the lively discussion on the reasons why some religious movements become revolutionary or reform movements and others accept the status quo and withdraw into an inner life. This will hopefully also correct the view held in historiography which when mentioning the Nazarenes attributed their rise in the Southern Hungary in the second half of the nineteenth century exclusively to social-economic factors because of their majority proletarian constituency.<sup>5</sup>

## Religious vs. Political

The Nazarenes were repressed because of the common perception that they were an anti-state political movement. In addition, they spread in areas of political instability and their growth often paralleled the deepening of that instability. Finally, a large number of their converts originated from social groups which were in one way or another politically dissatisfied, namely national minorities, landless peasantry or urban proletariat. Yet a series of questions arise that a disciplinary divide between religious and political history does not provide an answer to. Why did a religious movement attract a large following? How did it differ and even grow stronger than political, mainly socialist and anarchist groups around it? And last but not least why was it immune to their campaigns?

Eric Hobsbawm was the first to draw attention to the “marked parallelism between the movements of religious, social and political consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> Léo Moulin described the parallelism, transference and mimesis that existed—by their very nature, in his opinion—between the political and religious.<sup>7</sup> Comparing their shared notions of time he drew a parallelism between sectarian Millenarianism and left-wing revolutionist ideology. Revolutionary and religious millenarians shared a utopia, which Moulin called *uchronia*, whereby the perception of time is rooted in the past and ceases to function once the future is achieved. Both drew in their ranks the masses of the poor, the pariahs, the fringes, the casualties of progress or the wretched of the earth as *the International* sings. Other common features include but are not limited to the ideological vocabulary of demonisation and conspiracy, sociological context of isolation, notions of eschatologism, concepts of final struggle and powers external to man, which might be led by God, the course of history or a conscious and organised minority be it a sect or party.

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<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, unlike in the rest of this book, “Tolstoy” is written “Tolstoj” in order to be consistent with the chosen transliteration method for all the other Slavonic and Eastern European names used in the rest of the chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Tolstoj’s intercessions on behalf of sectarians and conscientious objectors were the topic of two of Brock’s articles—“Tolstojism and the Hungarian Peasant” *Slavonic and East European Review* 58, no. 3 (1980): 345–369 and “‘A Light Shining in Darkness’: Tolstoj and the Imprisonment of Conscientious Objectors in Imperial Russia,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 4 (2003): 683–697, 798–799. Two of Brock’s articles dealt with Nazarenes—“The Nonresistance of the Hungarian Nazarenes to 1914,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54, no. 1 (1980): 53–63 and “Some Materials on Nazarene Conscientious Objectors in Nineteenth Century Hungary,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57, no. 1 (1983): 64–72.

<sup>5</sup> Endre Kovács, ed., *Magyarország Története 6/2 1848–1890 [History of Hungary 6/2 1848–1890]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), 1163.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Léo Moulin, “Religious Millenarianisms and Political Millenarianisms,” in *Political and Ideological Confrontations in Twentieth-Century Europe: Essays in Honor of Milorad M. Drachkovitch*, eds. Robert Conquest and Dušan J. Djordjević (London: Macmillan, 1996), 231.

Yet thorough historical comparison calls for more restraint. Analysing religious revival in the years of and after Napoleonic wars and Revolution in England E. P. Thompson made a tentative conclusion that “religious revivalism took over just at the point where ‘political’ or temporal aspirations met with defeat.”<sup>8</sup> This was best exemplified in radical Methodism and numerous millenarian movements for which E. P. Thompson coined the term: “chiliasm of despair.” Just as E. P. Thomson is cautious about any direct links and causality even when sources and studies such as those of English religious revival abound, one should know much more about the minds and aspirations of those embracing the new faith before any tentative conclusions are made. Furthermore, Hobsbawm warned that religious movements were often misunderstood and their behaviour interpreted as irrational or pathological, or at best as an instinctive reaction to intolerable conditions, instead of trying to appreciate the logic and the reality which moved them.<sup>9</sup> The latter are the guidelines for the study of two aspects of Nazarene religious community which follow, namely, the political activism of the Nazarenes or the lack thereof and their conscientious objection.

The area and period of the Nazarene expansion were characterised by the profoundly disturbing effects that the irruption of modern capitalism had into peasant society through the introduction of a free market, the reform of common land and forest laws, the secularisation of church estates and especially the introduction of money economy. In Hungary, these were further exacerbated by the fact that they were not accompanied by a corresponding evolution of local social and political forces. Until the First World War, no group with political right in Hungary wanted to share them with peasants, a vast majority of which remained disenfranchised and could seek solutions only through revolutionary policies or as this chapter will evidence through religion.

The religious revival that gave crucial impetus to Hungarian Nazarenes was a part of an earlier tide of evangelicalism in Europe upsetting many churches, which yielded to religious apathy and formalism. Vaguely speaking, it stood in the succession of the eighteenth century revolt in religion initiated by German Pietist revivalists. Their distant founder was Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich, a minister in the Swiss Calvinist Church who in 1825 according to his own testimony experienced an inner conversion and began a search for true faith. He was mostly influenced by the teachings of the Mennonites, the remains of the sixteenth century Anabaptists who lived scattered in the neighbouring mountain villages near his hometown of Leutwill.<sup>10</sup> Yet his enthusiastic and revivalist ideas brought him into conflict and suspension from the state church and he soon became a leader of an independent sect that spread into neighbouring Germany and further to Alsace and through immigration to the United States and Canada. Fröhlich’s followers became known under a multitude of names—*Neutäufer*, *Gemeinden Evangelischen Taufgesinnter*, *Fröhlichianer*, *Evangelische Täufergemeinde*. In English language publications they were often referred to as Evangelical Baptists, New Amish or New Mennonites, which testifies the origin of Fröhlich’s religious inspiration and contacts, but the official name adopted for the community was the Apostolic Christian Church.<sup>11</sup> It is evident that the historical circumstances of the reception of Fröhlich’s ideas in Hungary distinguished and distanced their followers from the fellowship in other countries and that Fröhlich’s role should not be exaggerated since the Nazarenes in Hungary made their greatest advances after his death. Their beliefs and attitudes in Hungary were first formulated by a young Catholic convert Lajos Hencsey but also changed over time as the main channel of transmission

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<sup>8</sup> E. Thompson, “The Transforming Power of the Cross,” in *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), 428.

<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Fröhlich and the early Nazarene history in Hungary see Garfield Adler, *De Tauf- und Kirchenfrage in Leben und Lehre des Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich*, VDM, von Brugg 1803–1857 (Bern, Frankfurt: n.p. 1976) and Karoly Eotvos, *The Nazarenes* (Fort Scott, Ks, n.p. 1997).

<sup>11</sup> For English language accounts see Herman Ruegger, *Apostolic Christian Church History* (Eureka, Ill: Apostolic Christian Publications, Inc., 1985), second revised edition based on Hermann Rüegger, *Aufzeichnung über Entstehung und Bekenntnis der Gemeinschaft Evangelisch Taufgesinnter* (Zurich: n.p. 1948) and Perry A. Klopfenstein, *Marching to Zion. A History of the Apostolic Christian Church of America 1847–1982* (Fort Scott, KS: Sekan, 1984). See also *The Swiss Anabaptists* (Ephrata, Pa: n.p. 1990).

of new faith was from mouth to mouth. The bulk of early converts consisted of itinerant shoemakers, tailors, locksmiths and carpenters, most being ethnic Germans. Yet from the late 1850s and early 1860s thanks to another Catholic convert and preacher, István Kalmár, they managed to set foot in South and Central Hungary where their numbers swelled, exceeding several times those in other countries where Fröhlich's fellowship took root. The Nazarene "lay agency," simple men and women who did the bulk of the preaching, organising and pastoral care clearly distinguished them from other churches. Furthermore, the closely-knit community network, the work ethic and morals accounted for rapid expansion and prosperity of converts, who later mostly came from among the village poor.

The fact that our knowledge of Nazarenes is largely based on inimical sources might be even considered beneficial in the study of their political action or the lack thereof since it was so strongly determined by the perceptions and condemnation to which they were exposed. Threatened by the appearance of the Nazarenes the representatives of the established churches in Hungary were their greatest enemies. From the onset they stigmatised Nazarenes as communists and anarchists though there is no evidence for any association between them. Sources name only one early Nazarene preacher, István Ráb, who seems to be an unusual exception as he combined politics with religion in his sermons, which brought him arrests and other misfortunes.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Jenő Szigeti, Hungarian scholar of the Nazarenes, found some evidence that in their early days in Hungary some Nazarenes participated in peasant riots in Hódmezővásárhely. Yet he concluded that this experience only persuaded them to refrain completely from politics.<sup>13</sup> Ever since then the Nazarenes remained obstinate in their opposition to any political action, be it participation in elections or joining political parties and movements.

Whatever their true intentions were, the Nazarenes were closely watched. They were suspected of defying authorities, which, according to an early observer in 1870, had every reason to fear them "because at the moment they are only a few but if their number grows substantially nobody knows whether there will appear a Müntzer among them."<sup>14</sup> The accusations which claimed that the Nazarene faith was just a cover for their essentially communist and anarchist ideas were usually evidenced by their alleged communal property. The most gruesome of all accusations claimed that they were perverts and that even women were communal property among them, a common topoi in anti-Nazarene and anti-socialist treatises.<sup>15</sup> Finally, they were accused of Jewish haughtiness and of conspiratorial closeness in their communities.

Confronting the accusations and rumours that spread about the Nazarenes offers insights into the reasons behind the misguided parallelism between the Nazarenes and political revolutionaries, which dominated the accounts written in the period of the most intensive Nazarene expansion. Much fear and suspicion among the inimical commentators was actually provoked by the indifference or docility of the Nazarenes despite the harsh social reality in which they lived. On the other hand observers among Russian socialists projected their own ideological agenda onto the Nazarenes. They attributed the success of the Nazarene missionaries precisely to their ability to address the people who were on the edge of proletarianisation, to gather and organise them, to develop the sense of solidarity and mutual help among them and to explain to them the meaning and purpose of life. From articles in the Hungarian press, which accused the Nazarenes of spreading socialist and communist teachings at their "secret" meetings, V. Olhovskii (Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич), who is representative for this group of observers, inferred the confirmation of his beliefs that socialist propaganda can find fertile soil among sectarians

<sup>12</sup> "Kako su Postali Nazareni [How the Nazarenes Came About]," *Javo* 9 (1882), 277–280.

<sup>13</sup> Jenő Szigeti, *Ti Pedig Mindnyájan Testvérek Vagytok [But You Are Always Brothers and Sisters]* (Budapest: Mimeo, 1978), 69–70.

<sup>14</sup> "Nazarenusok-é? [Are They Nazarenes?]," *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* (1870), 277. The reference here is to the rebellious Anabaptist in the sixteenth century, a trope which will continue for almost half a century. See "A Tizenhatodik Századnak UjrakeresztelÉi Jelenben új Életre Ébredve Magyarországon [Resurgence of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists in Hungary]," *Evangelikus Egyházi Szemle* (1905), 20–24.

<sup>15</sup> "As Alsó-Baranya-Bácsi Egyházmegye Közgyűlése [The Lower Baranya Bács Diocese Meeting]," *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* (1867), 692–697.

and that sectarian peasants can easily be turned into socialist peasants.<sup>16</sup> Further, he interpreted the Nazarene frequent preaching against the established churches, clergy and their privileges as a conscious class position. The rumours of collective property among the Nazarenes were also welcomed by Russian socialists even if they acknowledged that it was rather communism of needs than collective production that was advocated.<sup>17</sup> In one thing these leftwing observers, personified by Bonch-Bruevich, were right. Condemning the reactions of the Hungarian and Serbian states and their state churches, they deemed that repression was only reinforcing the Nazarene image of martyrs, which would continue to attract converts.

The issue arises as to what can be established about the Nazarene attitudes to social and economic pressures of the period behind the screen of biased perceptions. Similar to other neo-Protestant sects, the Nazarene strict scripturality rejects any social division based on property or origin, which was at the core of political enfranchisement in Hungary. Furthermore, Nazarene preachers stressed time and again that the supreme judgment is that of God and the Holy Scripture, as illustrated in the agreement of the representatives of all Nazarene congregations assembled in 1895 to discuss whether to report to courts transgressions made by the Nazarenes or those which were confessed before joining the community. It was unanimously decided not to address “the court of this world.”<sup>18</sup> However, the scripture also obliged them to “render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s.”<sup>19</sup> That is why the Nazarenes promptly paid their tax dues even if they had considered any kind of taxation including the church tax unjust. Jaša Tomiü, Serbian socialist turned nationalist, described how important it was for Nazarenes to avoid conflicts by paying Orthodox parish tax although colloquially they called it not without a degree of sarcasm *beda* (misery tax).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, none of this spared them from accusations that the only reason they abandoned state churches was to avoid paying the church tax.<sup>21</sup> According to their own statements, the Nazarenes respected all levels of authorities in all matters except regarding the obligation to bear arms during military service, as evident from the rare insider report written by their elder F. G. G. in 1903 to Dutch Mennonites.<sup>22</sup> Considering their compliance with all other rules and taxation, it is no wonder that in a rare instance of sincerity one mayor of a small Hungarian town was recorded admitting the Nazarenes were in fact his “best citizens,” highlighting the hypocrisy of Nazarene persecutors.<sup>23</sup>

## The Peasant Commotion at the Turn of the Century Hungary

In order to move beyond the realm of perceptions, the Nazarene stance towards state, politics and political uproar will be illuminated on the concrete example of the so-called harvest strikes and related political agitation in the areas of Alföld (Great Hungarian Plain) and Bácska (Plain between the rivers of Danube and Tisza), at the turn of the century. These events were already researched by Brock in the article which served as an inspiration for this study.<sup>24</sup> Bringing in new sources will hopefully assure a more encompassing interpretation. The peasant strikes occurred in the area and time of the greatest Nazarene expansion and thus provide the best background for the study of Nazarene behaviour in relation to the social ferment which surrounded them. This episode is even more interesting because it involves the greatest writer of that day, Lev Tolstoi, and the circle of his political associates, whose ideas out of all political movements of the period came closest to that of the Nazarenes. During the last thirty

<sup>16</sup> V. Olhovskii, *Nazareni v Vengrii i Serbii* (Moscow: Posrednik, 1905), 23–24. Olhovskii alias Bonch-Bruevich was a close associate of Lenin.

<sup>17</sup> Olhovskii, *Nazareni v Vengrii i Serbii*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Olhovskii, *Nazareni v Vengrii i Serbii*, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 22:21 (King James Version).

<sup>20</sup> Jaša Tomiü, *Nazareni* (Novi Sad: Srpska štamparija Dra Svetozara Miletiüa, 1896), 101–102.

<sup>21</sup> Dušan Makovicky, *Nazarenove v Uhrach* (Prague, 1896, Print out from *Naši doby*), 8 and Dušan Petroviü, “O Nazarenima,” *Srpski Sion*, 16 August 1892.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Cramer, “Nazarener. Briefe,” *Menmonitische Blätter* 50, no. 7 (1903): 56–57.

<sup>23</sup> Henrik v. Himmel, “Von den Nazarenern,” *Pester Lloyd*, 4 June 1897, 2–3.

<sup>24</sup> Brock, “Tolstoiism and the Hungarian Peasant.”



years of his life Tolstoi wrote scores of books, articles and pamphlets on religion and politics promoting what he believed to be the true essence of Christianity. Like many radical Christian groups since the Reformation he based his beliefs on the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus instructed his followers not to swear oaths, not to judge and not to resist to evil and instead respond with love, forgiveness and sacrifice. In addition to his writings Tolstoi also helped financially religious non-conformists and conscientious objectors. Finally, his correspondence with thousands of prominent or common men and women in which he expounded his ideas and tried to influence political struggle in many countries is unmatched in the history of literature and political activism.

Tolstoi learned about the Nazarenes very early. Their marked nonviolence coincided with Tolstoi's own beliefs and attracted him to them. In a letter dated 14 September 1887 to his associate V. G. Chertkov, regarding Nikolai Gazenvinkel's idea to publish an anthology of authentic popular religious ideas against state and violence, Tolstoi informed Chertkov that he had received a letter from "Serbs" describing the Nazarene sect in Hungary and Serbia, and state persecution of it.<sup>25</sup> In another letter to Chertkov dated 19–23 August 1894, Tolstoi wrote about the visit of Slovak doctor Makovicky who told him about the oppression of the Slavs in the Habsburg Monarchy. Tolstoi was impressed with their nonviolent resistance to this oppression. He learned from Makovicky that the Slavs used the weapons of oppressors—raising their own national awareness against the foreign, safeguarding their language, confession and customs and conducting their struggle on all fronts—in newspapers, courts, associations, elections for the parliament, etc. Praising the struggle of Slavs in the Monarchy, Tolstoi noted that at the same time that while the sect of the Nazarenes was getting more and more numerous among them, the intellectuals of oppressed Slav minorities did not see that the liberation was possible only through faith. Tolstoi condemned Slav leaders for not embracing the Nazarenes, writing that by pushing them away they diminished their own chance for liberation.<sup>26</sup> We learn from the next letter dated 3 September, how Tolstoi advised Makovicky to get close to the Nazarenes, learn about them and help those who were suffering for their conscientious objection.<sup>27</sup>

Soon after, on 6 October, Tolstoi wrote to Eugen Heinrich (Jenö Henrik) Schmitt with similar intentions.<sup>28</sup> Schmitt was an educated government employee in Budapest. What separated him from his colleagues was his profound interest in religion. He propounded a sort of Gnosticism and found a journal, *Die Religion des Geistes*, around which a group of followers was formed.<sup>29</sup> In his letter to Schmitt, Tolstoi showed interest in the religious Weltanschauung of the members of Schmitt's Gnostic league but reiterated that for him the most difficult thing in serving truth was not the interpretation of religious principles but the carrying out of these principles in one's actual life. For this reason Tolstoi criticised the intelligentsia which wished to do good without sacrificing any of its advantages. Similarly workers who inclined to the socialistic creed, according to Tolstoi, endeavoured to change the present condition of things not because it was unjust and prejudicial to love, but simply because justice in this case would bring them certain advantages. For Tolstoi however:

Salvation, I believe, will come neither from the workmen who are socialistically inclined nor from their leaders, but only from people who will accept religion as their only guide in life, as the Nazarenes in Serbia and others in certain places in Austria[by which Tolstoi meant Austria-Hungary] do—namely, that hundreds of them refuse to take the oath and do military service and are condemned for this to spend years in prisons and fortresses. It is only from such men as these who are ready to give up their lives for their convictions that salvation

<sup>25</sup> L. N. Tostoi, *Polnoie Sobraniie Sochinenii (PSS)*, 90 vols (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928–1958), here vol. 86, 79–83. The dates are in Julian calendar.

<sup>26</sup> Tostoi, *PSS*, vol. 87, 284–86.

<sup>27</sup> Tostoi, *PSS*, vol. 286–87.

<sup>28</sup> The letter to Schmitt published as "Letters from Tolstoi," *The Nation* 122, no. 3162 (1926) in the translation from German by Herman George Scheffauer.

<sup>29</sup> Brock, "Tolstoiism and the Hungarian Peasant," 346.

will come. Men like these are to be found everywhere and we ourselves must become such men in order to fulfill our destinies and to imbue others with our spirit.<sup>30</sup>

After discovering Tolstoi's ideas Schmitt turned into a Tolstoian, a self-declared anarchist and an advocate of non-violent revolution. He left his position of a public servant in 1896, and started a new paper in two most commonly spoken languages in Hungary (with the very telling name of *Ohne Staat/Állam nélkül*), which opposed all forms of service to the state, especially military service. Disappointed with his role as an intellectual he left Budapest and went to Alföld to preach his ideas among the poor agricultural labourers and peasants, who at the time were engaged in frequent strikes and disturbances.<sup>31</sup> At the same time socialist ideas were making their first impact in these rural areas, notorious for their poverty, landless labourers and hard working conditions by the way of a dissident socialist and former farm labourer, István Várkonyi. He left the Social Democratic party and formed his own Independent Socialist Party whose agrarian program was interpreted as a step to the division and distribution of land.<sup>32</sup> Schmitt and Várkonyi, as Brock described, developed a close relationship. According to Várkonyi, Schmitt shared the same goals as those of agrarian socialism: human brotherhood, the enlightenment of the people, and an end to the exploitation of man by man. Their agitation in the countryside certainly had an impact on the wave of the harvest strikes in 1897. Brock is to be credited for pointing to this peculiar case of direct influence of Tolstoism, since the program of Várkonyi's Independent Social party, which gathered Alföld peasants, emphasised that the state was the source of all evil and summoned the people to refrain from paying taxes and refuse military service.<sup>33</sup> Brock also asserted that it was rather Schmitt's anti-clericalism than non-violence that attracted peasants from the area, which was already the most susceptible to the Nazarene preaching. Schmitt urged for the replacement of the church's slavish idolatry and superstition with the genuinely free spirit of Christ which alone can liberate the world. This staunch anti-clericalism was appreciated by many who were unwilling to accept his non-violence or adopt a communitarian way of life. Several groups of Schmitt's followers, which Tolstoi called communities of disciples of non-violence, were formed among Alföld peasants. Brock singled out the one in Ada in Bácska where Várkonyi also published his socialist newspaper in Serbian.<sup>34</sup> During his agitation Schmitt became a typical *narodnik*, who believed in the regenerating force of the people. The people were to form self-governing communities, which, bound by mutual trust and a spirit of self-sacrifice, would abolish poverty, wars and exploitation and establish peace, justice and development. His ideas embodied some of the age-old peasant strivings, which surfaced in so many peasant upheavals and sectarian movements before—negation of the existing social order, anti-clericalism and longing for a society in which religious imagery of "paradise on earth" was projected. Nonetheless, throughout these acute years and despite numerous attempts by Schmitt and Várkonyi, their peasant following remained scarce and their most logical allies, the Nazarenes, kept distance. This was troubling Tolstoi as well as he was constantly urging Schmitt to reach an understanding with at least the younger members of the sect insisting: "The future of Christianity, of the living truth, lies with such people, with the simple, the workers, and not with the social parasites."<sup>35</sup>

After a year of disturbances the government reacted by banning all socialist publications, arresting Várkonyi and passing an act which outlawed agricultural strikes. This signalled the end of peasant commotion and another quarter of the century passed before peasants rose again and achieved some gains.<sup>36</sup> Schmitt too was arrested and upon release withdrew from the region dispirited and persuaded

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<sup>30</sup> "Letters from Tolstoi," 184.

<sup>31</sup> Brock, "Tolstoism and the Hungarian Peasant," 349.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Held, *The Modernization of Agriculture: Rural Transformation in Hungary 1848–1975* (Boulder, Co: East European Monographs, 1980), 149.

<sup>33</sup> Brock, "Tolstoism and the Hungarian Peasant," 353.

<sup>34</sup> Brock, "Tolstoism and the Hungarian Peasant," 362.

<sup>35</sup> "Tolstoi to Schmitt," 27 March 1895, *PSS*, vol. 68, 56.

<sup>36</sup> Agrarian ideas subsided in parties founded by Vilmos MezEfi and András Áchim, the so-called peasant king of Békéscsaba, yet unlike Várkonyi's stateless idealism they incorporated element of Magyar nationalism.

that most peasants still preferred a political solution and struggle than renouncing politics for communitarianism or as Brock put it, building a New Jerusalem in the Great Hungarian Plain. Attempts by some peasant followers of Schmitt to form Tolstoian communities, based on working the land collectively and sharing the produce, soon disintegrated. Suspicion among the members was widespread and other villagers mocked them and, similarly to the Nazarenes before, accused them of sharing women in the community.<sup>37</sup> This experience shows that the establishment of such communities was possible only with the discipline and strict and overarching communitarian order intertwined with religious persuasion practiced by the Nazarenes. This partly answers the question why there was no connection between the two. Brock singled out the aloof stance of the Nazarenes and Schmitt's lack of tact and communication skills to transmit his message but also praised Schmitt as the only Tolstoian trying to persuade his country's peasantry or *narod* to inaugurate a new communitarian order. Yet his communities were few, very short lasting and left almost no traces behind. In contrast, the Nazarene communities based solely on religion and removed from politics subsisted. It is true that Schmitt too and his followers shared the Nazarene renunciation of power and rejected the sort of daily politics for which the only goal was to attain power and which saw states and party policies as means of achieving salvation. Nevertheless, his intellectualist approach helped little in setting practical structures and regulations for the survival of his communities, the endeavour in which the Nazarenes excelled for almost half a century. The issue of distribution and ownership of land proved to be hardest to resolve both for Várkonyi's political struggle and for Schmitt's communities. On similar grounds, the mainstream Social democratic party never managed to mobilise peasants and considered their obsession with land as petty bourgeois individualism. The Nazarene communities however, practiced a lasting solution at least for their members. Despite the malicious accusations, they respected private property and peasants' obsession with land. Yet their religious commands of love and solidarity, at least among their members, overcame selfishness, individualism and exploitation in establishing what Bonch-Bruevich described as communism of needs rather than collective production. That they came so close to the peasant ideal of the "limited good" also helps explain the Nazarene lack of interest for political action.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the Nazarene religious views widened their recruiting potential and they absorbed both absolutely landless and village poor and well-off peasants, artisans and small traders in contrast to the movements of Várkonyi and Schmitt, which were directed only at one class or segment of the population and when they involved more than one could not reconcile them.<sup>39</sup>

There were also radical differences in religious outlook between the Nazarenes and Schmitt and Várkonyi. Brock explained the Nazarene rigid abstention from politics as a trait of Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, which is concerned with paradise in heaven and not on earth—according to Jesus' words: "My Kingdom is not of this world."<sup>40</sup> This was a key to Schmitt's distaste of the Nazarenes. Unlike Tolstoi's and Nazarenes' Christianity Schmitt's religious outlook was more anthropocentric: "I see salvation not in humility and penitence but in awakening consciousness of the self."<sup>41</sup> While respecting their adherence to faith, Schmitt condemned the Nazarene's views on sinfulness, strict discipline and expulsion of members, and especially their reluctance to improve the human lot.<sup>42</sup> Yet it was exactly this Nazarene discipline and morality which improved the lot of their members. The religious or Godly sanction of such discipline and morality were essential for the mentality of peasant Nazarenes. Furthermore, in their reluctance to join political forces the Nazarenes were similar to the majority of peasants, who were throughout this period doubtful of socialist or intellectual agitators

<sup>37</sup> Brock, "Tolstoiism and the Hungarian Peasant," 364.

<sup>38</sup> For the idea of "limited good" see G. M. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 2 (1965): 293–315.

<sup>39</sup> This is what even their most vociferous enemies admitted. See Dušan Petrović, "O Nazarenima," *Srpski Sion*, 16 August 1892.

<sup>40</sup> John 18:36 (King James Version).

<sup>41</sup> From the letter of Schmitt to Ervin Szabó. Quoted in Brock, "Tolstoiism and the Hungarian Peasant," 357.

<sup>42</sup> Brock, "Tolstoiism and the Hungarian Peasant," 366.

not because they were not revolutionary enough, as dogmatic Marxist historiography claimed, but because they were doubtful of everything coming from the city, politics especially. These differences of mentality and outlook are best illustrated in the example of how even positively inclined socialist and pacifist activists were worlds apart from the Nazarenes, which they praised in order to promote their own political agenda. This is evident in the testimony of Albert Škarvan who spent time with Slovak Nazarenes in this period.<sup>43</sup> Škarvan himself objected to the military and lost his post as a military doctor in the Austro-Hungarian army and later became a personal doctor to Tolstoi.<sup>44</sup> After his visits and encounters with the Nazarenes, Škarvan described the unusual orderliness of their homes and their modesty in eating and dressing which both impressed him. But he could not hide his aversion for their long prayer meetings that he hardly managed to sit through, disliking the ecstatic, sentimental preaching whose meaning he could not understand. He admitted he suffered having to listen to their endless singing and despite his efforts his soul could not rejoice the Nazarene *Agape*.<sup>45</sup> It was precisely the fact that the Nazarene religion and way of life could not be separated, which was the hardest for observers to comprehend.

## Religious vs. Political Conscientious Objection

The seemingly political issue of the Nazarene conscientious objection was widely noted and discussed by contemporaries but not thoroughly resolved. Indeed, from the late 1850s the Nazarenes clashed with the state because of their refusal to bear arms. Bearing arms was considered against the Word of God and in this case the Nazarenes behaved according to the homily of Apostle Peter which commanded that men must belong to God more than to men. Austria-Hungary's Imperial War Office (acting for what is today Ministry of Defence) argued that any concession would draw people to join the Nazarenes. In reality, the number of members of three other groups who were granted concessions regarding the military service obligation, the Mennonites, Bezpopovtsy and Kharaites, either stagnated or decreased. At the same time the number of martyred Nazarenes increased many fold despite harsh persecution.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the tight rules imposed both before baptism and later for membership in the community clearly eliminated the possibility of joining Nazarenes out of opportunism. Finally, despite the fears of the government and army, Nazarene antimilitarism never took an active or rebellious stand of the scale of the mass burning of weapons by Russian Doukhobors at the same time, which is another problem that requires explanation.

Nazarene refusal to bear arms eventually had the most significant consequences for their own community. The narratives of the Nazarene men who refused weapons and suffered imprisonment "for the faith" provided a unique source of oral tradition for the group. One such story is preserved in the letter of Nazarene elder F. G. G. to Samuel Cramer from 1903.<sup>47</sup> It recounts how a certain brother called Zimbri was sentenced to death for his refusal to bear arms during the war with Prussia in 1866. The miracle occurred in the very moment when execution was to take place. While a colonel was ordering a fire squad to shoot, a grenade fell which threw him off a horse and killed him while Zimbri survived for many years after the war was over. These stories told and retold by old and young alike, contributed to a strong sense of self-identity, and the persecution further bolstered the self-perception of the Nazarenes as a separate, chosen people in a hostile society. Decades later, when a woman from the *Neutäufer* (Nazarene) community in Zürich visited fifty-two imprisoned Nazarenes in Szeged in 1902, there were still some among them imprisoned for more than ten years. Many more were in prisons in Komarom,

<sup>43</sup> Olhovskii, *Nazareni v Vengrii i Serbii*, 43–6.

<sup>44</sup> For more on Škarvan see Peter Brock, "Pacifist Witness in Dualist Hungary," in *Studies in Peace History*, eds. Peter Brock and Nigel Young (York: William Session, 1991), 59–60.

<sup>45</sup> Olhovskii, *Nazareni v Vengrii i Serbii*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Heinrich von Himmel, "Von den Nazarenern," *Pester Lloyd*, 4 June 1897.

<sup>47</sup> Cramer, "Nazarener Briefe," 58.

Arad, Novi Sad and other places. Yet F. G. G. recognised that conditions improved from the times when the Nazarenes sentenced for conscientious objection were all being sent to Möllersdorf near Vienna in order to keep them as far as possible from their families and communities in South Hungary and re-convert them as the authorities hoped. There, the elder once joined a visit of a family whose member was imprisoned for eight years. After a daylong journey they were allowed to see him for ten minutes only and were treated by the prison commander as the worst criminals. The Nazarene convict died soon after.<sup>48</sup>

Despite horror stories the Nazarene elder in the letter above also expressed his wish to tell the full truth even if it astonished many, admitting that it was exactly the suffering that contributed to the number of the Nazarene converts and that their martyrdom was the best proof of their true witness. The persecutions, according to Mennonite theologian Cramer who was writing about the Nazarenes, produced in them a certain fanaticism, characteristically Anabaptist, especially evinced by their hatred of state churches and priests.<sup>49</sup> Other observers also noted that the rejection and persecution of the Nazarenes only boosted their sense of separation and martyrdom and strengthened the significance and authenticity of one's conversion and spiritual commitment.<sup>50</sup> This explains the relatively weak reaction of the Nazarenes on behalf of their prisoners and their reluctance to join other political forces, which condemned the harsh government and army policies toward them. Generations were raised on prison and other stories of the suffering for the faith, which stressed the firmness of Nazarene men and members of their families facing ten-year sentences, torture or even death penalty.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, visits to prisoners were extremely important not only for members of the family of the imprisoned but for his whole congregation and even coreligionists from distant places. If there were any chance to visit a number of people would go even if they were poor and prison was far a way. Paying visits to an imprisoned fellow was perceived like a religious service giving the whole community the opportunity to share with his suffering. During services special prayers were said or moments of silence honoured for members who were in prisons and then special songs from *Zion's Harp* (Nazarene Hymnal) were sung.<sup>52</sup> Since all leadership positions were held by men who had to undergo prison experience, it was exactly this suffering for the faith that strengthened their spiritual and moral authority later in leading their congregations. Nevertheless, the attitude of the Nazarenes regarding the military changed with the generation change in the community and already in 1903, elder F. G. G. admitted that the long imprisonment was the main reason for Nazarene emigration overseas.<sup>53</sup>

The greatest challenge for Nazarene conscientious objection came in the face of growing nationalism as the century was drawing to a close. The continuous perseverance of the army and government to refute any concessions to Nazarenes both in Hungary and Serbia and the complete lack of social sympathy in this regard is best illustrated in the episode which involved Mór Jókai, the most prominent Hungarian writer at the time. Jókai had a long term relationship with the Nazarenes, who featured as a topic in

<sup>48</sup> Cramer, "Nazarener Briefe," 56–7.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Cramer, "Nazarenes. 2. Hungarian Anabaptists," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), 91. Originally "Nazarener, ungarische" in *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Leipzig: n.p. 1903).

<sup>50</sup> Szeberényi, *Die Secte der Nazarener*, 491–506 contains official documentation of first trials against the Nazarenes in Banat, which shows their firmness in face of persecution.

<sup>51</sup> Some accounts are preserved in C. Stäubli, *Die Nazarener* (Zurich: Pfäffikon, 1928). For the interwar period and more in reports of Delbert Gratz, Stella Alexander and others in IISH Archives, WRI 419 and 420.

<sup>52</sup> *Zion's Harp Hymnal* was one of the most potent instruments of Nazarene proselytism. For more see Perry Klopfenstein, *A Treasure of Praise. A History of the Zion's Harp Hymnal* (Fort Scott, KS: Sekan, 1998) and Jenő Szigeti, "A Nazaré nus Énekeskönyv Története [History of Nazarene Hymnal]" in *És Emlékezzél Meg Az Útról* (Budapest: Szabadegyházak Tanácsa, 1981).

<sup>53</sup> For the subsequent divisions, emigration and decline of the Nazarene community see C. Stäubli, *Die Nazarener*; Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 60–61, 68–69, 92–95, 316–319; and my "Nonconformist Sects under Communism: Case Study of Yugoslavia," in *Crossroads of History: Experience, Memory, Orality. Proceedings of XI International Oral History Conference vol. III* (Istanbul: International Oral History Association and University of Bogazici, 2000), 1334–1337.

several of his works.<sup>54</sup> In one article Jókai recalled being visited by seven Nazarenes from their greatest communities in Alföld in 1897, who approached him as the chairman of Hungarian Peace Association.<sup>55</sup> They shared with Jókai their difficulties with local authorities especially in getting permits to buy property as well as their long held problem with the military authorities. According to their testimonies the Nazarene conscripts were still either imprisoned or compelled to serve in medical corps for up to twelve years. But Jókai was of no help since his concept of peace was very different from theirs; he insisted on the balance of forces and national sovereignty which conscription helped maintain ( *civis paces para bellum*). Jókai's addition to this old argument was the peculiar threat to which Hungary was exposed, having no brothers (allies) in the world [ *sic*] so he told them: "If we let the foreigners take our fatherland, it is only the yoke of servitude and the destruction of our nation that awaits us."<sup>56</sup> In such a catastrophe, Jókai explained, the Nazarenes will also perish, as it happened to the Nazarenes' fellow believers, the Doukhobors and Bezpopovtsy in Russia, who were exiled to the barren mountains of the Caucasus. He continued with the nationalist tirade recalling the credo of Árpád and the Hungarian martyred past, explaining in passing that the message of Christ as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount meant only the prohibition of murder. The Nazarenes replied that Christ instructed the believers to love their enemies and do good to those ones who persecute them referring to Matthew 5. Jókai approved saying he loved all the neighbouring peoples and wished them all the best in their countries but insisted on the preservation of conscription as the means of defence, implying naturally that in the international order Hungary can only be victim of the injustice of others. The Nazarenes did not want to dwell on the issue of Hungary being threatened and only asked him to support their young men doing service without arms. To this last wish Jókai replied in the same bureaucratic fashion of the military officials that any special treatment for them would draw others to their ranks. Confronted with the old argument the Nazarene elders in the delegation could only reiterate that any new believer must undertake tough trials and fulfil many prerequisites in order to be accepted in their community, which Jókai knew very well. Yet even to an enlightened writer such as Mór Jókai, who praised the Nazarene beliefs and morals and who was a devoted Christian and connoisseur of the Bible, these meant little in comparison to his devotion to his Hungarian nation. He finished his discussion with the legendary, so-called iron declaration of Miklós Zrínyi—"ne bántsá a magyart" (do not harm the Hungarian).<sup>57</sup> For Jókai nationalism came ahead of any religious belief. That was a fully alien principle for the Nazarene, the principle that eventually sealed their fate which ended in emigration, dispersion or abandonment of the community in the face of repression by the new nation states after the First World War.

## Final Remarks

Going back to Hobsbawm's parallelism between political and religious movements, the Nazarenes present a clear case where a religious movement has been resistant to adaptation to political impetuses despite common features and similar social constituency. Hobsbawm defines millenarian movement as one featuring a profound and total rejection of the present, evil world, a passionate longing for another and better one, an ideology of the chiliastic type (the second coming), and finally a fundamental vagueness about the actual way in which the new society will be brought about. For him, the last feature is determining since this vagueness prevent followers of millenarian ideologies to become makers of revolution.<sup>58</sup> This chapter however rejects the notion that the Nazarene community's organisation and ways were characterised by vagueness. Instead it advances the notion that in the turn of the century Hungary political activism and religion were both legitimate responses to one's own or society's pressing

<sup>54</sup> See his novel *A Szerelmek Bolondjai* [*Maniacs of Love*] and *Buddhisták Magyarországon* [*Buddhists in Hungary*], a story which feature Serbian Nazarenes in Hungary.

<sup>55</sup> Mór Jókai, "A Nazarénusok Nálam [The Nazarenes to Me]," *Magyar Hírlap*, 4 November 1897.

<sup>56</sup> Jókai, "A Nazarénusok Nálam [The Nazarenes to Me]."

<sup>57</sup> Jókai, "A Nazarénusok Nálam."

<sup>58</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 57–8.

needs. Revolutionaries such as Várkonyi or Tolstoians such as Schmitt explained the origins of injustice in social and power relations and offered class struggle or utopian communities as a solution.

By contrast, the Nazarenes answered the problem of class exploitation and social marginalisation through their community of spiritual equals. Theirs was also an egalitarian community, but one based on religious rather than class or political consciousness. But while the followers of both strove for personal reassertion and emancipation, their paths and methods used differed radically. The Nazarene faith was based on a pietistic quietism that wants to change the world by one's own inner change. While on the conversion path many could be led with similar aspirations to those of political revolutionaries or rebels, once they became Nazarenes, they believed that only spiritual salvation could provide the basis for the egalitarian society they sought. That is why they left the rest of the world to its own devices except for a token reminding the others of their millennial program as with their refusal to bear arms and take oaths.

Last but not least this analysis wanted to escape a value judgment, typical of studies of grassroots religious movements such as the Nazarenes, which divides them into "backward-looking" and "forward-looking." The Nazarene example shows that there is no clear-cut division. Makovsky's criticism of the Nazarenes condemned their eschatological beliefs, which prompted them to reject the idea of progress and changes in this world in general. For this world, the Nazarenes believed, would be destroyed by God with fire just like God destroyed the previous one with flood.<sup>59</sup> But the vision of the Nazarenes was pulling them both backward and forward. Their communal morals and rules longing to re-establish the golden age of harmony also required the adoption of certain practices of community networking and organisation which were pulling them towards a new society. With all the change it brought about the conversion to Nazarene faith was a legitimate option for the poor and deprived, and a way forward. Many indeed chose this path.

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<sup>59</sup> Makovsky, *Nazarenove v Uhrach*, 9.

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# CHAPTER FOUR. A DEAD SEED BEARING MUCH FRUIT: THE DUTCH CHRISTIAN ANARCHIST MOVEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FRATERNITY

ANDRÉ DE RAAIJ

*Dutch Christian anarchism as a tendency of the workers' movement originates around 1890 amongst students of theology and young ministers of the latitudinarian tendency. There were precursor movements in the nineteenth century, which may be seen as both state-denying and Christian. The Christelijke Broedergemeente (Christian Community of Brethren, from 1803 till around 1835), generally known as Zwijndrechtse Nieuwlichters, was the first of its kind—living in community and (originally) sharing goods, rejecting all violence and refusing military service. Of a second mystical group, the Frisian Berne fan God (God's Children), still little is known today. The self-professed Christian anarchist movement proper then developed alongside the secular socialist and anarchist movements. In 1897 its members started their journal Vrede (Peace) out of discontent with the presumed lack of interest for the ideas of Leo Tolstoy in Church circles. They organised officially in the Internationale Broederschap (International Fraternity, 1899), and started an agricultural/industrial colony in Blaricum. This colony was attacked by villagers in 1903, an attack which challenged the defencelessness of its members beyond its limits. The movement as such did not survive this onslaught, but its ideas about non-violence, conscientious objection, sexual enlightenment and animal protection (amongst others) had an influence which outlasted the dwindling membership and the organisational failure of these original Dutch Christian anarchists.*

Christian anarchism can be dated to around 1890 as a movement in the Netherlands. There are precursor movements in the nineteenth century, which may be classified as kindred to Christian anarchism, such as the Christian Community of Brethren, and the Children of God. Of course these precursors would not have used the combined term, as the positive connotation of *anarchy* still had to be developed by people like Proudhon, later on in the nineteenth century. Dutch Christian anarchism under this name is an offshoot of the modernist current of the protestant Churches, breaking away by starting its journal *Vrede* in 1897. As an attempt to live communally in an agricultural colony, the Christian anarchist organisation of the International Fraternity failed. However, the influence of the ethical ideas spread by its members by far exceeds its small numbers. The same can be said about the general pacifist and ethical standpoint of Dutch secular anarchism, which has been definitely influenced by it. The Fraternity also had a big impact in the fields of conscientious objection, sexual education, protection of animals and struggle against alcoholism, amongst others—an influence which still resonates today.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The general story of Dutch Christian anarchism as presented here is drawn from my dissertation: *Onze God is een arbeider* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1989) and my forthcoming *Droom en dimensie*—a parallel life of Christian anarchism in the Netherlands and its founder Felix Ortt. For the period after around 1930 the main source to this day is the only book on religious anarchism published in Dutch: Ariëns, Hans, Laurens Berentsen and Frank Hermans, *Religieus anarchisme in Nederland tussen 1918 en 1940: in het rijk der vrijheid* (Zwolle: SVAG, 1984). An important introduction in another language is: Jochheim, Gernot, *Antimilitaristische Aktionstheorie, soziale Revolution und soziale Verteidigung: Zur Entwicklung der Gewaltfreiheits-*

# 1. Prologue in Zwijndrecht, Groningen and De Wilp

Yet there are several exemplary precursor tendencies in Dutch history, most of them mentioned and considered as such by the Christian anarchists of the *fin de siècle*. Living a communal life with properties shared had been practiced—since the Reformation—by amongst others the Anabaptists, the followers of Jean de Labadie (1675–1725), and less strictly by the Collegianten (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries). The example of a movement which is seen as heralding socialism in the Netherlands is the Christelijke Broedergemeente (Christian Community of Brethren), commonly known as Zwijndrechtse Nieuwlichters (followers of the New Light, with the connotation of: modernists). Central to their teachings and practice is Romans 11:36 (“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things”<sup>2</sup>). Started by peat barge proprietor Stoffel Muller in 1803 the movement finally found its home in Zwijndrecht in the South of Holland in 1829. Soon a part of it split away and moved to Mijdrecht. In 1832 the ideal of “from each according to ability, to each according to need” was virtually abandoned, and soon after this event Muller died and the Community slowly but steadily eroded itself. Some remaining members joined the Latter Day Saints in the U. S. A. in the 1860s.

The Christelijke Broedergemeente—apart from the communal life—declined to have anything to do with the registration service, which has been obligatory since the days of the annexation by France (1810–1813), and they refused to serve in the army, which particularly became a problem in 1830, when the Southern Netherlands declared independence as Belgium. Eventually, by way of compromise, members could serve as medics in the army, which they accepted. It was the first organised conscientious objection in the Netherlands. As mentioned above, the community did not survive long after the death of its founder Muller. The idea of the community as a religious inspired socialist movement is supported by the once influential Dutch novelist Arthur van Schendel in his novel *De waterman* (Dutch original published in 1933).<sup>3</sup>

Theologically related to the Zwijndrecht Community but without any sympathy for the movement—a lack of interest which must have been class biased, as theologians in the nineteenth century were very much part of the ruling class—is the Groningen School of Theology. Led by reverend Petrus Hofstede de Groot it is the tendency which brought back the humanist tradition to the Dutch Reformed Church. With their journal *Waarheid in liefde* (Truth in love), founded in 1837, they bridge the gap between the Zwijndrecht community and organised theological modernism in the Netherlands.

Imponderable is how the working of the Berne fan God (God’s Children) based in De Wilp in the Frisian moors might be described. Hardly known to its contemporaries, it was a community of believers following the Inner Light, led by yet another mystic, Marten Jans van Houten (1801–1879). The basic locus for him was John 1:5: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”<sup>4</sup> There is no revelation outside of the Bible, Van Houten preached, but the Spirit is the means by which the faithful can know God, and general Christendom is living in a scandal: it has taken the broad path. Where God works is the real freedom. The teachings of Van Houten sound similar to many of the themes adopted by Christian anarchists, and the Frisian moors are a strong base both for Christian and for secular anarchism. If possible, more research on this community should be done.<sup>5</sup>

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orie in der europäischen antimilitaristischen und sozialistischen Bewegung 1890–1940 — unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Niederlande (Assen etc.: Van Gorcum etc., 1977).

<sup>2</sup> King James Version.

<sup>3</sup> Schendel, Arthur van, *The waterman* [translated into English by Neline C. Clegg] (London: Heinemann, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> KJV.

<sup>5</sup> Sources are scanty, to say the least. The only full description has been done by G. A. Wumkes in: *Een mysticus uit de Friesche Veenen* (Leeuwarden: Friesch Genootschap, 1914).

## 2. Christian Anarchism and the International Fraternity (1890-) 1897–1906

In 1649 Gerrard Winstanley and the people called True Levellers or Diggers started their agrarian activities at St. George's Hill, which were violently cut down twice by forces more powerful than these peaceful toilers on the soil. There is a parallel with Dutch Christian anarchists who in 1899 started their agrarian collective enterprise in Blaricum, on land which was cheap exactly because it was hardly useful for agricultural purposes. Both places, St. George's Hill and Blaricum, now are home to *nouveaux riches*—in the latter case this is mainly due to the discovery of the poverty of the villagers by a public that came to know the village through the news about the colony. The poverty was considered to be picturesque and drew a lot of artists to the place, who wanted to document this poverty, and who eventually took over the village.<sup>6</sup>

With this opening remark to this section I mean to give my theoretical position on Christian anarchism in general and the *fin de siècle* variety in particular. I persist in disagreeing with the idea of a turn-of-the-century semi- or complete identity crisis of the bourgeoisie, which led artists, philosophers and other very non-proletarian people to adopt anarchism. Dutch historiographer Jan Romein is as far as I know the first who has coined this idea, which still survives, but for reasons which I shall not dwell upon here I do not accept this interpretation.<sup>7</sup> I will only mention the main reason: Christian anarchists of the turn of the century saw themselves as part of a long tradition throughout the history of Christianity and if I did not take their position seriously there would be no motivation to write about them as far as I am concerned.<sup>8</sup> We can conveniently call it *Christian anarchism* but defying or denying worldly authorities in the name of Jesus predates anarchism about eighteen centuries. The qualification of *anarchism* should only be applied to tendencies in the era of modern statehood, starting with Anabaptism on the European Continent and certainly with radical tendencies in the English Revolution. And after all, from the early Church up till present day New Monasticism the anarchist thread can be traced in the history of what Dutch church historian Lindeboom called Christianity's stepchildren.<sup>9</sup>

Dutch Christian anarchism was first manifested in circles of latitudinarian theologians, henceforth to be called *modernists* (Modernen), specifically in their journal *De Hervorming* (Reformation). The modernists were shaken up very much by confrontation with abject poverty of what were supposed to be their faithful parishioners through the new practice of house visits—in the spirit of English Christian socialist Arnold J. Toynbee. This culture shock is documented very well in *De Hervorming* and there were discussions going on of a very high intellectual quality on how the social question should be resolved—the meaning of socialism, and how to realise it. The original political leaning of most modernist theologians was towards liberalism, which implied they did not like to think of the state as the means to solve the social question. And so to them anarchism was more or less the natural choice for a tendency of socialism. There was also the combination of anarchism and Christianity as preached by Leo Tolstoy which particularly appealed to the radical theologians, generally referred to as “the young” (*de jongeren*). The most radical of them, Henri van den Bergh van Eysinga, is together with his brother G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, the most important name attached to the Dutch Radical School of Theology which insisted that Jesus of Nazareth never even had physically existed. Van den Bergh van Eysinga did not join any organisation of Christian anarchists and died just when he realised the new so-called socialist state in Russia was not the earthly paradise he longed for.

Socialism and anarchism were seriously discussed by theologians who knew what they were talking about in those days. Modernist professor of theology Gunning gave a course on anarchism in Leiden,

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<sup>6</sup> On this transformation of the poor villages Laren and Blaricum due to colonies: Lien Heyting, *De wereld in een dorp: schilders, schrijvers en wereldverbeteraars in Laren en Blaricum, 1880–1920* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> This is the general thesis of Jan Romein, *Op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1976). Translation in English: *The watershed of two eras: Europe in 1900* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> Felix Ortt, *De vrije mensch— studies* (Amersfoort: Vrede, 1904), 44–45.

<sup>9</sup> J. Lindeboom, *Stiefkinderen van het christendom* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1929).

stating that following Jesus would be the only real form of “archism.”<sup>10</sup> The man who started a theologically rightwing split in the Dutch Reformed Church, Abraham Kuijper, called for attention for the “social question” arguing that probably the only solution would be some kind of Christian socialism—an idea he easily forgot once he had become prime minister.

The first anarchist preacher in the Netherlands was the man known as the Prophet of Coevorden, H. C. J. Krijthe, who was a modernist theologian and a freethinker at the same time.<sup>11</sup> He may be considered the man who has prepared especially the North of the Netherlands for atheism, anarchism and Christian anarchism together. Atheism in this period should be seen as a rejection of official church teachings, so it should not be confused with present day ideological offerings.

Dutch Christian anarchism was expressed in the modernist journal *De Hervorming* from about 1890 to 1897. Expressions of this type actually pre-date the foundation of a parliamentary social democratic party (in 1894) and run parallel to the development of a secular anarchist movement. So Christian anarchism, small as it may be, was an independent new phenomenon in the workers’ movement from the start. The reverend Krijthe, mentioned above, certainly was one of the early Dutch anarchists. The most prominent member of both the early socialist and the anarchist movement, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis had been a bearer of the cloth too, but he left the Church when he was “converted” to socialism.

Radical ministers complaining that the ideas of Tolstoy were not given enough space in *De Hervorming* broke away from this journal and the organisation of modernists entirely, in 1897. They started their own paper, called *Vrede* (Peace), which continued under different titles for about twenty-five years. The immediate cause was the refusal of J. K. van der Veer to serve (again) as a civic guard, quoting Tolstoy’s vision of the gospel, which in turn led Tolstoy to write his *Les temps sont proches* (“the end is nigh”).<sup>12</sup> Van der Veer became publisher and editor of *Vrede*, which was officially called the organ of the Christian anarchists. Together with the start of *Vrede* the most important Christian anarchist who was not a theologian, Felix Ortt, published a book called *Christelijk anarchisme*, soon re-titled as *Het beginsel der liefde* (The principle of love)—a plea for voluntary and complete defencelessness. Ortt was working for the department for the maintenance of dikes, roads, bridges and the navigability of canals (Rijkswaterstaat) and had developed a method to predict the tide at the Dutch coast, which was used until 1985. This civil engineer and hydrographer left the aforementioned department in 1899, when it became clear that he inevitably would have to work for the new Dutch navy harbour in Den Helder.

The people who were calling themselves Christian anarchists in the Netherlands around this time were cherishing the idea of their own domestic colony, living together and working the land, all in the spirit of Christ or the earliest Christians. It might still be a matter of debate where this idea came from, but the most fitting explanation seems to me that several socialist experiments—sometimes also called utopian—in North America were model to this ideal. The novelist/philosopher/psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden had his own colony in Laren, named after Thoreau’s *Walden*. Van Eeden had been a friend of Felix Ortt’s since their days at school. It is hard to overestimate Van Eeden’s influence on Dutch Christian anarchism. His interest in spiritualism, his vision of socialism—building the new society within and at the same time outside of existing society—and perhaps his symbolism as a novelist and poet had a big impact. However, he can be considered neither as an anarchist nor as a Christian anarchist.<sup>13</sup>

In the village of Blaricum, near Van Eeden’s *Walden* colony, a rich sympathiser with Christian anarchism, Jac. van Rees, professor of histology in Amsterdam, bought a piece of very poor land for the Christian anarchist colony. First to settle there were the reverend Anne de Koe, who left the church refusing to serve the parish of Den Helder, the navy harbour, and S. C. Kijlstra, soon to be joined by

<sup>10</sup> J. H. Gunning, *Anarchisme* (Nijmegen: Ten Hoet, 1895), 30.

<sup>11</sup> On Krijthe and other anarchist preachers in the Netherlands: André de Raaij, “‘De gekruisigde communist van Galilea’: anarchisten op de kansel,” in *Onvultooit verleden* 18, [www.onvultooitverleden.nl](http://www.onvultooitverleden.nl) (accessed March 24, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> L. N. Tolstoj, *Les Temps sont proches*. Trad. sur le manuscrit original par P. Boyer et Ch. Salomon (Paris: n.p., 1897).

<sup>13</sup> His peculiar religiously tinged vision of socialism is explained in: Frederik van Eeden, *Happy humanity*. [Translated from the Dutch original: *De blijde wereld: reden over mensch en maatschappij*] (Garden City, N. Y.: Country Life Press, 1912).

student of theology Lod. van Mierop. The publisher Van der Veer joined too, but left for England soon, where Christian anarchism was more explicitly inspired by Tolstoy.

It can be easily seen with hindsight that ministers turning themselves into farmers on poor soil, having no agricultural experience whatsoever, was a recipe for disaster. They were joined by more experienced workers, but these did not necessarily share their high ideals. The colony somehow drew people who then and now could be considered problematic cases, just like Walden—Van Eeden was a psychiatrist and patients hoped to be cured by life in the country.

To relieve professor Van Rees of the formal burden of responsibility for the colony it had to have its own legal form, which was carried by the association “de Internationale Broederschap” (the International Fraternity), which was recognised by the government at the end of 1899. The name expressed the universality of the Christian anarchist ideal and the striving for fraternity. Brotherhood may have been there, but sisterhood was left out: the spouses of the ministers turned out to be very unwilling participants in the colony. So much for the ideal of equal rights, which was an important part of Christian anarchism. Actually, the spirit of fraternity somehow did not work either. People considered to be unworthy members apparently were told to leave—sometimes even by notes, stuck on the wall in the communal refectory.<sup>14</sup> Felix Ortt joined rather late, and became the colony’s naturopath as well as printer and editor of the publishing house. Van der Veer had soon been replaced as editor, since he was too fanatic as a Tolstoyan and after being around with the kindred spirits in England he left the Christian anarchist ranks altogether, making no secret of the fact that he considered the English Tolstoyans to be utterly crazy. That is one reason why the International Fraternity never really was international in the usual sense.

High-minded Anne de Koe also left the colony in disappointment, moving over to nearby Walden to be even more disappointed.

The disaster story does not end here. The colony was used as a meeting centre in the days of the Dutch general strike of 1903. This was not taken well by most villagers, who were suspicious of the vegetarian (grass-eating) wearers of reform clothing (nudist) colonists anyway (in the brackets are the names given to the colonists by the villagers). At the kermis of the village, always a perfect excuse for boozing a bit more than usual, a mob gathered to attack the colony, for queen and country. Most colonists left in fear, but Lod. van Mierop defencelessly and demonstratively sat reading the Bible, visible in front of his window—so a fire bomb was thrown at him. The colonists had to be rescued by the national guard, morally and practically the worst defeat to be suffered.

When members started discussing means to defend themselves against repetition of this siege, it turned out to be the bitter end for the colony as a community in the spirit of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Scattered and saddened the adherents however still had their focal point in the journal *Vrede*. But the idea of continuing unity was blown away when Van Rees turned out to be supporting a mistress, which did not particularly indicate a chaste life. In effect the International Fraternity was dissolved. When the last, if not the only proletarian member, S. van den Berg—a most remarkable Christian anarchist, being Jewish and a syndicalist organiser—asked for support during a strike in the Rotterdam harbour in 1906, his calls were met with silence.<sup>16</sup> This spelled the end of the illusion of playing a role in the workers’ movement altogether.

This may sound like a disastrous story, but this is just the spectacular side of the Fraternity that never really was. The really important role of Dutch Christian anarchists was in the battle of ideas. They organised conscientious objection, and rallied behind every young man who refused to wear the uniform, which had been compulsory since 1901. The advocating of chaste life was combined with sexual

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<sup>14</sup> The main story by an outsider of life in the colony is: Henriëtte Hendrix, *Een week in de Kolonie der Internationale Broederschap te Blaricum* (Amsterdam: Cohen, 1901).

<sup>15</sup> Maria W. J. L. Boersen, *De kolonie van de Internationale Broederschap te Blaricum* (Blaricum: Historische Kring Blaricum, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> S. van den Berg, *De elevator-kwestie, haar verloop en hare beteekenis voor de arbeiderswereld* (Amsterdam: Lodewijk, 1906).

education, for so-called heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, in which they were absolutely pioneers.<sup>17</sup> They had their unmistakable influence on the idea of animal protection, with an impact which still makes the Netherlands a pioneering country (resulting in the Partij voor de Dieren—the Party for the Animals—uniquely representing the interests of animals in Dutch parliament these days). Louis Bähler translated a Buddhist call for mission among the Christian barbarians in Europe—which I consider to be a falsification.<sup>18</sup> The result was a split between modernists and anti-modernists in the Dutch Reformed Church, in 1906, which still has not been healed yet. Bähler could stay as a reverend since the modernist wing had won the struggle for his position, but in 1909 he left after a conflict with his parishioners. Even the idea of starting your own self-managed business as a model against prevailing capitalism did catch up, and has stayed around until this day. So, in spite of what one might think of the disaster story, I would say that the story of Dutch Christian anarchism is one of small but significant successes which gives the ideal and its proponents a weight which lies far beyond the story of defeat or failure expressed by the Blaricum colony.

### 3. Developments after 1906 in Bird's Eye View

Felix Ortt and Lod. van Mierop continued working together through a foundation named Chreestarchia,<sup>19</sup> based in Soest, where they lived next door to each other. The most important goal of the foundation was the founding of a humanitarian school, which still exists today. Other activities were organising for teetotalism, propaganda for chaste living (combined with sexual education), pleading for vegetarianism, against vivisection and for the protection of animals, naturopathy and latitudinarian religious education.

In 1915 Louis A. Bähler took the initiative for a manifesto asking for the refusal of military service, which in a slightly watered down version was supported by the entire political left wing in the Netherlands. Signing the manifesto brought several members of the higher classes (among whom quite a few reverends) in jail. Getting acquainted with the prison system rallied religious anarchists Lod. van Mierop, Kees Boeke and Clara Meijer-Wichmann towards the cause of abolitionism. To give them some kind of organisational structure the Vrije Menschen Verbond (Association of Free Humans) was formed along with the initiative of the manifesto.

This association merged with the left wing of the Christian socialists—who never fitted in with social-democrats—into the Bond van Religieuze Anarcho-Communisten (Association of Religious Anarcho-Communists) in 1920. In 1932 it was renamed to Bond van Anarcho-Socialisten (Association of Anarcho-Socialists), formally open to everyone but still a religious anarchist association. The organisation was called *religious* anarchist rather than *Christian* anarchist to stress its openness to Jews, theosophists, confessors to other creeds and non-religious people who wanted to adhere to the ideas of the movement. As a pacifist and socialist movement its influence probably went beyond its small membership, which never exceeded a few hundred. Its journal, *De Vrije Communist*, rebaptised *Bevrijding* (Liberation) in 1923, generally edited by former reverend Bart de Ligt and with regular contributions by poet Henriëtte Roland Holst, was culturally and politically more important than the membership of the organisation would suggest, and the latter-day Pacifist Socialist Party adopted the name for its journal as a token of appreciation.

The Spanish Civil War effectively brought an end to the organisation due to unbridgeable disagreement about whether the use of violence should be permitted. Plans to revive the organisation were thwarted by the German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940. Organised religious anarchism did not rise again after this occupation. The story of religious anarchism for several decades after the occupation is one of individual persons, such as Kees Boeke with his school De Werkplaats (Workshop)

<sup>17</sup> Een Hunner [= J. H. François], *Open brief aan hen, die anders zijn dan de anderen* (Den Haag: Berkhout, 1915)

<sup>18</sup> Louis A. Bähler, *Het "christelijk" barbarendom in Europa: Boeddhistische zending* (Blaricum: De Waelburgh, 1903).

<sup>19</sup> A self-invented Greek word supposed to mean "Dominion of the morally good."

in Bilthoven, Année Rinzes de Jong with the Open Religious Community, management advisor and psychologist Lieuwe Hornstra. And Felix Ortt, founder of the Dutch Christian anarchist movement, remained active until his death in 1959.

Some decades later Roman Catholics brought back some life and organisation to the idea of Christian anarchism in the Netherlands. In 1988 the Ploughshares Movement got a branch in the Netherlands, along with the Catholic Worker. Roman Catholics were rarer than Jews in the old movement. Since both the Ploughshares and the Catholic Worker movements originate in the United States of America for the adherents in the Netherlands it may look as if they are following a new and imported tradition. But then, both the founders of the Catholic Worker and of the International Fraternity knew they were spreading ideas which (to paraphrase Peter Maurin<sup>20</sup>) are so old they always will look like new.

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Maurin, *Easy Essays* (Washington: Rose Hill, 2003), 37.

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## **PART II: CHRISTIAN ANARCHIST REFLECTIONS**

# CHAPTER FIVE. LOVE, HATE, AND KIERKEGAARD'S CHRISTIAN POLITICS OF INDIFFERENCE

RICHARD A. DAVIS

*This chapter suggests one way in which the Danish philosopher theologian Søren Kierkegaard can be understood as an anarchist. It suggests that Kierkegaard advocates neither love nor hatred of the state, but indifference, the fruit of a truly Christian life. The argument begins by explaining how anarchism can be understood as indifference. This indifference is found in Jesus' own orientation toward the political structures of his time, and can be seen elsewhere in the Christian tradition. Indifference is here considered a more radical standpoint than hatred of the state, typified by more militant anarchists. Kierkegaard's reputation as a political thinker is then considered, along with those who would deny that Kierkegaard was indifferent in politics. In placing Kierkegaard's politics in the intellectual context of Lutheran Danish Church Establishment and Hegelian Christendom, this chapter also examines Kierkegaard's less than indifferent approach to Christendom, the alliance of church and state that he saw plaguing Denmark and making authentic Christianity scarce. Against these movements, which risked swallowing the individual into the collective, Kierkegaard opposed the state in emphasising the individual and their discipleship of Christ. Such a love of God entails a dissolution of any active relationship to the state, which may be called indifference. Understood in this way, Kierkegaard's indifference to the state can be described as anarchist.*

## Introduction

The literal meaning of “anarchy” is, in political thought at least, to be against the state or “arkys.”<sup>1</sup> But why be against the state? Anarchists will probably agree that the state blocks, frustrates or even opposes true human flourishing and human community. Theologically understood, “Christian anarchism” sees the state obstructing the redemption of humanity and the possibility of peace with justice in this life. More generally speaking, then, one's favoured form of political organisation will be closely related to how one defines what it is to be human, both individually and communally, and what stands in the way of our true redeemed humanity. Christians have a particular view of what it means to be human; but are divided over the political form that best serves the flourishing of the human, and if, indeed, it matters at all. This chapter will examine how Danish philosopher theologian Søren Kierkegaard engaged with these issues, and will explore through his thought the notion that Christian anarchism is best understood as an attitude of indifference toward the state, rather than active opposition to it.

In his battle for authentic Christianity Kierkegaard attacked any target that removed the need for a direct personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Hence his well known attack on Christendom, the alliance of church and state that he saw plaguing Denmark and making authentic Christianity scarce. Kierkegaard's anti-Constantinian theological writings do not only assail; they positively promote an indifference to politics that provides a compelling version of Christian anarchism. This indifference is found in Jesus' own position toward the political structures of his time, and can be seen as a model for

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<sup>1</sup> “Arky” is a word invented by Vernard Eller and means “any principle of governance claiming to be of primal value for society.” Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy Over the Powers* (Eugene: Wipf / Stock, 1999), 1.

relations between Christians and the state and perhaps church-state relations as well. Indifference is here considered a more radical standpoint than hatred of the state, typified by more militant anarchists. This Christian stance is anarchist and radical when derived, as it is in Kierkegaard, from uncompromising obedience to God and imitation of Christ. The argument will begin by explaining how anarchism can be understood as indifference. Kierkegaard's reputation as a political thinker will then be considered, along with those who would deny that Kierkegaard was indifferent in politics. Finally, Kierkegaard's own positions on the state will be discussed, along with how we should react to the state and overcome its worst impacts though an emphasis on the individual.

## Love, Hate, and Indifference

Indifference in politics is sometimes thought of as a nihilistic quality that works against sociality and something that must be remedied. This view is often promulgated by those with most to lose by falling public participation in elections and policy debates. Yet even if one sees voting and state-centred politics as unimportant, one may have some concern about indifference to, or apathy about, serious social problems and falling participation in other forms of political and social action. But it is not only political actors that worry about apathy; religion also fears indifference.

For example, Christian anarchist Vernard Eller, writing in his work on Kierkegaard, expresses a common Christian sentiment: "The live threat to Christianity is not heresy ... but indifference."<sup>2</sup> Where the church is in decline is it the lack of relevance of Christianity that keeps people away, with many people simply indifferent to the church and God. The state's indifference to Christianity has also been seen as a threat to the church, although some would equate this with the neutrality necessitated by liberalism.<sup>3</sup> Here, though, the focus is on individuals' relationship to the state, and to God. At the individual level, then, Kierkegaard thought that indifference toward one's faith meant that one could no longer be called a Christian:

If anyone thinks he has faith and yet is indifferent toward this possession, is neither cold nor hot, he can be certain that he does not have faith. If anyone thinks he is a Christian and yet is indifferent toward being that, then he really is not one at all. Indeed, what would we think of a person who gave assurances that he was in love and also that it was a matter of indifference to him?<sup>4</sup>

Recalling Revelation 3:16, such a "Christian," being neither hot nor cold, is rejected. This passage from Kierkegaard also links indifference with love's opposite, and thereby enters into the dialectic of love, hate, and indifference. Here there are three stances: hot, cold, and lukewarm. One who is "hot" loves God and can be called a true Christian. Being "cold" is to be a hater of Christianity and in active opposition to the gospel. The "lukewarm" are in the worst position of all.<sup>5</sup> In Kierkegaard's example

<sup>2</sup> Vernard Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Everett Fergusson comments that the church should be wary of any posture the state has toward the church. And while he possibly prefers that the state be indifferent to the church, it really doesn't matter all that much, the church must follow its Lord regardless: "For the church truly to be the church, a benevolent state is no less threatening than an oppressive state. Indeed, the favorable state may be more threatening, for it tempts the church to rely on the state and its methods for the advancement of the church's programs. The oppressive state, as seen throughout history, strengthens the faith of the church and sharpens its identity. There is a current lament that a greater threat than either oppression or favor to the church is apathy or indifference by the state and society. Only those with the state-church mentality would think so. Whether the problem be indifference or opposition, the church must trust its Lord and follow his ways, which are not the world's ways, in achieving its mission." Everett Fergusson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 398–399.

<sup>4</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26–27.

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard counts amongst the sorry lukewarm Bishop Mynster and Pastor Grundtvig. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 206–210.

above, the “Christian” is a self-deluded fool for thinking they are a Christian, they are really indifferent; neither hot nor cold, such a person does not truly care whether they are a Christian or not. Even worse than being delusional about one’s relationship to God is to become gradually indifferent to God, as Kierkegaard laments:

to be able to lose God in such a way that one becomes utterly indifferent and does not even find life intolerable—that is disconsolateness and is also the most terrible kind of disobedience, more terrible than any defiance—to hate God, to curse him, is not so terrible as to lose him in this way or, what is the same thing, to lose oneself.<sup>6</sup>

Following Kierkegaard, lukewarmism can be placed in a category of its own; with love and hate in their own dialectal relationship. Paradoxically, Kierkegaard argues that love and hate *are* opposites, but at the same time that hate is a perverted form of love:

Spontaneous love can be changed within itself; it can be changed into its opposite, into hate. Hate is a love that has become its opposite, a love that has perished. Down in the ground the love is continually aflame, but it is the flame of hate; not until the love has burned out is the flame of hate also put out. Just as it is said of the tongue that “it is the same tongue with which we bless and curse,” so it may also be said that it is the same love that loves and hates.<sup>7</sup>

In politics, as well as religion, love/hate and lukewarmism (here called “indifference”) can describe relations to its objects. What the state and the church share is a desire that people are not indifferent to them; for while they would prefer to be loved, they would rather be loathed than not thought of at all. Indifference is a threatening disposition for it renders the object irrelevant and obsolete to one’s life. Through either love or hate one is bound to the object in an active relationship; whereas indifference is a kind of non-relation to its object. Politically speaking, this could be considered an anarchist posture when it holds the state as something irrelevant and meaningless. Or as Eller puts it, when defining “anarchy:” “the state of being unimpressed with, disinterested in, skeptical of, nonchalant toward, and uninfluenced by the highfalutin claims of any and all arkys.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise in the church; the danger is that it is simply ignored.<sup>9</sup>

Kierkegaard identified and enjoyed the paradoxical nature of indifference. It is not indifference, for instance, to tell another that one is indifferent to them, with Kierkegaard himself taking comfort from those who said, “What does anyone care about Magister Kierkegaard? I’ll show him.”<sup>10</sup> To express such indifference in this way is a logical contradiction, but is almost irresistible. For the Christian it is a worldly temptation, because the Christian does not need the world to acknowledge its indifference; and to seek this acknowledgement is to defeat the purpose of such indifference. In the following quotation Kierkegaard lists some of the worldly things the Christian should be indifferent to, and stresses that they should not be indifferent in a worldly fashion:

people thought that it was Christian to betray the secret, to express in a worldly way Christianity’s indifference to friendship, to the family relationships, to love of the fatherland—which is indeed false, because Christianity is not indifferent in a worldly way to anything;

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<sup>6</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 90.

<sup>7</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 34 (Kierkegaard’s emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> One might say that militant atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who despise lukewarm atheists almost as much as Christians, are doing religion a great service by getting people talking about God, and to consider what kind of relationship they should have to God.

<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard’s response to such people was: “Ah, but showing me that they do not care about me to taking the trouble to get me to realize that they do not care about me is still dependence ... They show me respect precisely by showing me that they do not respect me.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong, and Gregor Malantschuk, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 5, §5979.

on the contrary, it is concerned about everything simply and solely in a spiritual way. But to express one's indifference in such a way that one is eager for the relevant persons to find out about it is certainly not being indifferent. Such indifference is comparable to someone's going up to another and saying, "I don't care about you," to which the other might answer, "Then why bother to tell me!" Again it was a piece of childishness; it was a childish way of being distinguished by Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of this chapter will examine to what extent Søren Kierkegaard is an anarchist of this sort; believing that indifference to the state is normative for Christians. Such indifferentism toward politics was not an innovation of Kierkegaard's, it has been part of the Christian tradition since the Church Fathers. Saint Augustine, for instance, wrote:

As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days' course, what does it matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?<sup>12</sup>

In the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain affirmed this general approach in more structural terms, writing:

One can be a Christian and achieve one's salvation while militating in favor of any political regime whatsoever, always on the condition that it does not trespass against natural law and the law of God. One can be a Christian and achieve one's salvation while defending a political philosophy other than the democratic philosophy, just as one was able to be a Christian, in the days of the Roman empire, while accepting the social regime of slavery, or in the seventeenth century while holding to the political regime of the absolute monarchy.<sup>13</sup>

What these quotations share is a concern that Christians should not be too anxious about the political structures they live in, or who their political leaders are. A biblical mandate for this view can be found in St. Paul's letter to the Romans:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, it is possible that one can live a Christian life and be saved while living under any political regime whatsoever. But it should also be noted that both Augustine and Maritain accept limits to this indifference, notably where the law transgresses the "law of God," or compels one to sin. Kierkegaard shared this view on the *possibility* of true Christianity and salvation under any political system; but had concerns about the *probability* of faith when living in Christendom.

## The Politics of Kierkegaard

For many years it was thought Kierkegaard had little to say on social and political matters, given his existential focus on the individual. That phase of Kierkegaard scholarship seems to be over, and there has been an increasing number of scholars willing to recognise that Kierkegaard, while not a

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<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 144–145.

<sup>12</sup> Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), V, 17. Jean Calvin echoes Augustine on this point in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.1.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:38–39. All direct quotes from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version.

political philosopher, was a profound thinker about politics and a severe critic of modern society.<sup>15</sup> Yet while there is agreement on this, there remains debate over whether Kierkegaard had a positive political programme.

Just as Kierkegaard has been described as a negative theologian, he could also be described as a negative political thinker. As Merold Westphal rightly observes, Kierkegaard's politics

emerges indirectly, through a critique of what he believes is the overriding sociopolitical defect of the theory and practice of his times rather than as a positive description of the institutions of the society he deems most rational.<sup>16</sup>

Graham Smith has also observed this lack of a positive programme, and notes that "Kierkegaard cannot describe the details of such a politics precisely because to do so would be to collapse his critique of the political into politics."<sup>17</sup> Smith's interpretation leaves room to think that it is possible that Kierkegaard could offer us a positive politics. But Smith writes that if Kierkegaard did so he would become part of the problem, which would be trying to find a political solution to a spiritual problem.

While Smith's analysis is useful, seeing Kierkegaard as indifferent to the political strengthens the position that Kierkegaard would not and could not offer any political programme, because this would be self-contradictory. What form the political *ultimately* took mattered little to Kierkegaard.

Smith's profitable analysis also points to an illuminating way in which Kierkegaard's critique of politics can be read. If one stays within the ethical or political stage of life, one seeks to find what political ideology is a "better" form of the ethical, as though replacing one political system with another will solve our problems. Kierkegaard repudiates this approach to politics, believing that all these debates within the sphere of the ethical miss the real point. What is needed is the transcendence of the ethical into the religious stages of life. Kierkegaard maintains that true Christianity is the basis for true human community; not a new way of being ethical. To remain confined within the ethical stage of life has the result that Christianity has nothing to offer politics.

The rediscovery of the political nature of Kierkegaard's thought also comes with a warning against seeing him indifferent to politics. In some interpreters there can be confusion between indifference and ignoring the political altogether, as in Westphal, who wrote:

Kierkegaard's individualism, I have become increasingly persuaded, expresses a radical politics and is anything but a form of apolitical or antisocial indifference or withdrawal.<sup>18</sup>

Robert L. Perkins has also warned against this line of interpretation.<sup>19</sup> But he does nothing to explain the texts where Kierkegaard expresses or advocates political indifference. Yet, these texts form a not insignificant aspect of Kierkegaard's concern with the state and the emergence of Christendom. So while these warnings about oversimplifying or totalising Kierkegaard's indifference should be taken seriously, it is still possible to accept the normative implications of indifference to political structures and claims.

## Kierkegaard on the State

The claim that Kierkegaard was indifferent to political forms is also challenged by his severe criticism of the state, as seen in passages such as this: "The state is of the evil rather than of the good."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For some of the history of the reception and interpretation of Kierkegaard as a social and political thinker see the editors' introduction to George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare, eds., *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 33.

<sup>17</sup> Graham M. Smith, "Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political," *History of European Ideas* 31, no. 1 (2005): 59.

<sup>18</sup> Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, viii.

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. Perkins, "Kierkegaard's Critique of the Bourgeois State," *Inquiry* 27, no. 2-3 (1984): 208.

<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4238.

Lying behind such brief passages Kierkegaard had three substantive objections to the state. These interconnected criticisms were not in the realm of pure political theory. Kierkegaard was not a political anthropologist attempting to explain the ancient origins of modern politics, nor did he attempt to provide a theory of the basis of the state, as Hobbes and Locke did. “Instead of all these hypotheses about the origins of the state etc.,” Kierkegaard writes, “we should be more occupied with the question: given an established order, how can new points of departure be created religiously.”<sup>21</sup> His was a contextual political engagement, linked to nineteenth-century Denmark.

Firstly, then, what Kierkegaard really disliked was not the state in a purely theoretical sense, but the modern state as it was emerging in Denmark, being an alliance of church and state. To Kierkegaard this manifestation of Christendom was opposed to true Christianity, since all Danes were automatically Christians, without them having to do anything, since citizenship and being a Christian were made equivalent. Kierkegaard observed that “Christianity does not exist, at least not in ‘Christendom’ where we are all Christian and all are saved.”<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard’s neighbours were complacent in their Christianity. Nearly all Danes were baptised and most were confirmed. But these rites, while making people members of the church, were not enough, in Kierkegaard’s opinion, to make them real Christians. Danish Christians did not imitate Christ and his suffering. Theirs was a form of civil religion and not authentic apostolic Christianity. True Christianity, Kierkegaard thought, was becoming nearly impossible in Christendom, and with its disappearance went hopes for human community based on love for the neighbour.

Second, Kierkegaard saw that the rise of the modern state in Europe was replacing the old communities with the hollow notion of the “public.” In this process individuality disappeared and everyone was levelled down to being a mere human and shorn of their relational identity. In John Elrod’s words,

the democratic revolutions sweeping across Europe destroyed the concrete and historical community, replacing it with the abstract and ahistorical public. The individual is defined no longer by contingent factors like nationality, race, community and occupation but by his membership in the human race, which is defined in the universal ideals of democratic liberalism.<sup>23</sup>

Absorbed into the “public” or mob, people lose their individuality and the possibility of being an individual and a true Christian. Kierkegaard lamented that,

In the “public” and the like the single individual is nothing; there is no individual ... detached from the “public” the single individual is nothing, and in the public he is, more basically understood, really nothing at all.<sup>24</sup>

Darren C. Zook notes that the individual was under threat by the deliberate actions of the emerging states, which sought to encourage patriotism (love of the nation-state) and to become meaningful to their subjects:

the Danish state, like so many other European states, had been directing its energies in earnest at capturing the hearts and minds of “concrete individuals” at least from the latter half of the eighteenth century, largely through practices of ceremonial ritual and institutional discipline aimed at transforming subjects of the self into subjects of the state.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, 4, §4205.

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, 4, §4816.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 65–66.

<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, 3, §2952.

<sup>25</sup> Darren C. Zook, “The Irony of it All: Søren Kierkegaard and the Anxious Pleasures of Civil Society,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2008): 418.

It was not only the state that judged this a beneficial move. Removed from historical obligations and endowed with natural rights, the citizen could pursue their own egotistical ends, such as the pursuit of wealth and the domination of others. Finally, then, Kierkegaard criticises the state as being nothing more than the sum of individuals' egotism. The state, in this view, cannot become what individuals are not. Since individuals are naturally envious and egotistical, the state cannot but be the same. Since the state is nothing but egotism writ large, Kierkegaard rejects patriotism and the idea that it is virtuous to obey the state, or that that is where virtue is to be found, as was claimed by Plato and Hegel.<sup>26</sup> The state wishes to appear ethical and a vehicle for love, but Kierkegaard rightly saw through this, and the way in which politics masks its egotism as virtue: "But politics is egotism dressed up as love, is the most frightful egotism, is Satan himself in the form of an angel of light."<sup>27</sup> For Kierkegaard then, the state is what we use to impose our egotism onto others. The state does not become a giving up of the self for the collective, but a recognition and celebration of self-interestedness. Acceptance of the state and any implied social contract does not exhibit a giving up of interests selflessly for the common good, but rather our individual desire for security and safety.

Through his analysis of egotism Kierkegaard describes how humanity had a kind of fall into politics, in that as God recedes, politics advances. Politics becomes the playground of competing egotisms and interests focussed not on God, but on ourselves. Hence the egotism that appears in the state comes from a loss of duty to God and neighbour. Egotism, for Kierkegaard, can be understood as one's wants and desires, dressed up as duties to oneself, for as he wrote, "Concurrently as duty to God disappeared, duty to oneself made its appearance."<sup>28</sup>

In addition to these historical events and forces, further light can be shed on Kierkegaard's politics by understanding the intellectual genealogy of Danish Christendom in Luther and Hegel.

## The Lutheran Origins of Danish Establishment

Both Denmark's state-church and Kierkegaard were Lutheran. His theological training was Lutheran, and while he was never ordained, he attended worship regularly and preached occasionally. Kierkegaard was also a sometime fan of Luther, praising his sermons and theology throughout his writings.<sup>29</sup> But while Kierkegaard agreed with the basics of Lutheranism and reformed doctrine,<sup>30</sup> he was sometimes outspoken against Luther himself and the impact and use of his theology.

The most relevant feature of Luther's theology here is the theory and practice of his doctrine of the two kingdoms. Put simply, this asserted that there are two realms in the world, a spiritual one ruled "through the Holy Spirit under Christ," and a temporal one ruled by lawful secular authorities. Since both realms were ordained by God, Luther emphasised the duty of civil obedience and the sinfulness of rebellion against political authority. Importantly rulers got their authority directly from God, not from the Pope, marking a distinction between the two realms characteristic of Reformed theology. Luther saw that these two realms were distinct and should not be confused.<sup>31</sup>

What did Kierkegaard think of Luther's doctrine and its application to Denmark? One can easily imagine that Kierkegaard would have liked the doctrine of two kingdoms, seeing its focus on the separation of the two realms being a bulwark against established churches and Christendom. Indeed when Kierkegaard calls Christendom "Satan's invention"<sup>32</sup> he may be recalling Luther's concern about

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<sup>26</sup> See Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4238.

<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4206.

<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 1, §1004.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 3, §803.

<sup>30</sup> Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship*, 302.

<sup>31</sup> See Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority," in Martin Luther and Jean Calvin. *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, edited and translated by Harro Höpfl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10–11.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 3, §3238.



“*confusio regnorum*,” one of Satan’s great weapons being the confusion of the two regiments.<sup>33</sup> But much more important was what happened in practice; and this resulted in a sharp distinction between Luther and Kierkegaard.

Prior to the Reformation the church had significant control over Danish society. Following nearly two decades of Luther-inspired activism and conflict, evangelical Lutheranism was declared the national religion of Denmark in 1536, replacing the Roman Catholic Church. A new church structure was issued in 1537 with the participation and endorsement of Luther himself:

All of the new organising principles had been drawn up in close collaboration with Lutheran theologians and had also been sent to Wittenberg for the approval of Luther himself and of his inner circle of advisors.<sup>34</sup>

The effects of this alliance were far-reaching and gave shape to the state church that Kierkegaard hated so much. Kierkegaard was critical of the role of Luther in seeking political help for his reforming project: When Luther introduced the idea of Reformation, what happened? Even he, the great reformer, became impatient, he did not reduplicate strongly enough—he accepted the help of the princes, *i.e.* he really became a politician, to whom victory is more important than “how” one is victorious.<sup>35</sup>

Luther’s two kingdoms did not mean, in Danish practice at least, separation of church and state; they were intermingled from the start. Danish historian Knud Jespersen describes the changes that followed the Reformation in Denmark:

While previously the Danish clergy had been an independent and powerful group on equal footing with the aristocracy, the Reformation reduced them to the position of civil servants, directly answerable for their conduct to the state. As a result of this subordinated role, the Danish clergy became ever-more instruments of the state over the following centuries. In fact, they became the most significant mouthpieces of the state to address the wider public. On Sunday after Sunday, Lutheran dogma about the sanctity of authority and unconditional obedience—and attendance at services was compulsory. Thus, the clergy became the most important tool for the state in the comprehensive religious and social regimenting of the people, so that they not only all became faithful Lutherans, but also useful and loyal subjects of the state.<sup>36</sup>

It is here that Kierkegaard locates a battle between true Christianity and the Lutheran Church. While both Kierkegaard and Luther both wished to preserve the church they differed over how that ought to happen, and what the church should look like. Eller summarises neatly the difference between Luther (the “church”man) and Kierkegaard (the sectary):

*If* the church is what the “church”man sees it to be, then sectarian radicalism is a real and present threat to the very existence of the Christian *church*. But *if* the church is what the sectary sees it to be then Luther-type “politics” are a real and present threat to the very existence of the Christian *church*.<sup>37</sup>

This is why Kierkegaard focused on the individual’s direct relationship to God since in Christendom true Christianity had almost vanished. Hence, he saw his task as introducing Christianity into Christendom.<sup>38</sup> Kierkegaard did not hold Luther responsible for all that Lutheranism became. He thought

<sup>33</sup> W. D. J. Cargill Thompson and Philip Broadhead, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), 55.

<sup>34</sup> Knud J. V. Jespersen, *A History of Denmark*, trans. Ivan Hill (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 88.

<sup>35</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard: A Selection*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), §1166.

<sup>36</sup> Jespersen, *A History of Denmark*, 89.

<sup>37</sup> Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship*, 305 (Eller’s emphasis).

<sup>38</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 36.

that Luther's ideas suited certain secular interests who exploited him. Luther provided, ironically, both support for Christendom in Denmark and a means of critiquing it, through his two regiments doctrine. Kierkegaard despised the former and preferred the later.

## Hegel and Modern Christendom

Hegel was a contemporary of Kierkegaard's and while he did not have the direct impact of Luther on the church in Denmark, his idealism was influential in offering continued support to the established order. Much of Kierkegaard's body of work addresses what he saw as the negative influence of Hegelianism on his contemporary world. Hegel was concerned with the breakdown in community and the lack of a coherent social philosophy that could reverse this trend. He therefore gave much attention to what would unify people and rebuild community. He was opposed to the individualism of the age and its modern individualist morality.<sup>39</sup> Hegel saw Christianity as part of the problem, with faith being privatised and isolated from the world. "Our religion," he wrote of Christianity, "wishes to train people to be citizens of heaven with their gaze ever fixed on high, who will thereby be strangers to human feelings."<sup>40</sup> Following on from Rousseau, Hegel thought that such a religion was disruptive of social order and community. He favoured a civil religion that worked toward civil unity.

For Hegel the state is part of the Absolute Spirit, which consumed all ethics, politics and religion within itself. In such a state the responsible individual follows the community ethic ( *Sittlichkeit*) and subordinates their individuality to the collective. To be ethical and religious means to follow the group and law. It is easy to see how this promotes the community Hegel sought. With church and state combined, obeying the state (ethics) is what Christianity amounts to, with all citizens sharing a basic Christian identity. Hegel demands that the individual becomes part of the state, giving up their individuality. This is what Kierkegaard loathed, writing:

That the state in a Christian sense is supposed to be what Hegel taught—namely, that it has moral significance, that true virtue can appear only in the state ... that the goal of the state is to improve men—is obviously nonsense.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, Kierkegaard accuses Hegel of deifying the established order.<sup>42</sup> Hegel himself says, with a view to preserve social order: "nothing must be considered higher and more sacred than good will towards the State."<sup>43</sup> The consequence of this is dramatic. In deifying the established order one who thinks they are above it can be accused of being more than human. Any claim to be following a higher religious calling, as Abraham did in his religious teleological suspension of the ethical, would be a source of great offence to society.<sup>44</sup> Kierkegaard argues against the deification of the established order bought about by Hegel, calling it "the continual revolt against God."<sup>45</sup> Since, if the established order is itself divine then it can no longer be under the judgement of God.<sup>46</sup>

Kierkegaard continues his critique of Hegel's deification of the established order, seeing it as a secular force with civil peace as its end point effectively removing Christianity from society:

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<sup>39</sup> See Allen W. Wood, "Hegel's ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 211–233.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Bernard Cullen, *Hegel's Social and Political Thought: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4238.

<sup>42</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), 468.

<sup>44</sup> This a little explored political implication of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Not surprisingly Hegel and Kierkegaard diverge on their evaluation of Abraham. See Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, 61–84.

<sup>45</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 88.

<sup>46</sup> Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society*, 77.

The deification of the established order, however, is the smug invention of the lazy, secular, human mentality that wants to settle down and fancy that now there is total peace and security, now we have achieved the highest.<sup>47</sup>

Here we start to see the contrast between the Hegelian ethical order and the Kierkegaardian individual. While the individual can become *something* with God as its end, the state becomes an end in itself that cannot change and constrains the ability of its citizens to become *anything*. In opposition to the established order, then, is Kierkegaard's individual:

And just as the individual human being can aspire to become something, so this is the something to which the generation aspires; it wants to form the established order, to abolish God, in the fear of men to browbeat the single individual into a mousehole—but this God does not want, and he uses the very opposite tactic—he uses the single individual to prod the established order out of self-complacency.<sup>48</sup>

Kierkegaard, therefore, was directly opposed to the Hegelian theory of the state in which God was displaced by the deification of the state, and in which the individual becomes nothing but a speck and thus no longer truly exists. Along with Luther, Hegel was a foundation of Danish Christendom, with its established state church. In this Kierkegaard saw a national religion which encouraged conformity and suppression of individuality. Citizens were automatically Christians and were encouraged by the church to submit to the state and conform to Danish culture. How did Kierkegaard think this state of affairs could be overcome and true Christianity flourish?

## Overcoming the State and Recovering the Individual

Overall, Kierkegaard saw the development of the true self as the ethical-religious individual as the final word in reply to Christendom and political religion. Political indifference will be a mark of those who achieve this level of individuality and faithfulness. But given the seductive power of Christendom and project of the state to win adherents, Kierkegaard also flirts with political change that will make real Christianity easier to attain.

True individuality and indifference is best witnessed, according to Kierkegaard, in the lives of Socrates and Jesus. This is the highest level of political response and one that is a mark of the proper religious orientation. The archetypal individual for Kierkegaard was, of course, Socrates. Through his questioning of social thinking to uncover a higher truth Socrates “expresses the individual’s emancipation from the state.”<sup>49</sup> Socrates was an individual who did not follow the mob, but fearlessly stood outside society as one who was “discontented with the established order.”<sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard links Socrates’ individuality with his crime against Athens, writing that,

were we to describe his crime in one word, we could call it *apragmosyne* [indolence] or indifference. Admittedly he was not idle, and admittedly he was not indifferent to everything, but in his relation to the state he was indifferent precisely by way of his private practice.<sup>51</sup>

Socrates’ ironical quest for the infinite and willingness to suffer for it provides the basis for the offence he caused, and the death he suffered. Additionally, he provided Kierkegaard with a model attitude toward the Hegelian universal, being unafraid to be in conflict with, or cause offence to society’s ethics. For Kierkegaard such an attitude is dangerous to any established order:

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<sup>47</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 89–90.

<sup>49</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, 2, §1968.

<sup>50</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, 4, §4246.

<sup>51</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 193.

it is obvious that Socrates was in conflict with the view of the state—indeed, that from the viewpoint of the state his offensive had to be considered most dangerous, as an attempt to suck its blood and reduce it to a shadow.<sup>52</sup>

Kierkegaard found a similar disposition in Christ. Jesus' indifference to political authority is best exemplified, for Kierkegaard, in the tax test from the synoptic gospels where Jesus is asked the trick question of whether it is right to pay taxes to the Emperor.<sup>53</sup> About Jesus' reply: "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," Kierkegaard exclaims,

What infinite indifference! It is utterly indifferent to him whether the emperor is called Herod or Shalmanezzer, whether he is Roman or Japanese. But on the other hand, what an infinite, chasmic difference he confirms between God and the emperor—"Give to God what is God's!" In a worldly way they wanted to make it into a God-question, whether it was permissible to pay tax to the emperor; this is the way the worldly mentality is so fond of prinking itself up into godliness, and this is the way they had also mixed God and the emperor together in the question, as if the two straightforwardly and directly had something to do with each other, as if they perhaps were rivals of each other and as if God were a kind of emperor. In other words, in the question they actually had covertly taken God in vain, had secularized him. But he makes the distinction, the infinite distinction, makes paying tax to the emperor a matter of the greatest indifference, which means something one must do and not waste one word or one moment on talking about it—in order, then, to have more time to give to God what is God's.<sup>54</sup>

The lesson here is that the individual should not waste time worrying about government, but focus on God, maintaining a stark distinction between God and state. Again we see indifference to the relatively unimportant political sphere, but radical concern with the difference between statist politics and Christianity. This is also seen in Kierkegaard's comment on Romans 13:1: "Christianity is political indifference; engrossed in higher things, it teaches submission to all public authorities."<sup>55</sup> This could never be taken as always obeying the emperor for we should never give what is God's to the emperor. We can only belong to and worship God. For Kierkegaard this is the offence that Christians cause the state. Since for Kierkegaard the imitation of Christ is true Christianity, the Christian is to have the same indifference that Christ had toward politics, which Kierkegaard summarised as follows: "Christianity is indifferent toward each and every form of government; it can live equally well under all of them."<sup>56</sup>

Yet the question remains, if indifference to politics was Kierkegaard's true position, why was he so bothered about Christendom and the Danish alliance of Church and state? Why wasn't he indifferent to them? The answer must be that a lot was at stake, for while Kierkegaard believed that true Christianity, or a Socrates or Jesus, could not be helped or harmed by any form of the state, or the policies it might adopt, he did see danger to individuality in Christendom. Kierkegaard believed that Christendom was an obstacle to true Christianity and the imitation of Christ. Being a real Christian is based in individuality of the kind denied in Christendom. How, then, could Christendom be overcome? While Kierkegaard argued that Christendom needed another Socrates,<sup>57</sup> he also advocated for the breakdown of the alliance between Church and state. This was essential for the emergence of the individual, which is the foundation of community based on love for the other. Radical indifference could only be possible for the individual Christian, but they must first emerge from the mob and the crushing weight of Christendom.

<sup>52</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, 178.

<sup>53</sup> See Matthew 22:15–21; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26.

<sup>54</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 169–170.

<sup>55</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4193.

<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 4, §4191.

<sup>57</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 1, §373.

Practically speaking, Kierkegaard thought that the cause of real Christianity could be helped by the clergy not acting as agents of the state and in refusing to preach patriotism and unconditional obedience to the state. Changes in policy here would make a real difference to people being able to gain real Christianity. To overcome the state and let the individual flourish Kierkegaard wanted the Church and state to be separate. This would force upon the individual the decision whether to become a disciple of Christ. But disestablishment of Lutheranism could not be the total answer, since the culture of Hegelian Christendom also needed to be overcome.<sup>58</sup> But, as Kierkegaard observed, the established order has an interest in maintaining structures that levelled people into the mob, since the individual could be a political threat to the establishment, as were Socrates and Jesus. Kierkegaard, seeing the negative effects of Hegelian doctrine here, put his fears in these words:

The established order will not put up with consisting of something as loose as a collection of millions of individuals, each of whom has his relationship with God. The established order wants to be a totality that recognizes nothing above itself but has every individual under it and judges every individual who subordinates himself to the established order.<sup>59</sup>

Kierkegaard worried was that the state would become a mediator or sit between God and the individual, or even deify itself, acting as a saviour figure. This is the basis of Kierkegaard's penetrating analysis of Danish political religion, that the self-deified state becomes the saviour of humanity, standing in for Christ. He recognised that the state wanted to be loved, and that to be loved meant that one would love the state in place of God. Here Kierkegaard's analysis of inter-personal love from *Works of Love* is also relevant to anything (including a state) that seeks the love of a human being:

When a human being seeks another human being's love, seeks to be loved himself, this is not a giving of oneself; that would consist in helping the other person to seek God. To be able to seek love and oneself to become the object of love, yet without seeking one's own, is reserved for God alone. But no human being is love. Therefore, if a human being seeks to become the object of another human being's love, he is deliberately and fraudulently seeking his own, inasmuch as the only true object of a human being's love is love, which is God, which therefore in a more profound sense is not any object, since he is Love itself.<sup>60</sup>

This is the foundation of political religion itself, with the state or nation seeking the love that properly belongs to God alone. A state, rather than seeking love for itself, should deflect love from itself, and help its citizens love God. From the side of the citizenry, they should not give their love to a ruler or political body that has no proper divine claim on our love. On the relativity of love, Kierkegaard wrote, in commenting on Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26, that even love of our families should be as hate when compared to the love of God. He continued that:

If someone has a legitimate claim, has a sacred claim, has first claim on your love, then to love someone else, even if this means only becoming indifferent to that first one, is indeed like hating him, simply because he has a claim on your love.<sup>61</sup>

So to love one's family, nation or state to the degree that one becomes indifferent to God, is like hating God and losing oneself.

Kierkegaard could foresee a time, like ours, when the state would not need the support of the church. But today he would probably retain a theological critique, in which perhaps liberalism, rather than Christendom, becomes true Christianity's rival. While focussed on Denmark, Kierkegaard's universal

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<sup>58</sup> Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship*, 293–294.

<sup>59</sup> Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 91.

<sup>60</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 264–265 (Kierkegaard's emphasis).

<sup>61</sup> Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, 183.

lesson is that there will always be something to distract one away from the true encounter with Jesus Christ. Or in other words, something to which we can direct our love other than God.

The state could also, for Kierkegaard, become a barrier between God and the individual, even to the point where God cannot penetrate the mediating bulk of the modern state in trying to reach the individual:

But it is better to abolish God in such a way that he becomes a titular deity or a fustbudget who sits in heaven and cannot do anything, so no one notices him because his effect touches the single individual only through the solid bulk of intermediary causes, and the thrust therefore becomes an undetectable touch! It is better to abolish God by having him decoyed into natural law and the necessary development of immanence! No, all respect for the penance of the Middle Ages and for what outside of Christianity is analogous to it, in which there is always the truth that the individual does not relate himself to the ideal through the generation or the state or the century or the market price of human beings in the city where he lives—that is, by these things he is prevented from relating himself to the ideal—but relates himself to it even though he errs in his understanding of it.<sup>62</sup>

Kierkegaard saw that true Christianity needed to be recovered from both the Lutheran establishment and the Hegelian universal. Disestablishment, while useful, would only go so far toward correcting establishment's contribution to the fall of the church. Cultural and philosophical change was also needed to recapture the individual from the clutches of the universal. It is a paradox of Kierkegaard's that indifferent, offence-causing individuals, such as a Socrates, were needed to help break down Christendom, yet it was Christendom itself that held individuals down.

Indifference to politics is, therefore, both a fruit of true individuality and a means of it coming about.

## Conclusion

For Kierkegaard the state is a congregation of egotistical individuals. Merged with the Church in Christendom it destroys the individual and the likelihood of true faith, for all but the most Socratic of individuals. This is the impetus for Kierkegaard's writing on the state—to preserve the possibility of authentic individual faith. Yet, Kierkegaard would affirm that state interference in Christianity cannot harm true faith, since faith will always relativise the state's claims through the kind of indifference displayed by Socrates and Jesus. Kierkegaard, however, cannot quite be totally indifferent to the state, since in its alliance with the church it provides a deception, leading people to believe that they are Christians when they have not done or suffered anything to claim that name.

In concentrating on the claims of God to the exclusion of all claims of the state Kierkegaard's understanding of indifference, in its purest form, could be considered the archetypal Christian anarchist approach. While such an attitude undermines the claims of an absolutist state, Kierkegaard does not seek to abolish the state altogether. He wrote: "Christianity has not wanted to topple governments from the throne in order to place itself on the throne."<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard's anarchism is therefore at odds with the secular anarchist, who is an enemy of the state, and in whose place they would erect self-government. This distinction was noted by Eller, who observed that secular anarchists value autonomy through self-love, based on the assumption that "I am the one who best knows myself and knows what is best for

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<sup>62</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), I, 543. He continues: "Because of the jumbling together with the idea of the state, or sociality, of community, and of society, God can no longer catch hold of the single individual. Even if God's wrath were ever so great, the punishment that is to fall upon the guilty one must make its way through all the courts of objectivity—in this way, with the most affable and most appreciative philosophical terminology, people have managed to smuggle God away." Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, I, 544.

<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 135.

myself.”<sup>64</sup> But in this process, according to Eller, they impose upon themselves a “heteronomous arky.”<sup>65</sup> But for Eller this is to forget that

I am a creature (a sinful creature, even) and that there is a Creator who, being my Creator (and also being somewhat smarter than I am), knows me much better than I ever can know myself.<sup>66</sup>

Kierkegaard eschewed such a sovereignty of the self, as is found among some secular anarchists, and advocates instead the self-giving love of neighbour as the foundation of true community.

To return, finally, to the logical relations between love, hate, and indifference, it is worth reflecting on this passage from Augustine: “A people is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love.”<sup>67</sup> Political societies are formed around the shared love of a political body. Patriots, for instance, are united in their love of the nation-state. Conversely, anarchists are united in their hatred of the state. Yet both are in active relationship to the state. In commenting on this passage by Augustine, Oliver O’Donovan suggests that “every determination of love implies a corresponding hatred. For a community to focus its love on *this* constellation of goods is to withdraw its love from *that*.”<sup>68</sup> While this has some logical appeal (and the support of Matthew 6:24<sup>69</sup>) in that one must *either* love or hate something, such as the state, Kierkegaard begs Christians to have neither of these affections for the state, but to remain indifferent to the state in the face of the one true and worthy love—the love of God. In loving God, who has the only true claim on our love, one may not love other gods or things that pretend to be God. But it need not logically follow that in withdrawing love from these impostors, one must hate them; rather it may result in the dissolution of any active relationship, which may be called indifference. Understood in this way, Kierkegaard’s indifference to the state means a disintegration of connection to it, and in this way he could be understood to be a Christian anarchist.

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<sup>64</sup> Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Eller, *Christian Anarchy*, 2–3.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community: The 2001 Stob Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 22 (O’Donovan’s emphasis).

<sup>69</sup> The parallel text, Luke 14:26, is discussed at length in Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 72–74.

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# CHAPTER SIX. RESPONDING TO THE STATE: CHRISTIAN ANARCHISTS ON ROMANS 13, RENDERING TO CAESAR, AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

ALEXANDRE J. M. E. CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS

*The two Bible passages most frequently cited against Christian anarchism are Paul's assertions in Romans 13 and Jesus' recommendation about "rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." Surely, the argument goes, these two passages conclusively prove, once and for all, the Christian anarchist fallacy to be mistaken. A closer look at Romans 13, however, suggests that Paul is in fact interpreting Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—perhaps the founding Bible passage for Christian anarchism—and simply applying the turning of the other cheek to the state, therefore that Paul is not actually contradicting Christian anarchism but in fact articulating the peculiarity of its forgiving response to the state. Similarly, a closer look at Jesus' saying suggests that very few things actually do belong to Caesar, and that it is just as—if not a lot more—important to also render to God what belongs to God. Christian anarchists also take note of Jesus' bizarre instruction, in Matthew 17, to seek the coin for the temple tax in the mouth of a fish, because the reason Jesus gives for doing so is to avoid causing offence. In short, for Christian anarchists, none of these passages defeats their radical political interpretation of Jesus' teachings. To the contrary, they confirm it and further elaborate it. At the same time, the question of the limits of acceptability of any civil disobedience remains somewhat unresolved: while a few Christian anarchists see civil disobedience as problematic, many others consider it unavoidable in certain circumstances. Above all, however, all Christian anarchists tend to agree that obeying or disobeying the state is irrelevant next to the primary commitment of obedience to God.*

Christian anarchists interpret the Gospel to imply a critique of the state and an invitation to make it redundant. Their response to the state's contemporary prominence likewise consists of two fairly distinguishable concerns: on the one hand, Christian anarchists seek to work out a way in which to interact with the prominent state, a *modus vivendi* that honours Jesus' teaching; and on the other, they seek to exemplify the Christian alternative to it, to embody and to thereby demonstrate the possibility of the sort of stateless community life which they understand Jesus to be calling them to. The focus of this chapter, which is based on a section of my doctoral thesis, is limited to the former. A discussion of the latter is offered in a separate chapter in my thesis (which is due to be published soon with Imprint Academic). The present chapter therefore collects a broad range of Christian anarchist writings on responding to the state in order to both summarise the current shape of Christian anarchist thinking on the topic and encourage further discussion on it in the future.

Both in that thesis and in this chapter, Christian anarchist theory is defined rather broadly to include all the writings that advance the Christian anarchist thesis. The most famous producer of such writings is undoubtedly Leo Tolstoy—he is often the *only* example of Christian anarchism cited in the academic literature on anarchism. Among the aficionados, however, Jacques Ellul is also very famous, and people usually also know about Vernard Eller and Dave Andrews. Also well known are some of the figures associated with the *Catholic Worker* movement (especially popular in the United States), in particular Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and Ammon Hennacy. The Christian anarchist literature is also enriched

by contributions from thinkers at its margins, who are perhaps not the most vociferous fanatics of pure Christian anarchism, or perhaps not Christian anarchists consistently (perhaps writing anarchist texts for only a brief period of their life), or perhaps better categorised as pacifists or Christian subversives than anarchists but whose writings complement Christian anarchist ones. These include Peter Chelþický, Nicholas Berdyaev, William Lloyd Garrison, Hugh Pentecost, Adin Ballou, Ched Myers, Michael Elliott, and Jonathan Bartley among others. John H. Yoder is also cited in this chapter because, despite being a pacifist Mennonite who was keen to dissociate himself from the anarchist conclusions that his argument has been said to lead to, his writings do further reinforce certain flanks of the Christian anarchist critique. Finally, Christian anarchism also has its anarcho-capitalists, like James Redford and James Kevin Craig.<sup>1</sup> This chapter does not draw on every one of these thinkers and writers, but extracts from them some of the main arguments they put forward when discussing the question at hand.

Pondering the Christian anarchist response to the state brings to the fore two important New Testament passages: Paul’s instructions to the Christians in Rome that they “be subject unto higher powers,” and Jesus’ saying about rendering to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Both passages are often seen as problematic for Christian anarchism since they appear to contradict its basic proposition—after all, do they not clearly instruct Christians to concentrate on spiritual matters, to submit to the authority of the state, and to let the state and its politicians deal with political affairs? Also, there are substantial disagreements among Christian anarchists on how to approach these passages—are not these disagreements further confirmation that their interpretation is false and unfounded? By bringing together a wide range of Christian anarchist writings on the subject, this chapter suggests a negative answer to of both these questions. That is, despite some real differences, a generic and not too incoherent Christian anarchist interpretation (or set of interpretations) can be sketched out, and according to this reading, it is the standard interpretation of these passages that turns out to be false and dishonest.

The first section of this chapter discusses Romans 13—more specifically: Christian anarchists’ opinion of Paul, their actual exegesis of the passage, and what they make of similar passages elsewhere in the New Testament. In the second section, the two instances where Jesus is giving advice on payment of taxes are interpreted from a Christian anarchist perspective: first the “render unto Caesar” passage from Mark 12, then the curious recommendation about collecting the temple tax from the mouth of a fish, from Matthew 17. The third and final section outlines the divergent Christian anarchist positions on civil disobedience: the case against it, the case for it, and the paramount importance of obeying God whatever the case may be.

## Paul’s Letter to Roman Christians, Chapter 13

In his study of New Testament passages relevant to the state, Archie Penner summarises the conventional view when he asserts that “The most elaborate and specific body of teaching in the New Testament on the Christian’s relation to the state is Romans 13,” where Paul writes the following:<sup>2</sup>

1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

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<sup>1</sup> Craig is the person behind the otherwise anonymous Vine and Fig Tree websites; see for instance *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy* (Vine and Fig Tree), members.aol.com (accessed 20 April 2007). There are also many Christian anarcho-capitalist contributors to three key websites: [www.lewrockwell.com](http://www.lewrockwell.com), [www.strike-the-root.com](http://www.strike-the-root.com) and [www.libertariannation.org](http://www.libertariannation.org).

<sup>2</sup> Archie Penner, *The New Testament, the Christian, and the State* (Hagerstown: James Lowry/Deutsche Buchhandlung, 2000), 76.

4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.
6. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.
7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the Christian anarchist literature argues (as does Penner) that there are many other passages in the New Testament that have inherent implications for the state, but Romans 13 is probably the one with the most explicit reference to it. A few other scattered verses also refer directly to the state in a similar vein, but as noted in more detail below, what they say is largely encompassed by Romans 13. As a result, as Eller puts it, a thinker's "handling of Romans 13 (along with Mark 12) is the litmus test" of his Christian anarchism.<sup>4</sup>

Mainstream theologians have made the most of this passage to legitimise the church's support of the state. Ellul thus claims that "the official church since Constantine has consistently based almost its entire 'theology of the state' on Romans 13 and parallel texts in Peter's epistles."<sup>5</sup> Based on Romans 13, established theologians have argued that Christians ought to submit to state authorities, even to wield the sword when these request it, because God clearly intends the state to be His main tool to preserve social order and stability—in other words, that the state is sanctified by God, and that Christians should welcome that and collaborate with the state. For many Christian anarchists, however, such an interpretation betrays the subtle meaning of this passage. It does not take its context into account, and anyway, it leaves the church with the difficulty of dealing with the "embarrassment" of "tyrants."<sup>6</sup> Just like with many other Bible passages, therefore, Christian anarchists are suspicious of traditional exegeses, and instead, they articulate an alternative interpretation of their own.

## Paul's Weaknesses

Before this alternative interpretation can be outlined, it is important to note that Paul himself is also viewed with suspicion by some Christian anarchists.

For a start, several Christian anarchists note that Paul himself did not always submit to Roman authorities, and they demonstrate this by listing his many recorded acts of disobedience.<sup>7</sup> Redford even remarks that Paul proudly cites his punishments for such disobedience as proof of his commitment to Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Was Paul guilty of "evil works"? Was he not doing "that which is good" by spreading the good

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:1–7. King James Version.

<sup>4</sup> Vernard Eller, *Christian Anarchy: Jesus' Primacy over the Powers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1987), 114–115.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," in *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 166–167. See also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, trans. George W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 79; Enrico C. S. Molnár, *A Study of Peter Chelpecký's Life and a Translation from Czech of Part One of His Net of Faith*, ed. Tom Lock (Oberlin: [www.nonresistance.org](http://www.nonresistance.org), 2006), [www.nonresistance.org](http://www.nonresistance.org) (accessed 28 March 2007), 108; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicar Agnus Noster*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 193.

<sup>6</sup> Many theologians have sought to argue that somehow Romans 13 does not really apply to tyrants and dictators, but only to peaceful and just forms of government—especially democratic ones—but Ellul has little respect for such "strange casuistry" which anyway does not appear founded on the passage. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Dave Andrews, *Subversive Spirituality, Ecclesial and Civil Disobedience: A Survey of Biblical Politics as Incarnated in Jesus and Interpreted by Paul*, [anz.jesusradicals.com](http://anz.jesusradicals.com) (accessed 17 July 2006), 18–22; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 90; Roy Halliday, *Christian Libertarians* (Libertarian Nation Foundation), [www.libertariannation.org](http://www.libertariannation.org) (accessed 8 November 2007), para. 23–24; Penner, 98–100; James Redford, *Jesus Is an Anarchist: A Free-Market, Libertarian Anarchist, That Is— Otherwise What Is Called an Anarcho-Capitalist*, [praxeology.net](http://praxeology.net) (accessed 14 August 2006), 13–14.

<sup>8</sup> (He also remembers that Joseph and Mary disobeyed Herod to protect baby Jesus.) Redford, 13–14.

news? Why then did he incur the “wrath” of rulers? It would seem that either Paul did not abide by his own pronouncement, or that what he meant in Romans 13 must be slightly different to what he is traditionally interpreted to have meant.<sup>9</sup>

Either way, some Christian anarchists also make the point that Christians ought in the first instance to follow Jesus, not Paul, since unlike Jesus, “The apostles can err in their acts.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, for Tolstoy, the church’s “deviation” from Jesus’ teaching begins precisely with Paul.<sup>11</sup>

Hence both Tolstoy and Hennacy (who was strongly influenced by Tolstoy) frankly dislike Paul and see him as at best confusing Jesus’ message, at worst betraying it.<sup>12</sup> As to Elliott, he contends that Paul’s advice to submit to authorities was informed by his “expectation of Christ’s imminent return.”<sup>13</sup> For him, Paul advised submission because he mistakenly expected “the present order” to be soon “swept away.”<sup>14</sup> The “tragedy,” he argues, is that for the church, Paul’s instruction “takes precedence over the witness of Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> Hence for Christian anarchists like Tolstoy, Hennacy and Elliott, *Jesus* is the important teacher, and Paul is just an erring follower who has been given too big a role by the tradition. Beyond this, these particular Christian anarchists have little else to say on Romans 13.

Not all Christian anarchists, however, dislike Paul or view him with similar suspicion. Some point out that he seems to be edging towards anarchism when he says that for Christians, “there is no law.”<sup>16</sup> Others remember his advice to contend against the principalities and powers.<sup>17</sup> Others still try to defend him against allegations that he sought protection from the state—obviously anathema to any genuine anarchist.<sup>18</sup> Either way, not all Christian anarchists see Paul as a traitor. Several try to make sense of Romans 13 rather than reject it outright as dishonest and inauthentic.<sup>19</sup> Their resulting exegesis, they argue, actually ends up paradoxically confirming rather than contradicting the Christian anarchist position.

## The Christian Anarchist Exegesis: Subversive Subjection

One Christian anarchist interpretation of Romans 13, posited by Redford, is to argue that this is an “ingenious case of rhetorical misdirection.”<sup>20</sup> For him, Romans 13 must not be interpreted literally

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<sup>9</sup> Eller, 198–199.

<sup>10</sup> Penner, 98. See also Halliday, para. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Leo Tolstoy, “Church and State,” in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 336.

<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: By Little and by Little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 142; Ammon Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon*, ed. Jim Missey and Joan Thomas, Second ed. (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1994), 301–302, 475; Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 39–40; Leo Tolstoy, “Introduction to an Examination of the Gospels,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 107–108.

<sup>13</sup> Michael C. Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture* (London: SCM, 1990), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Elliott, 77–78.

<sup>15</sup> (He uses the word “tragedy” in the plural.) Elliott, 78 (see also 89).

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the anarchist interpretation of this passage is nowhere elaborated in great detail—it is usually just cited as evidence of Paul’s anarchist credentials. Day, 343; Simon Watson, “The Catholic Worker and Anarchism,” *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 15, Lent 2006, 8. (Galatians 5.)

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Eller, 198; Penner, 77. A discussion of this theme is available in Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Ballou looks in detail at each episode in which Paul appears to seek help from, or be helped by, the state, and concludes that in no instance does Paul not behave as a Christian non-resistant should have—which is not the same thing as saying that Paul was a consistent anarchist, of course, but at least, according to Ballou, he always abided by the doctrine of non-resistance to evil which is also at the root of Christian anarchism. Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, Second ed. (Oberlin: www.nonresistance.org, 2006), www.nonresistance.org (accessed 28 March 2007), 38–40. See also Penner, 99–100.

<sup>19</sup> According to Goddard, in struggling with this passage, Ellul “probably changed” his interpretation over time. Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul*, ed. David F. Wright, et al. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002), 287–288 (in the footnote). As to Chelpický, Wagner asserts that he “never doubted” the “authenticity” of Romans 13. Murray L. Wagner, *Petr Chelpický: A Radical Separatist in Hussite Bohemia* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1983), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Redford, 14.

because Paul is not speaking his true mind (partly for reasons mentioned in the next paragraph).<sup>21</sup> Similar arguments have been made by others: Carter, for instance, suggests that Paul is using the “classic ironic technique of blaming by apparent praise.”<sup>22</sup> He sees Paul’s apparent reverence for authorities as “deeply subversive” because of this “ironic edge.”<sup>23</sup> Both Carter and Redford point to examples of Paul disobeying authorities as proof of him not really meaning that Christians should obey. Such interpretations of Romans 13, however, can—rightly or wrongly—sound more like justifications to brush the text aside than patient attempts to grapple with it and give it a fair hearing.

Yet both Redford and Carter also note something that several other Christian anarchists take note of as well: Paul’s letter is addressed to the Christian community in Rome—the very heart of the Roman empire. It is written at a time when Christians are already being persecuted across that empire. For several Christian anarchists, therefore, Paul is deliberately very cautious in his wording, as his letter could easily be used by Roman authorities as a pretext to step up this persecution.<sup>24</sup> Hence for some Christian anarchists, Paul’s advice is largely “pragmatic rather than philosophical:” by submitting to the authorities’ wishes, Roman Christians might be able to develop good relations with their persecutors and thereby avoid further conflict.<sup>25</sup> The historical context of Romans 13 is thus an important aspect to pay attention to. It helps explain why Paul would have deliberately addressed the question of Christians’ relations to the authorities in the first place, and indeed even perhaps why he may have opted for that “rhetorical misdirection” or “irony” alleged by Redford and Carter.

The *textual* context of Romans 13:1–7 is even more important, as it throws light on what Paul has in mind when writing these particular verses. Along with Yoder, several Christian anarchists insist that “chapters 12 and 13 in their entirety form a single literary unit.”<sup>26</sup> In both chapters, Paul is writing about love and sacrifice, about overcoming evil with good, about willingly offering oneself up for persecution. Interpreting Romans 12 and 13 as a coherent whole, Ellul notes that there is a progression of love from friends to strangers and then to enemies, and this is where the passage then comes. In other words, we must love enemies and therefore we must even respect the authorities.<sup>27</sup>

Eller agrees: these authorities “are brought in as Paul’s example of those to whom it will be the most difficult to make the obligation apply.”<sup>28</sup> They are “a test case of our loving the enemy.”<sup>29</sup> In any case, for Yoder, “any interpretation of 13:1–7 which is not also an expression of suffering and serving love must be a misunderstanding of the text in its context.”<sup>30</sup> Hence Paul’s message in Romans 13 is to call for Christians to subject themselves to political powers *out of love*, forgiveness and sacrifice.

Seen in that light, Romans 13 is not a betrayal of Jesus’ revolutionary Sermon on the Mount (as Tolstoy would have it), but actually an exegesis of it: Romans 12–13 is an “eloquent and passionate

<sup>21</sup> Redford, 13–20.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Carter, “Commentary: The Irony of Romans 13:1–8,” *Third Way*, issue 28, May 2005, 21. (I am grateful to Keith Hebden for sending me this interpretation.)

<sup>23</sup> Carter, 21. See also Jason Barr, *Radical Hope: Anarchy, Christianity, and the Prophetic Imagination*, propheticheretic.files.wordpress.com (accessed 11 March 2008), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Nekeisha Alexis-Manners, *Deconstructing Romans 13: Verse 1–2*, www.jesusradicals.com (accessed 28 October 2005), 1; Andrews, 10; Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1957), 47–48; Carter, 21; Molnár, 109, 137; Redford, 14–15; Yoder, 200.

<sup>25</sup> [Justin Meggitt], “Anarchism and the New Testament: Some Reflections,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 10, Summer 1988, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Yoder, 196. For others making that same point, see Alexis-Manners, 1; Barr, 12; Eller, 197; Penner, 80. Ellul, for his part, calls upon an even broader context from Romans 9–11, in which Paul makes “a detailed study of the relations between the Jewish people and Christians,” to Romans 14, in which “some details are offered as to the practice of love (hospitality, not judging others, supporting the weak),” and concludes that “It seems so odd, so out of joint, in this larger context that some exegetes have thought that it must be an interpolation and that Paul himself did not write it.” Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 80–81.

<sup>27</sup> He adds that Paul “is reminding Christians that the authorities are also people (there was no abstract concept of the state), people such as themselves, and that they must accept and respect them, too.” Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81. See also Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170.

<sup>28</sup> Eller, 197. Note that Redford disagrees with the “fallacy” that “higher powers” necessarily implies “mortal governments that exist on earth.” Redford, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Eller, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Yoder, 198.

statement” of the Sermon applied to the case of the state.<sup>31</sup> In the Sermon, Jesus calls for his followers to love their enemies, to give not only the requested coat but the cloak also, and to bless their persecutors. In Romans 12–13, Paul is doing the same, and applying Jesus’ commandments to the authorities.

At the same time, Eller emphasises that to “be subject to” does not mean to worship, to “recognise the legitimacy of” or to “own allegiance to.”<sup>32</sup> For him,

It is a sheerly neutral and anarchical counsel of “not-doing”—not doing resistance, anger, assault, power play, or anything contrary to the “loving the enemy” which is, of course, Paul’s main theme.<sup>33</sup>

Hence Paul is not counselling “blind obedience.”<sup>34</sup> As explained below, if what the authorities demand conflicts with God’s demands, then Christians ought to disobey the former—but also then submit to any punishment.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, a Christian’s allegiance is only to God, not to the state.

Yet Paul goes on to write that “the powers that be are ordained of God.”<sup>36</sup> Does this not suggest divine sanctification of state authorities? Does it not imply that political powers are always endorsed by God? For Christian anarchist writers, it only means that God “allows” it, not that “he agrees with it” or that these authorities are “good, just, or lovable.”<sup>37</sup> Here, they recall 1 Samuel 8, where despite his disappointment with the Israelites’ request for a king, God grants them their wish.<sup>38</sup> Chelpický furthermore argues that “The earthly rulers and the state authorities are the punishment of God for disobeying His laws.”<sup>39</sup> Thus God does indeed “appoint” state authorities, but reluctantly, only because his commandments are being ignored. It does not imply that anything the authorities do is willed by God, or that, as Penner puts it, “God’s moral character is in any way imprinted on the state.”<sup>40</sup> Again, “appointing” or “ordaining” is not the same thing as “approving” or “agreeing with.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Why I Worship a Violent, Vengeful God Who Orders Me to Be Loving and NonViolent* (Vine and Fig Tree), members.aol.com (accessed 4 November 2005), para. 5 (for the quoted words); Alexis-Manners, 2; Yoder, 210. See also Penner, who argues that the opposite of the Greek for “be subject to” is the Greek used in the Bible for “resist,” so that Paul is indeed repeating the commandment not to resist which Jesus uttered in the Sermon on the Mount. Penner, 90–94.

<sup>32</sup> Eller, 199. See also *God Sends Evil: Why Calvinists Are Anarchists* (Vine and Fig Tree), members.aol.com (accessed 9 November 2005); *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40.

<sup>33</sup> Eller, 199.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Wink, *Jesus’ Third Way* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1987), 59. See also Alexis-Manners, 1; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 89; J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, Revised and expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 68–69.

<sup>35</sup> Andrews, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Romans 13:1. Redford reads this to mean that “the only *true* and *real* authorities are *only* those that God appoints, i.e., one cannot become a *real* authority or ruler in the eyes of God simply because through force of arms one has managed to subjugate a population and then proclaim oneself the potentate. Thus, by saying this Paul was actually rebuking the supposed authority of the mortal governments as they exist on Earth and are operated by men!” Redford, 15 (Redford’s emphasis). Tennant proposes a very similar reading in Michael Tennant, *Christianarchy?* (Strike the Root), www.strike-the-root.com (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 15–17.

<sup>37</sup> For the first two quotes, see Alexis-Manners, 3. For the last one, see Ellul, who writes that “We have to remember that the authorities have attained to power through God. Yes, we recall than Saul, a mad and bad king, attained to power through God. This certainly does not mean that he was good, just, or lovable.” Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Alexis-Manners, 2; Eller, 199–200; Molnár, 139–140. A summary of Christian anarchist interpretations of this passage can be found in Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, “Christian Anarchism: A Revolutionary Reading of the Bible,” in *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, ed. Nathan Jun and Shane Wahl (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 135–152; Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

<sup>39</sup> Molnár, 95 (paraphrasing Chelpický).

<sup>40</sup> This touches on an important debate regarding God’s ultimate responsibility for the actions conducted by political authorities, a debate which Christian anarchists do not venture into in any detail and which is therefore left out of the main body of this chapter (although a few reflections related to this are offered further below in this section). Suffice it to say here that this debate concerns not just Christian anarchists, but all Christian theologians, and that most would agree that God cannot be fully responsible for every act ever conducted by political authorities, as this would imply the unacceptable conclusion that God killed Jesus. For more on this, see for instance Penner, 65–66, 89–90, 119 (for the quote).

<sup>41</sup> Alexis-Manners, 3.

Nonetheless, since people have lost faith in him and instead place their faith in political authorities, since people will not listen to him anymore, God does use the state as one of his “servants” in his mysterious ordering of the cosmos.<sup>42</sup> Several Old Testament passages describe God using state authorities to punish sins and injustices.<sup>43</sup> The state, it seems, is one of God’s tools to maintain some order where his commandments are not being heard.<sup>44</sup>

It is probably in that sense that “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.”<sup>45</sup> The authorities should be feared by those who do evil, but not by those who do good works. Perhaps there is a suggestion that *despite* doing good works and nevertheless being persecuted by the state—which they were—Christians should *not fear* the state.<sup>46</sup> This particular phrase, however, is often steered clear from in the Christian anarchist literature: Christian anarchists never really seem to fully make sense of it. What they do point out, however, is that it cannot mean that these authorities do not persecute good people: they crucified Jesus, Paul himself was beaten by them, and Christians were being persecuted just as Paul was writing these lines.<sup>47</sup> Besides, elsewhere, Paul criticises these authorities, and warns Christians of further persecution.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, this verse cannot mean that the state always praises good works and only ever punishes evil ones. What it perhaps does imply is that persecuted Christians should not fear these authorities because in the eyes of God, the works that they do are good, and even if they die, at least their “martyrdom” will “magnify their glory”—much like Jesus’ death did.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, even state leaders are subject to God’s judgement, and are warned of this (for instance) in Acts 28:20.<sup>50</sup> These leaders do not know the precise purpose God has in mind for their actions: “like a plough in the hands of the ploughman,” Chelpický writes, the ruler “does not know what the ploughman intends.”<sup>51</sup> God uses state authorities as “instruments in the grand economy of his providence,” but at the same time, state leaders “[act] entirely out of [their] own perverse and wicked inclinations” and are “punished” by God accordingly, writes Ballou.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore *unknowingly* that state authorities are acting as God’s servants. In turn, their actions and intentions are examined by God, and, where their work is evil, they will themselves eventually incur God’s providential wrath.<sup>53</sup>

Yoder moreover recalls that according to Paul, the principalities and powers, “which were supposed to be our servants, have become our masters and our guardians.”<sup>54</sup> They “were created by God,” but they “have rebelled and are fallen” because “they claimed for themselves an absolute value.”<sup>55</sup> Yoder

<sup>42</sup> *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40; *Praying through Romans 13* (Vine and Fig Tree), members.aol.com (accessed 9 November 2005); Ballou, 32–38; Eller, 200–203; Molnár, 110–111, 119–123, 145; Penner, 65–66, 83–90; Wagner, 98, 135.

<sup>43</sup> Ballou, 34–37; Eller, 200–203; Molnár, 121; Penner, 88–89. (They cite the following Bible passages in their argument: Isaiah 10:5–15; 13:3–5; 41:2–4; 44: 28; 45:1–13; Jeremiah 25:8–12; 27:6–13; 43:10.)

<sup>44</sup> Sometimes, therefore, these authorities are indirectly and unconsciously doing God’s work, and according to Eller, if, as a Christian, you were to resist them, “You could find yourself resisting the particular use God has in mind for that empire; at the very least, you definitely are trying to take over and do God’s work for him.” Eller, 203. See also Molnár, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Romans 13:4.

<sup>46</sup> *Praying through Romans 13*.

<sup>47</sup> Carter, 21; Molnár, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Redford, 16–17. (1 Corinthians 2:6–8; 2 Timothy 2:8–9, 3:12.)

<sup>49</sup> Chelpický (whose words are borrowed here) actually goes even further, saying that “if they were killed, it was in accordance with His will; He wanted to test His servants and to magnify their glory through their martyrdom” (which again touches on the debate over God’s ultimate responsibility for actions perpetrated by political powers). Molnár, 119 (quoting Chelpický).

<sup>50</sup> Molnár, 120. Tennant also draws a parallel with the Book of Samuel. He writes: “Samuel made it plain that ‘If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers’ (1 Sam. 12:14, 15). Similarly, Paul in Romans 13:4 asserts that the human ruler ‘is God’s servant to do you good,’ which therefore implies that the ruler is to abide by God’s law and to enforce it upon the ruled.” Tennant, para. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Molnár, 120 (quoting Chelpický).

<sup>52</sup> Ballou, 35.

<sup>53</sup> *God Sends Evil*; Molnár, 119–123.

<sup>54</sup> Yoder, 141.

<sup>55</sup> Yoder, 142.

then argues that instead of God “ordaining” these powers, a better interpretation of the text would see him as “ordering” them.<sup>56</sup> That is, “God is not said to *create* or *institute* or *ordain* the powers that be, but only to *order* them, to put them in order.”<sup>57</sup> Yet while God “orders” them and uses them for good, they remain rebellious and fallen nonetheless.<sup>58</sup> That God puts them in order does not mean that they “do no wrong, commit no sin, and deserve no punishment.”<sup>59</sup> They remain living evidence of humanity’s rebellion against God.

It is crucial to bear in mind, then, that if God ordains state authorities, it is only to maintain order *among those who have refused to follow his commandments*. In other words, the state may be valid for non-Christians, but if “all truly followed in Christ’s footsteps it would wither away.”<sup>60</sup> God uses the state in his ordering of the cosmos only because his commandments for a peaceful and just society are not being followed. In a community of Christians, however, these authorities and powers would be redundant. Thus for several Christian anarchists, the state remains a regrettable necessity among non-Christians, but only because they refuse to follow Jesus’ commandments. The state is violent and unchristian, and God wants *all* humans to overcome it; but as long as Jesus’ alternative is not embraced, the state remains God’s only way to somehow redress sins and injustices. The state is a symptom of human imperfection, tolerated by God only because he accepts that we have rejected him.

Of course—and disappointingly for non-Christian anarchists—this does imply that Christian anarchism is only prescribing anarchism for Christians.<sup>61</sup> Among non-Christians, the state is an acceptable, though regrettable and imperfect, servant of God’s justice. This does not diminish in any way the many criticisms Christian anarchists mount against the state.<sup>62</sup> After all, Christian anarchists want to see Jesus’ teaching taken up by all—they want the whole society to convert to true Christianity. But at the same time, according to Paul, they are to tolerate the presence of the state as an unfortunate symptom of society’s rejection of God.<sup>63</sup> Christianity overcomes the state, but it tolerates it among heathens. That, for several Christian anarchists, is what Paul is implying in Romans 13. He is reminding Christians of the reasons for the state’s existence, but he is also calling them to patiently endure and forgive this pagan rejection of God.

The message behind this, therefore, is to make it plain “that Christians were not a sect out to overthrow Caesar and force their religion on everyone else.”<sup>64</sup> Paul’s concern is for Christians not to engage in any violent insurrection—despite their persecution.<sup>65</sup> He is telling the Christians in Rome to “stay away from any notion of ... insubordination,” and instead to adopt a loving, “nonresistant attitude towards a tyrannical government,”<sup>66</sup> an attitude which would therefore “set an example of humility and peaceful living for others.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, Romans 13 “seeks to apply love in a context where Christians detested the authorities.”<sup>68</sup> It does not legitimise the state, but it also makes a point of not

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<sup>56</sup> Yoder, 201. On page 172 onwards, he also agrees with the view that to “be subject to” would be better translated as to “subordinate oneself to.”

<sup>57</sup> Yoder, 201 (Yoder’s emphasis). Note that Alexis-Manners also quotes this passage in her exegesis. Alexis-Manners, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Yoder, 141–144.

<sup>59</sup> Ballou, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Brock, 48.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Eller, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Again, for details of these, see Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that while this view summarises the conclusion reached by those Christian anarchists who give Paul a chance and see his Epistles as genuinely compatible with Jesus’ teaching, it is not one that those who reject him outright—Tolstoy in particular—would subscribe to. For someone like Tolstoy, who universalises Jesus’ commandments by grounding them in universal reason, the state is evil and should not be tolerated but overcome—period. Then again, in a sense, for all Christian anarchists, non-Christians are arguably those who have not fully understood or seen the truth. Moreover, all Christian anarchists prescribe tolerance, love and forgiveness of those who err on the side of evil. In the end, therefore, the difficulties which those who reject Paul would feel with the conclusions derived by those who do not are probably less serious than might first appear.

<sup>64</sup> Tennant, para. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Molnár, 110.

<sup>66</sup> Yoder, 202. See also *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 40; Penner, 90–94; Wink, 60; Yoder, 185–187.

<sup>67</sup> Tennant, para. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170.



legitimising any insurrection against it.<sup>69</sup> It is reminding Christians that Jesus refused to engage in that type of revolutionary politics, that the Christian revolution is to happen by setting an example of love, forgiveness and sacrifice instead.

Thus the Christian is to remain indifferent, so to speak, to particular forms of political authority.<sup>70</sup> However evil or tyrannical any one of them may be—and there is no denying that they can be very brutal—a follower of Jesus should overcome evil by good: by loving enemies, by turning the other cheek, and by submitting to persecution and possible crucifixion. It is not for the Christian to avenge human injustices, however horrible any one of them may be. In Romans 12:19, Paul recalls that God said: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” That is, vengeance is denied to the Christian because it belongs to God.<sup>71</sup> Eller also interprets Paul as telling Christians not to “set their minds on high things”—that is, for Eller, not to get concerned and distracted by specific political ideologies or utopias.<sup>72</sup> Instead, the only priority is to abide by Jesus’ commandments.

Hence, according to Christian anarchists, Romans 13 cannot be interpreted as divine sanctification for the state.<sup>73</sup> It accepts the state as ordained by God, but only for those who have rejected God. Thus “It carefully declines to legitimize either Rome or resistance against Rome.”<sup>74</sup> For Ellul, “we have no right to claim God in validation of this order,” and therefore “This takes away all the pathos, justification, illusion, enthusiasm, etc” that can be associated with specific political authorities.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, to quote Tennant, “an exhortation to obey authorities does not imply that those authorities are required to exist in the first place... If there is no state, there is no need to obey it.”<sup>76</sup> Besides, as Chelpický remarks, while the passage does counsel submission to the state, it does not provide a justification for Christians to become rulers themselves.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, when Paul was writing this, all authorities were pagan—Romans 13 never considers “Christian” authorities.<sup>78</sup> What Paul is saying in Romans 13 is that Christians should love and forgive state authorities—not that they should participate in their sins.<sup>79</sup>

This does not imply uncritical passivity. Where the state infringes upon God’s commandments, the Christian should—as always—side with God, not with the state. Indeed, submission to the state is only a consequence, a derivative of submission to God and God alone.<sup>80</sup> When Christians submit to the state, it is because they are submitting to God. If the state demands something that conflicts with God’s commandments, then the state should be disobeyed.

Thus, in apparent reference to Mark 12, Paul concludes Romans 13:1–7 by calling for Christians to “Render therefore to all their dues.”<sup>81</sup> This is examined in more detail in the next section, but the gist of it for Christian anarchists is that Christians ought to give to the state what it asks, *unless* doing so

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<sup>69</sup> Eller argues that Paul here focuses particularly on delegitimising a violent revolution precisely because of the similarity of Jesus’ subversive message with the message of violent revolutionaries. Eller, 11, 41, 115, 121–125. Ellul makes a similar point in Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 170; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 86–90.

<sup>70</sup> Eller, 43, 46–47, 155, 159–161; Molnár, 109. See also Yoder, 198–199.

<sup>71</sup> *God Sends Evil; Why I Worship a Violent, Vengeful God*; Adin Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments* (www.nonresistance.org), www.nonresistance.org (accessed 28 March 2007), 10–11; Eller, 124–126; Yoder, 198; John Howard Yoder, “The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State,” (Elkhart: Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 1955), 14.

<sup>72</sup> The passage thus paraphrased by Eller is from Romans 12:16, and, in the KJV, reads as “Mind not high things.” Eller, 118–121.

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, Eller, 196; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 86–88; Molnár, 108; Wagner, 97–98; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 198–203.

<sup>74</sup> Eller, 204.

<sup>75</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 88. See also Eller, 124–125.

<sup>76</sup> Tennant, para. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Brock, 47; Molnár, 108; Wagner, 51. See also Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Molnár, 117.

<sup>79</sup> The last section of this sentence is paraphrased from Molnár, 116 (paraphrasing Chelpický).

<sup>80</sup> The ideas summarised in the paragraph can be found in Alexis-Manners, 3; Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4–6; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 88.

<sup>81</sup> Romans 13:7. For the case arguing for the parallel between these two texts, see Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 207–208.

conflicts with what God demands.<sup>82</sup> What is required, then, is “passive subordination” but not “pious obedience to the state.”<sup>83</sup> The state should be treated with love and due respect, but “Obedience to secular power has definite limits. In matters contrary to the law of God, the Christian is obliged to refuse obedience” and “must willingly suffer whatever penalties the state imposes.”<sup>84</sup> As explained elsewhere, this means that Christians must disobey “Directives such as those to wield the sword, to swear an oath, or to enter a public court to settle a dispute.”<sup>85</sup> What is less straightforward is the question concerning the payment of taxes—which is addressed in detail below.<sup>86</sup>

The important point is that, as Ballou writes, “The Christian has nothing to care for but be a Christian indeed.”<sup>87</sup> The state is a pagan distraction, to be treated with love and respect, but only because doing so is in line with Jesus’ teaching of love and forgiveness—and it is *that* teaching only which the Christian is really abiding by even when submitting to the state. It certainly has nothing to do with any duty to protect certain freedoms or maintain some order in a chaotic war of all against all.

## Similar Passages in the New Testament

Christian anarchists interpret shorter passages elsewhere in the New Testament along the same lines.<sup>88</sup> The most important of these minor passages is probably 1 Peter 2:13–25, since as Alexis-Manners claims, it is “usually used by supporters of obedience to the government as a trump card” if defeated on Romans 13.<sup>89</sup> For Christian anarchists, however, it is actually just repeating the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 13. Peter’s plea for Christians to show respect for the king, for instance, is in line with Romans 13.<sup>90</sup> Even Peter’s call for slaves to submit to their masters—which Paul also makes elsewhere—mirrors Romans 13: it is not a defence of slavery, but a call to subvert it by accepting one’s subjection to it out of love and forgiveness.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, just as for Paul, Christian anarchists point out that Peter seems not to have always fully abided by his pronouncements—at least not if they are taken to imply total and unquestioning obedience to authorities.<sup>92</sup> Like Paul, Peter’s allegiance is first and foremost—indeed *only*—to God, and the respect he shows to the state is never absolute.

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<sup>82</sup> Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 37; Eller, 11–12; William Lloyd Garrison, “Declaration of Sentiments Adopted by the Peace Convention,” in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), 8; Molnár, 114–117; Wagner, 50–51, 136; Wink, 60; John Howard Yoder, “The Limits of Obedience to Caesar: The Shape of the Problem,” unpublished Study Conference Paper (Elkhart: Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary, June 1978); Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 203–209.

<sup>83</sup> Wagner, 51.

<sup>84</sup> Wagner, 136.

<sup>85</sup> Wagner, 136. This is explained in the longer version of the present chapter, in Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

<sup>86</sup> For Christian anarchists commenting on taxes in the context of Romans 13:6–7, see for instance Eller, 127; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 81–83. Note that Redford considers any insinuation by Paul that Roman Christian should pay taxes to be yet again a case of “rhetorical misdirection.” Redford, 17–18.

<sup>87</sup> Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance in All Its Important Bearings*, 37.

<sup>88</sup> To cite just one of the minor examples, Titus 3:1–2 is taken by both Redford and Penner to be repeating Romans 13 (even though the two of them do not actually come to the same conclusion on that meaning). Penner, 97; Redford, 19–20.

<sup>89</sup> Alexis-Manners, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Alexis-Manners, 3–4; Penner, 79, 105–111; Redford, 21–23. Note that Ellul claims that the common exposition of 1 Peter 2:13 as preaching “obedience and submission of Christians to political authorities” in fact “displays great ignorance regarding the political institutions of the period,” because the Greek word Peter uses for “king” was not the word then used for the head of the Roman state. Instead he surmises (and admits it is just a “hazardous hypothesis”) that Peter could have been referring to the Parthian king—in which case Peter’s pronouncement could imply “scorn,” “total repudiation” or “condemnation” of political power or of Roman power. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 75–77.

<sup>91</sup> *The Predestined Pencil* (Vine and Fig Tree), members.aol.com (accessed 9 November 2005); Penner, 106; Redford, 27–32; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 179–187. (1 Peter 2:18–25.) For Christian anarchists, the same applies to other New Testament passages on slavery and on accepting one’s unfortunate position in life (such as Paul’s epistle to Philemon, or 1 Corinthians 7:20–24). See Stephen W. Carson, *Biblical Anarchism*, www.lewrockwell.com (accessed 8 November 2007), para. 17–20; Eller, 159; Redford, 27–32; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 179–187.

<sup>92</sup> Halliday, para. 25–28; Penner, 111–112; Redford, 21–23.

The other New Testament passage cited by a Christian anarchist in parallel to Romans 13 is Revelation 13—despite these two being often cited as an example of contradicting passages.<sup>93</sup> For Eller, the Beast does not represent just the Roman empire but the spiritual essence of what he calls “arkydom”—in other words, the state.<sup>94</sup> Revelation, he says, “does not go on to suggest that Christians should therefore resist, withhold their taxes, or do anything else in opposition to this monster;” but instead, “they are asked to bear patiently whatever injustice and suffering comes upon them *by keeping faithful to Jesus*,” and at the same time to “come out of the arkys,” to “separate [themselves] (spiritually and psychologically) lest [they] get [themselves] entangled and go down with them.”<sup>95</sup> For Eller, therefore, there is no opposition between Romans 13 and Revelation 13: neither differentiates between “good” or “bad” states (they refer to “arkydom” in general) and both advise patience and submission rather than violent revolution.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, however surprising or outrageous it might at first seem, several Christian anarchists argue that Romans 13 calls for Christians to accept and forgive the state, but without granting it any absolute authority.<sup>97</sup> For them, this does not in any way compromise Jesus’ implicit criticism of the state or his call for humanity to overcome it, but it simply confirms that Jesus calls for Christians to subvert it through love, service and sacrifice.

## Jesus’ Advice on Taxes

The other New Testament passage often quoted by supporters of the state as proof of the error of Christian anarchism is the following:

13. And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.
14. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?
15. Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.
16. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar’s.
17. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him.<sup>98</sup>

This passage has often been cited by church theologians to suggest that when pushed on the question, Jesus defended the state’s tax system. It has also been used to develop the notion of a division of realms between state and church, whereby the state would be concerned with the material and temporal realm (politics), and the church, with the spiritual and eternal one (religion).<sup>99</sup> For Christian anarchists, both

<sup>93</sup> Eller, 42–43.

<sup>94</sup> Eller, 43–44.

<sup>95</sup> Eller, 44–45 (Eller’s emphasis).

<sup>96</sup> Eller, 43–47.

<sup>97</sup> Such an interpretation is indeed one that is bound to result in “angry objection” from both liberal and conservative quarters, as Yoder reports to have faced in response to the first edition of his book. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 188 (for the quoted expression)-192.

<sup>98</sup> Mark 12:13–17 KJV. Tolstoy’s rendering of this episode can be found in Leo Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 227–228.

<sup>99</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), 69; William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 190–191; Elliott, 51; David McLellan, *Unto Caesar: The Political Relevance of Christianity* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 4; David McLellan, “Unto Caesar: The Political Relevance of Christianity,” in *Religion in Public Life*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok and

interpretations are illegitimate: Jesus is neither “siding with the establishment,”<sup>100</sup> nor dividing realms between politics and religion.<sup>101</sup> Again, therefore, Christian anarchists put forward their own, different interpretation.

## Caesar’s Things and God’s Things

To begin with, Ellul argues that Jesus must have had “a reputation of being hostile to Caesar” for this question to be asked in the first place.<sup>102</sup> He was already seen as a political threat, and the authorities were trying to entrap him: if he had answered “yes, give tribute to Caesar,” then this would have dealt a blow to his following; but answering a clear “no” would have made him liable for immediate arrest.<sup>103</sup> For some Christian anarchists, therefore, Jesus’ response is a “politically astute” response to a contentious question, an ingenious reply to avoid the trap set by his detractors.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, some Christian anarchists claim that the image and superscription on the coin were a clear infringement of the first and second commandment—in other words, a case of idolatry.<sup>105</sup> Hence Jews caught with the coin were arguably violating the Decalogue.<sup>106</sup>

Ellul moreover explains that “in the Roman world an individual mark on an object denoted ownership.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore the coin did indeed belong to Caesar—money does belong to the state.<sup>108</sup> If Caesar wanted his coin back, then this coin should be given back to him.<sup>109</sup> The important question, then, is to define what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God—because Jesus does also emphasise that what belongs to God should be given to God.<sup>110</sup> For Ellul, what belongs to Caesar is simply

Whatever bears his mark! Here is the basis and limit of his power. But where is his mark?  
On coins, on public monuments, and on certain altars. That is all... On the other hand,  
whatever does not bear Caesar’s mark does not belong to him. It all belongs to God.<sup>111</sup>

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David McLellan (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992), 112; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 312–313; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44–45.

<sup>100</sup> Eller, 76 (for the quoted expression); Penner, 49; Ronald Sampson, “Christian Soldiers?,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 14, March 1990, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Berdyaev, 69; Cavanaugh, 190–191; Eller, 11; Elliott, 51; Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 167; Myers, 312–313; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44–45.

<sup>102</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59. A similar point is implied in Cavanaugh, 190–191; Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 44–45.

<sup>103</sup> Some commentators note that the issue of payment of taxes was a sensitive political issue both when Jesus said this and at the time during which Mark is estimated to have written his Gospel (during the Jewish-Roman war of A. D. 66–70). In both contexts, Jesus’ answer would clearly and pointedly distance him and his followers from the Zealots who favoured armed rebellion against Rome. Eller, 78–80; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 61; Myers, 312–314; Penner, 50.

<sup>104</sup> Elliott, 52 (where the expression “political astuteness” appears), 72; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59; Halliday, para. 12; [Meggitt], 11; Myers, 352; Tennant, para. 11–13. Similarly, Redford sees it as another case of “rhetorical misdirection.” Redford, 10–11. As to Hennacy, he rather audaciously writes that “Whether [Jesus] winked as much as to say that any good Jew knew that Caesar did not deserve a thing ... , no-one knows.” Hennacy, 432.

<sup>105</sup> *The Rigorous Intuition Board*, p216.ezboard.com gynetanarchistjesuspdf/frigorousintuition-fm10.ShowMessage?topicID=6754.topic (accessed 20 April 2007), post by Lysander Spooner on 11 April 2006; Myers, 311. These first two commandments are: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” and “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:3–4; KJV’s italics removed).

<sup>106</sup> Incidentally, the episode does indeed suggest that Jesus himself did not possess a coin. Eller, 77.

<sup>107</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 59.

<sup>108</sup> (A close look at the small print of most bank notes reveals that the same logic still applies today.) Note that Christian anarcho-capitalists like Redford disagree on this: for him, Caesar’s face on the coin does not make the coin his. Redford, 10–11.

<sup>109</sup> Barr, 10; Eller, 11, 77; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60; Penner, 51–52.

<sup>110</sup> Eller reports Hengel’s thesis that this crucial second part of the sentence is what “left them ‘amazed,’” and that “the Greek of the connective should be translated ‘but’ in place of the usual ‘and’: ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s—but to God the things that are God’s.’” Eller, 77.

<sup>111</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60. See also Brock, 49.

Thus, for instance, Caesar has no right over life and death. That belongs to God. While the state can therefore expect us to return its coins and monuments when requested, it has no right to kill dissidents or plunge a country into war.<sup>112</sup>

Christian anarchists indeed maintain that what belongs to God is much broader than what belongs to Caesar: to Jesus' Jewish audience, the debt owed to God is incomparably greater.<sup>113</sup> Besides, money is "the domain of Mammon."<sup>114</sup> For a faithful Jew, the higher obligation is always to God, and, against this, Caesar's claim is almost irrelevant. Myers therefore contends that by his careful answer, Jesus

is inviting them to act according to their allegiances, stated clearly as *opposites*. Again Jesus has turned the challenge back upon his antagonists: What position do *they* take on the issue? *This* is what provokes the strong reaction of incredulity ... from his opponents—something no neat doctrine of "obedient citizenship" could possibly have done.<sup>115</sup>

In other words, as Ellul insists, "Jesus does not say that taxes are lawful."<sup>116</sup> Instead, according to Penner, he uses to occasion "to point the Jews to the fact that they had, in effect, accepted the supremacy of Rome, when He made them acknowledge whose coinage they were using."<sup>117</sup> His detractors had not been giving to God what belongs to God: they had betrayed God by their de facto allegiance to Caesar.

For Eller, therefore, the apparent choice between Caesar's things and God's things is "fake," because "Whether a person chooses God or not is the only real issue."<sup>118</sup> By uttering those words, Jesus "makes the distinction between the one, ultimate, absolute choice and all lesser, relative choices."<sup>119</sup> Questions like the payment of taxes "are 'adiaphora' [Greek for 'indifference'] in comparison to the one choice that really counts"—the choice of God above Caesar.<sup>120</sup> We are told several times in the New Testament that we "cannot serve two masters," and the message of this passage is "to absolutize God alone and let the state and all other arkys be the human relativities they are."<sup>121</sup> Seen in this light, Jesus' answer is not so much a defence of the tax system or of the division of realms, but a counsel of subversion by indifference (as discussed in Richard Davis' contribution to this volume).

Thus, for Christian anarchists like Eller, "civic responsibility is a proper obligation only insofar as it does not threaten our prime responsibility of giving God what belongs to God."<sup>122</sup> In other words, "let Caesar take his cut," says Eller, "so that you can continue to *ignore* him."<sup>123</sup> Hence if Jesus seems to recognise as appropriate the payment of taxes, it is because that concern is insignificant compared to

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<sup>112</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60–61. To cite a few more examples of separate "belongings," Ellul writes that the only things which belong to Caesar are those things which he himself "creates;" Myers notes that the land of Israel belongs to God; Penner argues that the verse only admits taxes among things to be rendered to Caesar, and that one could perhaps infer that being made in the image of God, the Jews "owed themselves to God;" and Tolstoy suggests that money and property belong to Caesar, but one's soul, to God. On a different note, Hennacy quotes Day, who said (quoting St. Hilary): "The less of Caesar's you have, the less you have to render." Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," 167–168; Hennacy, 298 (see also 317, 431); Myers, 312; Penner, 52; Tolstoy, "The Gospel in Brief," 228; Leo Tolstoy, "The Teaching of Jesus," in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 371–372.

<sup>113</sup> It is Myers who explains that the word "render" evokes this reference to "debt." Myers, 312. See also Philip Berrigan, *Jesus the Anarchist* (Jonah House), [www.jonahhouse.org](http://www.jonahhouse.org) (accessed 10 April 2007), para. 2; Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," 168; Hennacy, 432.

<sup>114</sup> Ellul, cited in Eller, 11 (see also 195).

<sup>115</sup> Myers, 312 (Myers' emphasis).

<sup>116</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 60.

<sup>117</sup> Penner, 51.

<sup>118</sup> Eller, 11 (also: 77).

<sup>119</sup> One example which Eller lists of such a "relative choice" is whether to collaborate with or resist the Romans. Eller, 82.

<sup>120</sup> Eller, 83. On this notion of indifference to the state, Eller was strongly influenced by Kierkegaard. He acknowledges this throughout his book, and this is also explained in Richard Davis' contribution to the present volume.

<sup>121</sup> Eller, 83. See also Linda H. Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 90–91.

<sup>122</sup> Eller, 196.

<sup>123</sup> Eller, 196 (Eller's emphasis).

the one concern that really matters.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, however, what must be denounced is Caesar's attempt to compete with God: the state's tendency to seek to dethrone God and be worshipped and served in his place—precisely because that touches on the much more important issue of rendering to God what belongs to God.<sup>125</sup>

## The Temple Tax and Fish Episode

Christian anarchists read the other main passage in which Jesus refers to paying taxes in much the same way. The progression of the dialogue in Matthew 17:24–27 is even more interesting in this case.<sup>126</sup>

24. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?
25. He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?
26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.
27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.<sup>127</sup>

Ellul thinks that too much attention has focused on the curious and miraculous side of this prescription.<sup>128</sup> For Christian anarchists, it is clear from the dialogue that the state has “no legitimate jurisdiction over Christians, yet that Christians should nonetheless pay taxes “to avoid offense”<sup>129</sup>—that is, “so as not to stir up trouble.”<sup>130</sup> If Jesus ends up asking for Peter to pay the tax, Eller therefore writes, it is “for reasons entirely extraneous to the recognition of any arky.”<sup>131</sup>

Eller then compares the justifications given in Romans 13, Mark 12 and this passage as follows:

In Mark 12, the stated reason was “Let Caesar have his coin so he will get off your back and leave you alone to be giving to God what belongs to him.” In Romans 13, it was “Let Caesar have his coin so that you won’t be drawn into the disobedience of failing to love him.” Now, in Matthew 17, it is “Let Caesar have his coin so as not to be guilty of causing ‘offence.’”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Note that Christian anarcho-capitalists refuse to recognise any validation by Jesus of any form of taxation since, as far as they are concerned, taxes are pure theft. See for instance *The Rigorous Intuition Board*, post by Lysander Spooner on 11 April 2006; Redford, 10–11, 18–19, 48–49; Tennant, para. 11–13.

<sup>125</sup> *The Christmas Conspiracy* (Vine and Fig Tree), thechristmasconspiracy.com (accessed 10 April 2007); *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, thesis 18 (for instance); Berdyaev, 78–79; Eller, 84, 165; Elliott, 52; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 61; Myers, 427.

<sup>126</sup> Eller shows the importance of the progression of the dialogue by paraphrasing it in Eller, 205–208.

<sup>127</sup> Matthew 17:24–27 KJV. Tolstoy’s rendering of this episode can be found in Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” 227–228.

<sup>128</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 63–64. Ellul’s interpretation of that fantastic story of fishing out a coin is that, in making that prescription, “Jesus held power to ridicule,” that “an absurd miracle” is performed “to show how unimportant the power is.” Ellul, “Anarchism and Christianity,” 167; Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 64.

<sup>129</sup> *Ninety-Five Theses in Defense of Patriarchy*, theses 77–78. Craig here applies the verses to the state even though they describe the paying of tax to the temple. Other Christian anarchists follow that trend—partly perhaps, as Eller remarks, the author of these verses “gives no attention at all to the tax’s ‘temple’ aspect.” In any case, the distinction between the authorities’ religious and political functions was less clear during Jesus’ time than it is today, therefore extending the meaning of these verses to the state does not seem too inappropriate. Eller, 204.

<sup>130</sup> Redford, 11, 49. See also Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 64. Tolstoy, for his part, argues in one place that Jesus asks for the tax to be paid in order not to resist evil, and in another, “in order not to tempt men.” Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” 227; Tolstoy, “The Teaching of Jesus,” 371.

<sup>131</sup> Eller, 206.

<sup>132</sup> Eller, 208.

The priority is always to follow God and his commandments, and any submission to the state is peripheral to that.

Yet Eller also points out that in some other instances, Jesus does not seem to mind causing offence.<sup>133</sup> The difference, he argues, is between causing offence “deliberately” and “accidentally.”<sup>134</sup> The difference is in what constitutes the main motive. To repeat, what matters is always giving priority to God, and abiding by his commandments. In doing so, one should indeed avoid causing offence to others. Sometimes, however, people might be offended at one’s actions when giving priority to God—but if so, “that’s their business,” says Eller, because offence was never intended and because the only purpose was “to obey God.”<sup>135</sup> What should be avoided is the causing of intentional offence. For Eller, therefore, the proper Christian attitude with respect to taxes is to pay them, because withholding them would turn the causing of offence into a political instrument and thus lose sight of what is much more important: obedience to God.<sup>136</sup>

## Pondering the Role of Civil Disobedience

The above exegeses open up the question of the limits of acceptability of any civil disobedience. On this issue, however, Christian anarchists are somewhat divided.

### Against Civil Disobedience

The main Christian anarchist who argues against any form of civil disobedience is Eller.<sup>137</sup> For him, one should not engage in “deliberately illegal action” in attempting to counter any particular evil in society.<sup>138</sup> Too often, he says, Christians who try and fail to persuade others react by “turning up the volume,” at the “high end” of which is civil disobedience.<sup>139</sup> Such disobedience, according to Eller, presumes that effectiveness is enhanced by “offense-causing.”<sup>140</sup> Yet for him, civil disobedience helps neither the “content” nor the “persuasiveness” of the “witness and protest” because it “does not call attention to the truth content of the witness and protest but to the offensive behavior of the witness-protester.”<sup>141</sup> For him, “failure of others to accept” the “truth” does not justify “recourse to questionable methods.”<sup>142</sup>

One of Eller’s problems with such tactics is that typically, they result in “two worldly arkys condemning each other”—that is, a political climate of mutual, zealous and self-righteous condemnation that polarises society into rival political views.<sup>143</sup> What is lost in the process is the higher aim of obe-

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<sup>133</sup> He writes: “Who is this Jesus who can tell *us* not to cause offense (thirteen times in seven different books of the New Testament such wording is found) when much more frequently the scriptural word “offense” is used to report the offense he himself causes—to the point that both Romans and 1 Peter name him as ‘the Rock of Offense’?” Eller, 208.

<sup>134</sup> Eller, 208–210.

<sup>135</sup> Eller, 209.

<sup>136</sup> He sees “tax payment” (or “an allowing of Caesar to take his taxes”) as “the model of all the offense-causing actions of Jesus,” which only aims to obey God and has “total disregard of the arkys;” and “tax withholding” as an “arky-faith action” which “[uses] offense as a tactic for influencing events.” Eller, 208–209 (emphasis removed).

<sup>137</sup> Eller, especially chap. 4, 8, 10.

<sup>138</sup> Eller, 210. Here, Eller is not alone: some Christian anarchists seem to agree that however evil the laws of the state might be, Christians should avoid taking part in illegal activity. See for instance Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 8; Hugh O. Pentecost, *Anarchism*, [www.deadanarchists.org](http://www.deadanarchists.org) (accessed 22 November 2007), para. 12; Wagner, 51.

<sup>139</sup> Eller compares this “turning up with volume” to what Ellul calls “dramatization.” Eller, 210–214.

<sup>140</sup> For Eller, offence is caused partly because “in almost every case, the law that is actually broken is an innocent one which all parties would agree is perfectly just and which no one could claim reasons of conscience for violating.” Eller, 214.

<sup>141</sup> Eller, 213. The same point is made in Dick, “Pure Quakerism and Ploughshares,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 8, October 1987, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Moreover, according to Eller, however evil the state is (and he repeat that he continues to believe it is), at least democratic laws do make it possible to use more honourable ways of being heard. Eller, 216.

<sup>143</sup> Eller, 217. On pages 87–101, Eller illustrates this point by analysing what he calls the “zealotism” of the peace movement (and he explains that he chose the peace movement precisely because its concerns are likely to be close to those reading his book).

dience to God. For him, any civil disobedience should be accidental to that primary goal. Obedience to God, rather than effectiveness in persuasion, should always remain the guiding principle.<sup>144</sup> Hence one should avoid compromising with power politics. According to Eller, direct action is not the only way to bring about change.<sup>145</sup> Another way, and for Eller the only Christian way, is “voluntary self-subordination.”<sup>146</sup> Eller admits that the outcome of this method is uncertain, but that is nonetheless precisely the alternative which Jesus and his early followers taught and lived.

## For (Non-violent) Civil Disobedience

For other Christian anarchists, Eller’s position is a “total cop-out.”<sup>147</sup> It is “naïve,” and in effect, it “accepts” or “condones” oppression.<sup>148</sup> They say that “we *are* called to resist, ... to actively confront evil and hatred and violence”—though loving and non-violent means should of course be adopted in that struggle.<sup>149</sup> For these Christian anarchists, the “arrogant state” simply must be confronted, unmasked and subverted.<sup>150</sup>

Moreover, doing so is not unchristian: Jesus himself challenged the authorities, spoke out against them, broke a few rules (on the Sabbath) and even sometimes engaged in militant (but non-violent) direct action.<sup>151</sup> He also warned that Christians will be persecuted and that this will be an “opportunity to bear witness.”<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the cross is “a symbol of resistance to evil,” so following Jesus and taking up the cross implies at least some form of resistance as well.<sup>153</sup> Besides, when God and the state require contrary things, Christians are clearly called to obey God, not the state, which would then

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<sup>144</sup> Eller, 218–219.

<sup>145</sup> He claims to “understand why so many Christians find some sort of arky faith to be absolutely essential to their creed,” because it “assumes there is only one possible way social good can happen,” but he maintains that “The direct-action method of messianic arkys is hardly recommended by its track record,” and that “although the results are neither quick nor spectacular, it may be that social service has a better record in effecting even structural change than has revolutionism.” Eller, 237–239.

<sup>146</sup> Eller, 239. In the remaining pages (239–248) of that chapter, Eller interprets as an example of a story of such “voluntary self-subordination” Paul’s epistle to Philemon about the latter’s slave, Onesimus. He understands Onesimus to have been a runaway slave who voluntarily submitted himself back to his master, and he suggests (following John Knox) that this same Onesimus could well have become the great Bishop which Ignatius so keenly praises in his later writings. If so, then this would be a story of eventual emancipation through initial voluntary self-subordination. To Eller, this illustrates perfectly the Christian alternative to class warfare through the cultivation of patient and loving one-to-one relationships with any given oppressor.

<sup>147</sup> These words are Stephen Hancock’s, the editor of the first fourteen issues of *A Pinch of Salt*, in his review of the book, in [Stephen Hancock], “Christian Anarchy: Jesus’ Primacy over the Powers (Book Review),” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 8, October 1987, 9, 13. Eller’s book is also reviewed in the following issue, where Hancock’s conclusions are agreed with. Justin Meggitt, “One of Three Letters,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 9, Spring 1988, 7.

<sup>148</sup> For the accusations of “political naivety” and “condoning” of “oppression,” see [Hancock], 13. Although not referring to Eller, Elliott seems to share this view. Elliott, 176. As to Ellul, he writes that “Christian radicalism ... cannot counsel the poor and the oppressed to be submissive and accepting ... without at the same time constraining the rich to *serve* the poor.” Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul Kings (London: SCM, 1970), 150–151 (Ellul’s emphasis).

<sup>149</sup> The ending of the full sentence of the latter passage is important: “We are called not to be passive, but to actively confront evil and hatred and violence with love of enemies, forgiveness and self-sacrifice,” hence also the insistence on nonviolence. “The Power of Non-Violence,” *London Catholic Worker*, issue 12, January 2005, 2–3 (writer’s emphasis). See also Day, 304.

<sup>150</sup> Adin Ballou, *Christian Non-Resistance* (Friends of Adin Ballou), [www.adinballou.org](http://www.adinballou.org) (accessed 12 February 2007), chap. 1, para. 7; Simon Barrow, *Rethinking Religion in an Open Society* (Ekklesia), [www.ekklesia.co.uk](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk) (accessed 17 January 2008), para. 27; Keith Hebden, “A Subversive Gospel,” *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 20, Autumn 2007, 14; Molnár, 39 (where the notion of “arrogant state” is mentioned), 57; Myers; Penner, 43; Greg Watts, “Following Jesus in Love and Anarchy,” *The Times*, 29 February 2008, [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk) (accessed 29 February 2008); Roger Young, *A Plea to Christians: Reject the State! (Strike the Root)*, [www.strike-the-root.com](http://www.strike-the-root.com) (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Retta Fontana, *Citizen Jesus (Strike the Root)*, [www.strike-the-root.com](http://www.strike-the-root.com) (accessed 21 November 2007), para. 8–16; Halliday, para. 11; David Mumford, “The Bible and Anarchy,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 14, March 1990, 8; Myers, 161–162, 436–437; Tim Nafzinger, “Marks of a Resistance Church,” *London Catholic Worker*, issue 13, April 2005, 8.

<sup>152</sup> “The Power of Non-Violence,” 3. (Luke 22:12–13.)

<sup>153</sup> Berrigan, para. 3.



indeed imply some form of disobedience to the state—but also patient endurance of the consequences.<sup>154</sup> Hence rather than seeing it as civil disobedience, for them, one should see it as obedience to God.<sup>155</sup>

Some Christian anarchists even speak of acts of disobedience or witness against the state in the language of liturgy.<sup>156</sup> Thus civil disobedience becomes “a prayer,” and the confronting of state power a sort of “casting out of demons.”<sup>157</sup>

Then again, Ellul insists that civil disobedience must not become a political strategy to achieve political goals—whether or not it can indeed be effective as a political strategy.<sup>158</sup> As discussed below, Christians can sympathise with and participate in movements of civil disobedience, but their goal must always remain solely to follow God’s commandments.

Moreover, the state’s punishment for such disobedience should be fully accepted. Day says of Hennacy that

His refusal to pay federal income tax does not mean disobedience since he has always proved himself to be ready to go to jail, to accept the alternative for his convictions.<sup>159</sup>

The penalty for disobedience should thus be patiently and forgivingly endured. Besides, for Christian anarchists, prison is a kind of resting place in today’s world, a “new monastery” in which Christians can “abide with honour.”<sup>160</sup>

In any case, there can be no denying that there is a tension here, between Jesus’ call to turn the other cheek and his cleansing of the temple, between what Eller calls “voluntary self-subordination” and civil disobedience. Yet even so, the tension should not be over-exaggerated: for Christian anarchists, even turning the other cheek is defiantly trying to unmask an evil (the violence that has just been inflicted), and Jesus’ cleansing of the temple was an equally non-violent attempt to unmask another evil (the concentration of power in the temple).

As to Tolstoy, as discussed elsewhere, he seems to have quite genuinely read (perhaps indeed misread) Matthew 5:39’s “non-resistance to evil” as “non-resistance to evil *by evil*”—not unlike Walter Wink.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> This sentence is heavily paraphrased from Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4; Adin Ballou, “Non-Resistance: A Basis for Christian Anarchism,” in *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writings on the Anarchist Tradition*, ed. Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (Garden City: Anchor, 1966), 141–142. Note that even Eller admits that in his argument, he has not analysed this very possibility of the state demanding something that is contrary to the will of God—in which case he is clear that the only course of action is obedience to God and “accidental” disobedience to the state. He then even proposes a “litmus test for making the distinction: If an action of lawbreaking is done solely as obedience to God, then, plainly, whatever media exposure occurs is entirely incidental to the purpose. If, however, media exposure is *sought* and valued, the action must have a political, arky motivation that goes far beyond simple obedience to God.” Eller, 218–219 (Eller’s emphasis).

<sup>155</sup> This paraphrases Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen, who said: “Some would call what I am urging ‘civil disobedience.’ I prefer to see it as obedience to God.” *Multi-Denominational Statements* (Jesus Radicals), www.jesusradicals.com (accessed 5 November 2006), under “Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle”.

<sup>156</sup> Cavanaugh makes the case for seeing such actions as liturgy in Cavanaugh, 12, 273–277. Bartley also mentions this in passing in Jonathan Bartley, *Faith and Politics after Christendom: The Church as a Movement for Anarchy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 68.

<sup>157</sup> “A Vote for the State Means...” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 12, March 1989, 9; Jim Douglass, “Civil Disobedience as Prayer,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 3, Pentecost 1986, 8–9. See also, for instance, Scott Albrecht, “The Politics of Liturgy,” *The London Catholic Worker*, issue 14, Advent 2005; [Stephen Hancock], “Interview with Dan Berrigan,” *A Pinch of Salt*, issue 11, Autumn/Winter 1988, 11; Myers, 452–453; Ciaran O’Reilly, *Remembering Forgetting: A Journey of Non-Violent Resistance to the War in East Timor* (Sydney: Otford, 2001), 21, 50, 63, 95 (for instance); Watson, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Goddard, 180–181.

<sup>159</sup> Dorothy Day, “Foreword,” in *The Book of Ammon*, by Ammon Hennacy, ed. Jim Missey and Joan Thomas (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1994), ix.

<sup>160</sup> Douglass, 8 (where the expression “new monastery” comes from); Hennacy, 132 (from where the expression “abide with honour” is borrowed); Molnár, 130.

<sup>161</sup> Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, “Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism: Reflections on the Contemporary Significance of Leo Tolstoy’s Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Politics and Religion* 1/1 (2008), 39–41; E. B. Greenwood, “Tolstoy and Religion,” in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 170; Aylmer Maude, “Editor’s Note,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), xv; Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, 250–251; Wink.

This ambiguity was picked up by his detractors,<sup>162</sup> and many of his admirers cling on to the non-violent resistance which Tolstoy's reading allows for.<sup>163</sup> As explained again below, Tolstoy himself was happy to disobey and "to fight the Government by means of thought, speech, actions" and the like, and called for Christians to desist from participating in the mechanics of the state's power.<sup>164</sup> He was keen to protest and disobey, though always in a strictly non-violent way.

## Obedience to God

So who is right? Are Christians called to engage in civil disobedience? It seems that there can be no nicely detailed and predefined answer to these questions.<sup>165</sup> In the end, the highest principle and ultimate reference on which all Christian guidelines are based is love. Jesus frequently repeats that love of God and of one's neighbour are the two most fundamental commandments on which the rest of the law subsequently hangs.<sup>166</sup> It follows that if to love God and to love one's neighbour sometimes requires disobeying the state (when obedience to the state would imply a violation of any of these two fundamental commandments), then there might be a case for moderating the purest interpretation of the subsequent command not to resist.

Besides, if Wink is right in interpreting the original Greek as criticising violent resistance and rebellion only, and indeed since (according to Christian anarchism) Jesus does call us to react to state violence and injustice, it seems that some degree of civil disobedience is inevitable for his followers in certain specific situations. At the same time, what for Christian anarchists remains clearly contradictory to Jesus' commandments is *violent* resistance.<sup>167</sup> It is whether *non-violent* resistance can sometimes be tolerated that is less clear. Evil certainly calls for a response, but for Christian anarchists, this reaction can never be violent. The spectrum of possible responses to evil ranges quite narrowly from non-resistance to non-violent resistance—but also, in the latter case, submission to any consequent penalty for this resistance.<sup>168</sup> Anything outside this narrow range, however, would seem to amount to a disobedience of Jesus' law of love.

Nevertheless, Eller's warning seems important enough to heed. For example, Tolstoy's own reaction to violence was to spread his gospel in various essays, plays and novels: his protests were largely verbal; Gandhi, who was inspired by Tolstoy, applied the principle of non-violence much more confrontationally; King and later pacifists pushed it even further into tactical political activism. Similarly, the *Catholic Worker* movement only adopted more confrontational methods of civil disobedience over time, partly under the influence of Hennacy.<sup>169</sup> What these and other examples suggest is that there is perhaps

<sup>162</sup> For instance: Edith Lyttelton, "Introduction to a Confession and What I Believe," in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, by Leo Tolstoy, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), viii.

<sup>163</sup> For instance: Terry Hopton, "Tolstoy, God and Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000), 44; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1993), 378; Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom, 1996), 251; David Stephens, "The Non-Violent Anarchism of Leo Tolstoy," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, by Leo Tolstoy, ed. David Stephens (London: Phoenix, 1990), 17–19; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 217.

<sup>164</sup> George Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoi," *The Century Magazine* 34/2 (1887), 256; Leo Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 63; Leo Tolstoy, "Christianity and Patriotism," in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), 450; Leo Tolstoy, "The End of the Age: An Essay on the Approaching Revolution," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 24, 40, 41, 50; Leo Tolstoy, "On Anarchy," in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens, trans. Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: Phoenix, 1990), 79 (where the quote comes from).

<sup>165</sup> The discussion in this section is very similar to Christoyannopoulos, "Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism," 39–42.

<sup>166</sup> For example, Matthew 22:36–40; Mark 12:30–31; John 13:34–35.

<sup>167</sup> For a discussion of Jesus cleansing of the Temple (often said to legitimise Christian violence) from a Christian anarchist perspective, see Christoyannopoulos, "Christian Anarchism"; Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.

<sup>168</sup> Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 8.

<sup>169</sup> Tom Cornell, "Air Raid Drills and the New York Catholic Worker," *The Catholic Worker*, issue 73, May 2006, 1; [Hancock], "Interview with Dan Berrigan," 10–11 (where Berrigan explains that Day "had qualms" and was initially "quite shocked" at the slightly more assertive tactics adopted in the late 1960s).

a tendency for what begins as fairly strict non-resistance and obedience to *God* to move along the spectrum of possible actions ever closer to *politically*-driven civil disobedience—and beyond. Eller’s fear about turning up the volume might be worth remembering: doing so tends to reveal a gradual relegation into power politics and a concomitant loss of sight of God.

Thus, even if a variety of actions are in line with a Christian anarchist reading of the Bible, one must perhaps always remain on guard to avoid the sort of degeneration spotted by Eller. Every context might result in different actions being most appropriate to continue to serve God and not the state, but it is crucial to always keep service to God as not just the primary but indeed the only concern that informs such non-violent and (in that sense) accidental civil disobedience.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, for Christian anarchists, as this discussion and exegesis of Romans 13 and “Render to Caesar” has argued, *whether obeying or disobeying*, a Christian response to the state is always incidental to the Christian obedience to God.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Eller, 218–219.

<sup>171</sup> Ballou, *Non-Resistance in Relation to Human Governments*, 4–6; Ballou, “NonResistance,” 141–148.

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# CHAPTER SEVEN. BUILDING A DALIT WORLD IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD: CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN DALIT INDIGENOUS PRACTICE AND WESTERN ANARCHIST THOUGHT

KEITH HEBDEN

*Taking as a starting point Colin Ward's contention that anarchic behaviour is evident all the time and in all types of society, I use select criteria to compare western anarchism with eastern indigenous religion. I examine the anthropological work of missionaries and theologians working in rural Indian contexts with respect to "worship" and "religious conversion." Through indigenous forms of worship, Dalit communities show anarchic practice and values that challenge western assumptions about the importance of the state to modern Indian society. Further, a Dalit approach to conversion is different to the Western Christian approach, and the contrast illustrates the polyvalent and communitarian nature of Dalit life and thought. Nonetheless, even though we find evidence of anarchic values and practice, we do not find a perfect example of anarchic religion in that of the Dalits.*

How would you feel if you discovered that the society in which you would really like to live was already here, apart from a few little, local difficulties like exploitation, war, dictatorship and starvation?<sup>1</sup>

—Colin Ward

The purpose of this chapter is to test Colin Ward's contention that an anarchist society is already "in existence, like a seed beneath the snow" of the state.<sup>2</sup> I consider the likelihood that the seeds of dissent are as multivalent as nature herself and include the seeds of primitive religious revolt and social reconstruction. The context for the hypothesis is India and specifically rural Dalit communities who retain what has not been co-opted of their culture into the hegemony of modernist Hinduism. More specifically the way Dalits worship together and how they understand the "event" and "intent" of conversion in religious and political terms. To do this we need simple anarchist criteria from which to begin. These criteria will act as a dialogical partner rather than a measure, allowing conversation between the cultural practices of an indigenous people—the Dalits—and the theoretical assumptions of a western enlightenment ideology—anarchism.

The sources will be justified and conversational criteria explained below. It will be necessary then to define the parameters of the subject: the Dalits. Something of their context and self-identification will help to make it clear which communities are being surveyed as well as making the simple distinction between anarchist and anarchism. Broadly speaking there follows two sections that flesh out the context

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1982), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, 14.

of the test: worship and conversion. The ways in which Dalits organise and execute their acts of worship tell us something of both their spirituality and politics. The ways in which Dalits approach relations with the other through adoption or conversion tells us something of how Dalit religion is subversive in its adaptability.

The key sources for this conversation are long-established anarchist thinkers, the anthropology of Christian liberationist theologians in India, and the journal *Anarchist Studies*. In Volume 14:1 of *Anarchist Studies* the special focus is a response to Sharif Gemie's critique of *Monde Libertaire*, a French anarchist newspaper, and the reactionary tone of many articles within it to "the veil" as used by Muslim women. The papers that were written in answer to Gemie's timely criticism begin to unpack the unsteady relationship between religion and anarchism so making a useful introduction to this chapter. For example, Beltrán Roca argues that anarchism, as a system of thought rooted in the enlightenment, is "unable to meet the challenges of today's society."<sup>3</sup> It is useful to look at this *enlightenment anarchism* in relation to primitive religion. Religion has great but imperfect valence with post-modernism and anarchism therefore it is a useful critique of the latter in the cool shade of the former. Indian liberation theologians, trying to make sense of both their post-colonial baggage and the primitive religious context to which they are pastorally drawn have done a great deal to reflect on the Other of the Dalits in a meaningful and useful way. Furthermore Dalit Christian theology, with its heritage of Marxist tools of social critique, begins to unpack the power-relation imbalances that Dalit religion subverts.

It is helpful that Harold Barclay has already addressed the instinctive caution among anarchist thinkers when looking to conversation with religion, especially majority world religions.<sup>4</sup> Barclay points out that "anarchism" as a diverse set of ideological tools and "anarchy" as a phenomenon are distinguishable.<sup>5</sup> It is conceivable that Dalit religion is anarchic in the latter sense if not the former. Barclay asserts that if we cannot make such comparisons "we are left with a proliferation of neologisms which become pure jargonise."<sup>6</sup> For Barclay anarchy can be understood as "primitive" in a way which is comparable with Marxist theorising of "primitive communism."<sup>7</sup> Thus it is to aboriginal, which is Dalit, religious communities that we turn for an understanding of primitive religious anarchism.

Roca, in his response to the French debate about the veil, points out that pre-Constantine Christianity, overlapping anarchist and Christian thinking around the time of the enlightenment, and Christian dissent throughout the last two millennia have highlighted the role of primitive Christian religion in defying the tyranny of the state. He goes on to suggest that Islam also contains a "multiplicity of liberatory elements."<sup>8</sup> The responses to Gemie's paper seem at least generously ambivalent toward the potentially liberating agency of religion and often positively enthusiastic. Peter Kropotkin in his seminal work on mutuality made the same point on the way primitive religion yields a subversive and vital key to human potential for building a society based on non-reciprocal mutuality.<sup>9</sup> It is the mutuality found in primitive religion that is tested below, with the Dalit as a case study.

## Conversational Criteria

The three conversational criteria rooted in the anarchist tradition are: playful spontaneity, leaderless mutuality, and deviancy / subversion. These criteria do not provide an exhaustive understanding of anarchist thought yet they are useful to this study of religious practice as Dalits attempt to live free

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<sup>3</sup> Beltrán Roca, "The Shadows of the Enlightenment: Some Foucaultian Perspectives on the French Law and the Veil," *Anarchist Studies* 14, no. 1 (2006): 30.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Barclay, *People without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Barclay, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Barclay, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Barclay, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Roca, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), 222.



within a complex post-colonial and hegemonic state. That these communities and practices have survived colonisation should alert us to their value as subversive groups.

First, playful spontaneity: Colin Ward refers to “Play as an Anarchist Parable” and “The Theory of Spontaneous Order.” For brevity these two can be treated together as *playful spontaneity*. Play, as much as necessity is the mother of invention, the mother of spontaneous order. Ward uses children’s playgrounds as a model for anarchist society claiming that the same “diversity and spontaneity” and “unforced co-operation ... and communal sense” derived by children in play is illustrative for anarchists of society without coercion.<sup>10</sup> If Ward is correct and Dalit religion is anarchic then childlike playfulness and spontaneity will be traceable in the Dalit colony where pre-invasion and pre-colonial practice and values have been preserved. The theory of Spontaneous Order assumes that a community if acting in open co-operation will find its way, if haltingly, towards order.<sup>11</sup> This theory not only allows but embraces the chaos that is part of the continuous journey toward new and fluid ideas and orders of things. Rural Dalit communities are pre-literate or oral communities. The advantage of oral/aural communities is that there are no scribes to privately decide on and interpret what an ordered event should be like so the community is more likely to be included in the process of its own recreation and recreation (play).

The second criterion, leaderless mutuality, leans the study toward seeking out forms of community that subvert the state by providing an alternative view of the world model on a micro-community of equality rather than the macro nation state of privileged or aspiring individualism. Ward quotes Bakunin on the transient role of leaders in anarchist theory: “Each directs and is directed in his [ *sic*] turn.”<sup>12</sup> The extent to which this is true is a measure of the anarchic tendency of a community, although this is not the whole story. Leadership must be discerned from rule, and the role of consensus in leadership is vital to ensuring its non-reified state. For a basis of mutuality we have the foundational writings of Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Kropotkin’s thesis is that “better conditions are created by the elimination of competition by means of mutual aid and mutual support.”<sup>13</sup> Kropotkin goes on to link competition with the coercion of an increasingly centralised practice of European states. Kropotkin concludes that this mutuality can be found in primitive versions of world religions.<sup>14</sup> Therefore it makes sense to search for a similar mutuality-based value system in the primitive religion of the Dalits.

Finally, deviancy/subversion, a composite criterion, moves the assessment from the construction of an anarchic alternative to the destruction or undermining of the modern political system. Oscar Wilde claims that disobedience is “man’s [ *sic*] original virtue” and sees in deviancy the seed of social progress and the struggle a struggle for justice.<sup>15</sup> Nicolas Walter outlines different forms of disobedience in anarchist tradition. Disobedience, in a western anarchist context may often mean either “direct action” or “propaganda of the deed.”<sup>16</sup> In either case the act of deviancy involves an overt and conscious, sometimes spontaneous, confrontation with the oppressor in order to highlight injustice or bring about reform. However, other forms of deviance are part of the spectrum of anarchist action too, from nihilistic terrorism on the one hand to forming communities intended to subvert by practice the way society is structured on the other. The latter is a particular characteristic of many western religious movements and has been for thousands of years.<sup>17</sup> Walter also refers to what he calls “Permanent protest” as a pessimistic form of anarchist deviancy:

Permanent protest is the theory of many former anarchists who have not given up their beliefs but no longer hope for success; it is also the practice of many active anarchists who keep

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<sup>10</sup> Ward, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Ward, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Bakunin, quoted in Ward, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Kropotkin, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kropotkin, 234.

<sup>15</sup> George Woodcock, ed., *The Anarchist Reader* (Hassocks: Harvester / Humanities Press, 1977), 72.

<sup>16</sup> Woodcock, 168–169.

<sup>17</sup> Nicolas Walter only refers as far back as the Middle Ages; however, Buddhists and Christians have been forming counter-cultural communities for much longer than this. See Woodcock, 170.

their beliefs intact and carry on as if they still hoped for success but who know—consciously or unconsciously—that they will never see it.<sup>18</sup>

Walter is critical of this lack of eschatological hope, although he would not use such religious language he does write optimistically that “no one can tell when protest might become effective and the present might suddenly turn into the future.”<sup>19</sup> A strategy that has given up hope for change must have some stake in the status quo in order to survive; there is a refusal to risk the present injustice for the sake of an impossible future justice.

## Ascribing Dalitness

There is some debate about whether Tribals<sup>20</sup> should be considered Dalits. While it may be illuminating to have a conversation between tribal religion and anarchism it is simpler and more accurate to make a distinction between the two groups. Dalits and Tribals feel their selves distinct from one another and are geographically and anthropologically different.

It would be meaningless to say that Dalits are or were anarchists and the problem of applying a western enlightenment term to ancient eastern peoples in a post-colonial context is a perennially academic one. However, it is not impossible to see in Dalit religion a worldview and practice that resonates with anarchism and with which anarchists can meaningful engage and vice versa. India is a sub-continent that has lived with the homogenising impact of empire and state for over five hundred years. It is not surprising then that it is informed, among the marginalised, by a pre-invasion indifference to the state that can become co-opted, passive or subversive and does all three at different times and in different places. The purpose of this chapter is to refer to Dalit literature and worship thus discovering in what ways Dalit communities and movements may be considered anarchic and how the anarchic elements of Dalit religion both address their own dilemma and speak to the contexts of the Other.

In the rural context Dalits do not live in the village with the caste Hindus but in a colony outside the bounds of the village they serve. Dalits are often landless labourers, tanners, weavers, drummers at funerals, undertakers, and those who remove carrion from the land. In other words, they do the work that no one else wants and that makes them ritually impure, which in turn considerably limits their political rights. The scenario is more complicated than this: there has been a Dalit president and there are many impoverished Brahmins. Recent land reforms mean some Dalits have been able to gain property rights for now. Simple class analysis of power-structures is rarely useful tools in India. This is one reason why an anarchist treatment of the subject is useful.

Some Dalits call themselves Harijans, others claim to be Scheduled Caste, or Backwards Class, and still others refuse to acknowledge caste heritage, seeing it as failure to divest externally imposed prejudice. It was Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890), a social reformer, who first applied the word Dalit to the outcaste communities.<sup>21</sup> In order for the community and the individual to have freedom at any level it must be at the level of choosing their own name. Even for the sake of practical convenience, theologians cannot refer to all those who necessarily fit into the bracket of Dalit as Dalits. Universally applying the term would undermine the process of self-naming, more important than the actual name that is chosen. Self-naming initiates but also reviews the process of creating a Dalit identity of protest. In a sense this thesis ascribes this identity, since the Dalits identify themselves in terms of what others have done to

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<sup>18</sup> Woodcock, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Woodcock, 171.

<sup>20</sup> The Tribals or Adivasis are another ethnic group in the subcontinent that predate the Aryan migration. They are often non-hierarchical communities with a strong subsistence based and spiritual, relationship with the land. Tribals are neither caste communities nor outcaste untouchables. Tribal communities have often been impoverished by governmental resettlement programs and are politically and in other ways marginalised in the modern nation state.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Roots for a Contemporary Debate* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 5.

them. However, in protesting against what was done to them they accuse caste Hindus of oppression and violation of Dalit identity, thereby identifying with the struggle if not the term.

If a Dalit's identity is passively ascribed she allows others to give her meaning and purpose, or allows herself to be defined only in terms of other people's sense of identity. If a person asserts her identity, she becomes an active agent in choosing her own meaning, a liberating and empowering experience, which allows the individual to examine her own potential and worth. The etymological meaning of the word "Dalit" is important to academics, and often frames an article or provides the introduction to a book on the subject. The etymological meaning of "Dalit" also has theological implications as well. The term Dalit is popularly understood to be a Sanskrit term meaning "Crushed, oppressed, broken"<sup>22</sup> and refers to the state that the Dalits find themselves in, on abstract and physical levels equally. Jyotirao Phule, Bhim Rao Ambedkar, other academics, activists, and countless Dalit communities have used it with this meaning. However, it has a Marathi meaning which is very different, and according to some scholars is: "of the soil and earth."<sup>23</sup> As with any form of Liberation theology, the challenge comes in identifying the crushed people of the soil. However, any linguistic identity has limitations and amount in the end to "a cluster of descriptions"<sup>24</sup> which can be interpreted and re-interpreted endlessly. One might legitimately ask: who cares? Some theologians obviously do care what the word Dalit means and it has provided many essays with a nice introduction to the topic. It has not, however, illuminated either the reality or the reflective possibilities of being Dalit or being a Dalit Christian. The term Dalit is an empty vessel; self-ascription does not necessarily lead to self-definition or liberation.

Anarchism acknowledges both the transcendent and the contextual flux of human temperament. Humans are a part of their circumstance, but can equally rise above it; it is a matter of latency. Central to an anarchist understanding of the transcendent "I" is a universal "notion of a will to power:" egoism.<sup>25</sup> However, egoism is counterbalanced by an equally innate inclination toward "sociability." Contemporary anarchists like Dave Morland go as far as calling these inclinations "propensities which may be said to lead to good or evil."<sup>26</sup> This appears to be a somewhat deontological observation for anarchism but it illustrates that an external concept of wrongness is not necessarily at odds with an internal consciousness of it. Acknowledging these two propensities makes it incumbent upon the anarchist to see society perpetually allowing of either good or evil.

The Vedic concept of sin is related closely to duty and honour. So abandonment of duty is a sin: breaking with traditional roles in the village, for example. The Dalit communities have adopted this Hindu moralising from their caste oppressors. Since there is protest in Dalit theology there must be a corresponding concept of sin, of evil. This evil tends to be located corporately or in circumstances, so that the caste-system is evil, purity-pollution laws are evil, and proscribing duty is evil. Morality, in the individuated sense, is alien to the Dalit community. Were we to choose between an anarchic or Vedic reading of Dalit identity the former is a better model of understanding it: the human in community has divergent propensities.

## Worship

Some of the most useful anthropological work on studying Dalit worship has been done by contemporary progressive Indian Christians. Dalit Christians are going through the process of discovering the radical roots of both primitive Christianity and primitive Dalit religion. Dalit theologians J. T. Appavoo and Sathianathan Clarke are good examples.

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<sup>22</sup> James Massey, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 6.

<sup>23</sup> M. Krishnan, "Project and Series Editor's Note," in Bama, *Karukku* (Chennai: Macmillan India Limited, 1992), v.

<sup>24</sup> Don Cupitt, *The Religion of Being* (London: SCM, 1998), 28.

<sup>25</sup> David Morland, "Anarchism, Human Nature and History: Lessons for the Future," in J. Purkis, and J. Bowen, eds., *Twenty-first Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for a New Millennium* (London: Cassel, 1997), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Morland, 16.

Clarke discovered that the exclusivist conservatism of rural Dalit congregations was a veneer for his benefit. He sought to understand Dalit religion in its own right in order to better understand Dalit Christians and their relation to it. Appavoo is a Dalit Christian who, as priest, re-visited Dalit religion as a source of his own spirituality.

Worship is an important socio-theological expression in Dalit communitarianism but the logocentric Western approach to theology impoverishes this.<sup>27</sup> The central act in Dalit worship is Food Fellowship. The Dalit approach to Food Fellowship contrasts with that of Brahminic Prashad: while the latter is “begged from god,” the former is brought as an offering to the community. Equal sharing and classless participation are consistent hallmarks of Dalit worship.<sup>28</sup> No priest officiates and all models of leadership are service-oriented.

Once I asked a Dalit, why they had postponed the worship. He said that one member of the community had very important business. I said, “Why don’t you leave that person and worship?” He said, “That will be like cutting our fingers.” Thus the Dalits when they worship are one family with an organic unity. Their Deity is the mother of that family.<sup>29</sup>

This organic unity gives a clue to the theological poly-centrism of Dalit theology. The community is indivisibly “One” but with many centres, similarly to god. A seam of information about Dalit worship is provided by the theologian and Christian priest Sathianathan Clarke who, when he realised that rural Dalit congregations were covertly continuing to practice indigenous worship with the rest of their colonies, sought to better understand these religious practices in their own right and discern their meaning for Dalit for the formation of Dalit communities in relation to the village.

Anarchism is not merely a critique of the state and its abuse of power but the suggestion that alternatives must be found. The state has its totems, rituals, and symbolic actions that reinforce the status quo but anarchist communities sometimes fail to value these in building local alternatives of communities of resistance and reconstruction. Dalit mutuality is an important reminder that local cohesion comes about partly in the constant revisiting and rehearsing of the symbolic together, and that, without the whole communities’ presence in some way, such a re-narration is weakened. All communities, whether self-defining as religious or not, have ritual symbols that either reinforce the atomisation of society or its cohesion in different ways. Atomisation leads to exploitation as the axiom “divided we fall” illustrates. Cohesion along the lines of a Dalit community leads to the possibility of liberation because the community is liberative. However, there is always a caveat. Patriarchy is rife even among rural Dalit communities. Like all patriarchal societies women are not actively considered to be human in the same way that men are and so the process of dehumanisation of the most marginalised goes on even within a marginal community. Nonetheless the Dalit community has its own internal resources with which to challenge patriarchy once named as a social evil.

Referring again to Roca’s critique of anarchism as an ideology born out of enlightenment thinking: Roca points out that “the enlightenment placed the individual at the centre of its concept of ‘rights.’”<sup>30</sup> Roca claims that anarchists forget the role that religion often plays in serving the oppressed classes in their desire to subvert illegitimate power. In reinforcing collective acting, play-acting, and decision making, Dalit religion subverts the individualism of enlightenment systems, including, on occasion, anarchism, and helps to safeguard communities from the tyranny of the charismatic or otherwise powerful individual or sub-group.

Any Paraiyar<sup>31</sup> Dalit can select, switch, and combine devotion to a number of deities during her lifetime. The devotion to a deity need not be fenced in to boundaried loyalty which continues regardless

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<sup>27</sup> James Theophilus Appavoo, “Dalit Ways of Theological Expression,” in V. Devasahayam, ed., *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 283.

<sup>28</sup> Appavoo, 284.

<sup>29</sup> Appavoo, 286.

<sup>30</sup> Roca, 33.

<sup>31</sup> A particular Dalit community found in South India.

and need not be rationalised.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, festivals are both cyclical and spontaneous, arising out of need or agreement.<sup>33</sup> All this gives rise to a religion in which renewed order is constantly arising and being pulled down by the whole community. It is both a religion of continuity, respecting the traditions of ancestors, and a religion of spontaneity which is therefore self-subverting.

Charismatic spontaneity is evident and located in particularly gifted Saamiyaars<sup>34</sup> or in randomly gifted dancers or Saamiyaadis<sup>35</sup> at cultic festivals. The latter is most pertinent since it does involve a permanent priestly role of translator of a divine will but can be any member of the community for a brief moment. Devotees are “transitorily possessed” by the goddess and under her influence dance and utter oracles to the community.<sup>36</sup> James Theophilus Appavoo points out that the Dalit deity is not “chained to the ‘symbol’” because of its transitory mode of visitation onto random community members.<sup>37</sup> “[For Sanskrit religion] the deity is the possession of the priest, whereas in the Dalit religion the worshippers are in the possession of the deity.”<sup>38</sup>

Since Clarke does not detail the content of these oracles it is useful to compare this event with those described by theologian Aloysius Pieris. Pieris takes seriously the need to theologise from a Buddhist perspective. While Pieris’ study is based on a Buddhist village in Sri Lanka it provides material for theologising from an explicitly Dalit Buddhist perspective as well. Pieris tells the story of an exorcism he witnessed in a rural Buddhist community. The aim of the elaborate rite was to expose a deception against the community. In this instance the priest reveals that a local grocer has been cheating people by selling them damaged milk cartons at full price—the money-demon is ridiculed and the injustice is exposed, “calling the devil by its name.”<sup>39</sup> Although the grocer is not present, simply by naming the sin the community is set free from its power. Appavoo also confirms that there is often room for protest in Dalit ritual as the people use the oracular event as opportunity to denounce oppression.<sup>40</sup> This role of mediator of sanction is spontaneous and de-linked from centralised power. Barclay makes this important distinction between two types of religions: “those religious sanctions which require human mediation and those which are ‘automatic.’”<sup>41</sup> Dalit religion operates sanctions that fall into the latter category and, according to Barclay’s measure are “not incompatible with anarchy.”

At the end of a major festival the entire community joins together in spontaneous play, throwing coloured water on each other, eating and generally messing around. There is no respect for age or sex in this play and it serves to unite the colony in unruly mischief.<sup>42</sup> Throwing colourful water is also part of Hindu tradition at the time of Hori. There is spontaneity, ritual, and some of the virtue of carnival that Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us of: the use of mutually mocking play and discord to temporarily suspend all forms of gender, sub-caste, and economic disparity allows Dalits to momentarily hold up a vision of a ruler-less and joyful future.

Clarke proposes that theology offers the critique for interaction that goes on between the Dalit community and the Divine.<sup>43</sup> This approach takes the emphasis of construction of theology far from the

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<sup>32</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73.

<sup>33</sup> Clarke, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Saamiyaars are individual charismatic oracles not elected or hereditary but discerned by the community in response to a sense of vocation.

<sup>35</sup> Saamiyaadis perform the same role, or similar, to the Saamiyaars but may only perform this function at a single event in their lives. One is a Saamiyaadi briefly in a moment of ritual ecstasy.

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, 87–88.

<sup>37</sup> James Theophilus Appavoo, “Dalit Religion,” in Massey, 117.

<sup>38</sup> Appavoo, “Dalit Religion,” 117.

<sup>39</sup> A. Pieris, “Prophetic Humour and Exposure of Demons,” *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*, 60, no. 5 (May 1996): 311–314.

<sup>40</sup> Appavoo, “Dalit Religion,” 118.

<sup>41</sup> Barclay, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, 84.

<sup>43</sup> Clarke, 2.

theologian and places it with the particular community.<sup>44</sup> Clarke emphasises “living collectively under the Divine.”<sup>45</sup> Corporate responses to god’s involvement with the community create Dalit Theology. The response affirms god’s active involvement in the community and the community’s desire to express its relationship with god. This affirmation contradicts the Vedic tradition that the Dalits are beneath god’s interest and have no license to interact with the Divine.

God as matriarch—a dominant female personality—is evident in Dalit theology and makes sacred the ideals of extended family and mutual responsibility. The consort-free femaleness of god also acts to some extent as an antidote to the otherwise patriarchal tendency of Dalit life. God, in turn, is both female and male; god is both parent and child. Priesthood is alien to this idea of community a mediator between parent and child would not make sense. Appavoo claims there is “no priest-caste”<sup>46</sup> among Dalits but this is too generous a position. However, the assertion that the priestly function is often performed on rotation and by men and women equally suggests a model of leadership that deliberately protects the community from centralisation of cultic power. Although Clarke often refers to the role of a priest in religious ritual it is important to note that what is meant is very different from the Christendom schema of Priest as executor of the divine will of the state. The priest in the Dalit context is shaped in his actions entirely by the will of the community and holds a status either beneath or equal to the community as a whole. Furthermore, animal sacrifices are shared equally between all members of the community rather than given to a cultic leadership as was the case with temple-Judaism.

Major Dalit festivals are funded collectively<sup>47</sup> and organised by consensus<sup>48</sup> of the whole colony, where particular roles are assigned they are roles that are subservient to the corporate will of the colony. A “priest” is directed constantly during ceremonies by well-meaning heckling community members.<sup>49</sup> Ward contrasts this emerging orderliness with western expectations of how order is rather maintained.

There is an order imposed by terror, there is an order enforced by bureaucracy (with the policeman in the corridor) and there is an order which evolves from the fact that we are gregarious animals capable of shaping our own destiny. When the first two are absent the third is infinitely more human and humane form of order and has an opportunity to emerge.<sup>50</sup>

This means that meaning and practice are constantly being negotiated and the shape and meaning of the colony is the product of the whole community’s spiritual and political sense of wellbeing. In this process we find an example of Proudhon’s principle that liberty is the mother of order.

Meanwhile, theologian George Oomen notes that the “witch doctors” of the Pulaya Dalits used their powers of sorcery primarily to bring harm to landlords and bosses:

Pulayas believed in the all pervasive dominion of the spirits on human affairs and held the sorcerers in awe and esteem. The upper castes dreaded these agents of the demons and the ghosts. Some social control over the excesses of the high caste landlords was exercised through the threat of Pulaya black magic in Travancore.<sup>51</sup>

For these Dalits the spiritual and political are integral to one world view and an act of dissent in one dimension equates entirely to an act of rebellion in the other. Importantly, their oppressors make the same equation. The question of how far these acts of supernatural revolt can be pushed remains open.

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<sup>44</sup> Clarke, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Clarke, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Appavoo, “Dalit Religion,” 120.

<sup>47</sup> Appavoo, “Dalit Religion,” 120.

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, 125.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke, 81–84.

<sup>50</sup> Ward, 37.

<sup>51</sup> George Oomen, “Re-reading Tribal and Dalit Conversion Movements: The Case of the Malayarayangans and Pulayas of Kerala,” *Religion-Online*, [www.religion-online.org](http://www.religion-online.org) (accessed October 1, 2008).

The use of magic as a means of theatrically or covertly sourcing power back from a ruling community offers an inviting source of creative resistance for any community.

The Dalit drum offers just an icon of creedal dissent. For Clarke, the drum “depicts the core of [Dalit] religious activity” and is a symbol of “emancipatory theography.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, it connects the Dalits with the divine and with the heritage of pre-Hindu spirituality. It is at the service of both outcaste and caste community, but it is also an exclusively Dalit symbol of relationship with the feminine divinity.<sup>53</sup> As a tool of social and spiritual cohesion the drum is used, with different rhythms in various settings: for auspicious processions; to signify blessing and the benediction of the goddesses’ presence; to invoke and inspire the goddess to display and manifest her power among the devotees; to communicate news to neighbouring villages; to drum up a party atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> This is especially typical of south Indian Paraiyars, but it illustrates how Dalit symbols can go beyond the visual and verbal and can express more than a reconstructive history of the Dalits ever could.

Clarke makes two suggestions regarding the relevance of this theographic enterprise: the beating drum is not concerned with apologetics and semantics of creeds and formulas of faith yet it is a concrete affirmation of a Divine concern for the Dalits. Furthermore, in its ambiguity, the use of the drum allows for myriad interpretations; it is pluralistic in intent.<sup>55</sup>

Clarke claims that the “resistance and contestation of the religious legitimacy of the dominant caste communities” is in evidence in Dalit worship but that this is done in a way that communicates “Compliance.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, Dalits give the impression of passive acceptance of religious homogenisation while subverting and reclaiming their own myths and structures. He goes on to argue that “overt mimicking” of the religion of the oppressors can act both as “fertile ground for the germination of resistive strategies.” Perhaps by this Clarke means that satire and subversion of the text of oppression is incorporated into the religion of the Dalits. Comparable evidence can be seen in early Christian documents that subvert the language of the Roman Empire but in the latter case it was rarely covert.

Dalit worship reinforces leaderless mutuality through normative yet fluid rites and spontaneous mystic experiences. The relationship between religion and land also suggests that private ownership of property is anathema to the indigenous rural Dalit community. The need for the whole community to be present for corporate worship underlines the responsibility of the group to the individual and vice versa and since worship and shared food fellowship are integral to one another the total corporality of worship equals an economic corporate being that subverts modern economic and competitive models of both belonging and resourcing.

The role of the mystic in worship acts both to signify the availability of oracular knowledge to the whole community and as a means of funnelling messages that challenge imbalances of power that may have crept into the life of the community.

## Religious Conversion

Dalits have a complex, liberal, and fluid set of loyalties to deities based largely on aesthetics, an understanding of the efficacy of the god, and a neighbourly loyalty to the other as well as to kin.<sup>57</sup> The arithmetic of Dalit cosmology is not for rationalising either. Clarke finds that if a Dalit is asked how many deities there are the same will reply variously “one,” “seven” or list any number of named gods.<sup>58</sup> The goddess is both one and all in all; rather than rely on a systematic theology Dalits have complex narratives and ambivalent language and action with which to move their notions of spiritual meaning.

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<sup>52</sup> Clarke, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, 119.

<sup>54</sup> Clarke, 113–118.

<sup>55</sup> Clarke, 198–199.

<sup>56</sup> Clarke, 129–130.

<sup>57</sup> Clarke, 72–73.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, 71–72.

This is an exciting and deviant approach to theology that refuses to be contained by the more controlled theology of the village and its Brahminic text-based hegemony.<sup>59</sup> No one tells a Dalit how to worship, she is led by both kin loyalty and personal preference. This local yet multivalent approach to worship and loyalty feeds into a particular approach to conversion that is alien to the western mindset—prejudiced as it is by Christian models of conversion.

The most conspicuous form of religious phenomena with a deliberately political intention in the Indian context remains mass conversion of the Dalits.

Converts have adopted religious systems, which have [e]quality as their profession of faith; initially Buddhism and Islam and later Sikhism and Christianity.<sup>60</sup>

Conversion raises many issues of event and intent. Commentators are unclear as to why Dalits convert and as to what has taken place in the process of conversion on both a social and a religious level. Statistics on Dalit conversion are unreliable because the government offers preferable welfare and rights to Dalits who register as “Hindu” on the grounds that Dalit is a Hindu term and therefore non-Hindu Dalits are no longer Dalits at all.

If the phenomenon of conversion is to be used for the purpose of this chapter to join the conversation between Dalit religion and anarchism it must first be clarified as to whether conversion is a religious event: an outworking of the religious mindset of the Dalit community. In other words, is conversion an act of conversion an act of dissent rooted in the Dalit religious tradition?

The fact that conversions happen—and they usually happen corporately—is telling of the Dalit understanding of her relationship with socio-spiritual existence. We have already found that Dalits as individuals are liable to worship more than one god and even give loyalty to the god of the Hindu village to which they are indebted and by whom they are marginalised. We have also found that Dalits may be casual about the number of gods they refer to and alter their loyalties: Dalit religion allows for magical mobility. Conversion therefore does not necessary mean a change of religion, worldview, or even allegiance, and can be often based on aesthetics and the perceived efficacy of a deity at a given time. It is wrong to assume that Dalit conversion means conversion from Hinduism to another religion. For Dalits are neither automatically Hindu (a “catch all” term with no accurate meaning) nor of another religion since conversion is more present and fluid than such a model would allow. Conversion for Dalits does not mean the same as conversion in orthodox Christianity. The false assumption that conversion implies a leaving off entirely of a cultural and religious worldview in favour of an alien one was promoted as a paradigm by readings of Paul’s autobiographical accounts of conversion in which he considers all things as loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:8).<sup>61</sup> Western anthropology, where it does not examine its methodology in the light of post-colonialism, remains in danger of reading religion through the Christendom lens so it is vital to highlight this difference of meaning at the outset.

However, even when Dalits convert on their own terms the initiative is sometimes taken off them by religious groups ideologically predisposed to individualism and subordination to the state. Paul Chambers’ dualism between “religions of power” and “religions of revolt” is useful here.<sup>62</sup> According to sociologist Lancy Lobo, rather than being emancipated, the Dalit converts to Christianity specifically were domesticated by a passive and political conservative theology received from missionaries;<sup>63</sup> little wonder so few saw conversion to Christianity as an attractive proposition. The Christian missionaries, with their religion of power took the initiative away from the Dalits with their religion of revolt and transformed Dalit Christianity into another domestic enlightenment religion. Yet, within primitive

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<sup>59</sup> Clarke, 125.

<sup>60</sup> Sanjay Vairal, “Religious Conversion and Dalit Identity,” in Ambrose Pinto, ed., *Dalits: Assertion for Identity* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1999), 129.

<sup>61</sup> Philippians 3:8 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>62</sup> Paul Chambers, “Anarchism, Anti-clericalism and Religion,” *Anarchist Studies* 14, no. 1 (2006): 38.

<sup>63</sup> Lancy Lobo, *Religious Conversion and Social Mobility: A Case Study of the Vankars in Central Gujarat* (Surat: Centre for Social Studies, 2001), 42.



Christianity and primitive Dalit religion there lays the seeds of revolt. Thus the engagement between religions at the point of Dalit conversion can be catalyst for deviancy/subversion. Those who first converted and stimulated mass conversion had no direct material motive for doing so, although they had seen the material advantages of allegiance to this novel religion. It may be that second generation field workers had as many material reasons as spiritual ones for joining themselves to the work and may have frustrated missionaries, whose zeal caused them to leave their homeland. Missionaries wrote in surprise or suspicion of mass conversion, the former while the phenomenon took place, the latter when trying to make pastoral sense of it.<sup>64</sup>

For Dalits, conversion is an act of corporate dissent. B. R. Ambedkar, political and religious leader for hundreds of thousands of Dalits, believed that the abolition of caste required the conscious rejection of Hinduism.<sup>65</sup> Ambedkar saw in modern Hinduism the integral partnership between emerging religious hegemony and the emerging nation state. Ambedkar was rarely brave enough to consider the possibility of an anarchist society, although his writings occasionally explicitly endorsed an anarchist country with non-coercive police and decentralised leadership. He was aware of anarchism as a political idea but appears wary of its practicality and perhaps his legal training as a barrister prevented him from properly considering anarchic modes of social transformation. Ambedkar was a man in a hurry and constitutional provision for the poor seemed to him the quickest way to bring about reform, alongside deliberate protest through mass conversion.

When B. R. Ambedkar publicly converted to Buddhism, on 14 October 1956, in Nagpur, 300,000 Dalits converted with him.<sup>66</sup> Many thousands of Dalits have converted to Buddhism since and continue to do so. This is telling of how Buddhist thought and practice resonates with Dalit religiosity and how important conversion is as part of Dalit religious experience. Furthermore, conversion is demonstrably a corporate, public, and political act of protest. It is a deviant act of defiance against the homogeneity of so-called Hinduism. V. T. Rajshaker, a Shudra Hindu who converted to Ambedkarite Buddhism, complains that not all converts eat beef as a part of their conversion ceremony.<sup>67</sup> The eating of beef in such a public and symbolic way is an unambiguous act of defiance against Hindu religious purity-pollution systems and even deliberately offensive to Hindus.

B. R. Ambedkar announced in 1935 that he was planning to convert out of Hinduism and began his search for an alternative. Notably he was not interested in considering indigenous Dalit religion. He was looking for a religion that treats all humans as equal and did not subject them to any form of humiliation. B. R. Ambedkar asserted that only Buddhists follow the real national religion of India not Hindus. The deistic faiths were unlikely to satisfy his pragmatic humanistic outlook. His abhorrence of subjection to a religious representative of god, in the Brahmin caste, made him suspicious of both priest and any divinity that appears to lessen the value of personhood. He rejected Christianity on the basis of its indifference, its powerlessness, and the apathy of missionaries toward Dalits. Furthermore he was disgusted by the caste prejudice he observed in churches and disappointed by a lack of change in religious practice of many converts away from worship of images.<sup>68</sup>

John Webster notes that Dalit communities do not ostracise converts to other religions but neither does mass conversion of the whole group follow automatically.<sup>69</sup> Mass movements were and continue to be the unsolicited initiative of members of the converting community. The role of missionaries, in regard to mass conversions to Christianity, was always after the event and, as Clarke Paul has shown, limited

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<sup>64</sup> A. Copley, *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54.

<sup>65</sup> Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), 224–258.

<sup>66</sup> Indian Bibliographic Centre, *Christianity and Conversion in India* (Varanasi: Rishi Publications, 1999), 204.

<sup>67</sup> V. T. Rajshaker, *Caste, A Nation within a Nation: Recipe for a Bloodless Revolution* (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2002), 81.

<sup>68</sup> Rajshaker, 206.

<sup>69</sup> Webster, 55–58.

in its attempts to conform their religion but as Lobo has shown, effective in pacifying their political expectations.

## Conclusion

It would be misleading to suggest that Dalits are anarchists; such has never been the contention of this chapter. Nonetheless a study of Dalit religious practice, including the practice of conversion, reminds us that the parameters of god-talk and politics-talk are different in a non-western context from which anarchism was founded and continues to have the weight of its gravity. Dalit religion offers in practice what many anarchists aspire to in theory and does so even in the shadow of an often violent nation state whose citizenry actively seek their marginalisation at both practical and ideological levels of play.

Anarchist thought needs to pull up its anchor from western frames of reference if it is to survive and thrive in the post-modern global context it now finds itself. Anarchism is not the preserve of anarchists. In order to make this shift away from colonial prejudice anarchists can revisit the broad minded optimism of writers such as Peter Kropotkin and Colin Ward who found in practice that anarchist society is not simply that which claims to be so. Furthermore, the language and vehicles of meaning that religions of revolt provide for their communities may be useful even for those who reject for themselves any purpose in religion.

Dalit religion cyclically preserves and presents the values of playful spontaneity, leaderless mutuality, and deviancy in ways that show that another world is not only possible but can be narrated presently and in its ritual narration is constantly being brought about. Dalit religion is not utopian or a perfect and hermetically sealed example of anarchy and resistance. However, it offers the keen observer an insight into the symbolic language of resistance and is suggestive of the possibility that, in our post-modern west, the reconstruction of a mythic world may aid the struggle for liberty and good order.

The integration of spiritual and political spheres gives anarchist practice a new front on which to challenge the ideologies of state and liberal capitalism through grass roots re-imaging and play that is rooted in the religious psyche of local communities. To reject political protest on the grounds of its religiosity is no less bourgeois than to foster a religion of power and oppression. Such a rejection is unhelpful and does not match the perceived reality of the marginalised communities that are attempting to be the “seeds beneath the snow” that Colin Ward hopes for.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT. THE CHURCH AS RESISTANCE TO RACISM AND NATION: A CHRISTIAN, ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE

NEKEISHA ALEXIS-BAKER

*In this chapter I examine the relationship between the history of race as an idea and the making of the nation-state. In so doing, I demonstrate the ways in which race and racism are essential for conceptualising, creating and sustaining nations into the present. Furthermore, I argue that current efforts to challenge the idea of race and to dismantle racism should also include resistance to the nation-state. With that in mind, I look to Scripture to describe how the Church can participate in this struggle, despite its conflicted and compromised history. For when the Church lives out its identity as both a transnational body of people who are reconciled to one another and to God across social boundaries and as a political body whose loyalty lies with the upside-down kingdom of God and the way of Christ, it can resist racism at its primary source.*

Race—the method of classifying human beings based on alleged biological differences—is a science fiction. Yet it remains entrenched in our language, our institutions and our societies. How is it possible that systems of racial power and privilege continue to strangle societies across the globe when the biology of race has been discounted? How does racism persist without a valid scientific foundation? In this chapter, I argue that because race and nation developed simultaneously during the modern period, influencing and informing each other as they evolved, race and racism will persist as long as nations are the dominant model for organising societies. Subsequently, one critical approach to dismantling racism is to resist the mythology of the nation-state and the social structures that support it. Because I believe we can best understand how racism functions by understanding its history as an idea, I provide a historical sketch of racial theorising between the seventeenth and nineteenth century and an overview of how these theories shaped the nation-state. Finally, I examine the idea of the Church<sup>1</sup> as a community that can oppose racism when it is true to its call to be a reconciled body whose loyalty to the way of Jesus transcends all other allegiances, including the nation-state.

## Race Theorising: A Historical Overview

### Early Race Theories

Contrary to popular belief, the concept of race as we know it today is not an age old idea. Instead it emerged during the modern era as scientific thinking developed and people from the West began exploring the world beyond their shores.<sup>2</sup> Well-travelled French physician François Bernier first categorised the diverse peoples he encountered in a paper he published in 1684. Based on facial features,

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever the word “Church” is capitalised in this chapter, it refers to the church universal.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Nicholson, *Who Do We Think We Are?: Race and Nation in the Modern World* (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 10. In his broad overview of premodern societies, Nicholson finds no evidence of either the concept of race or of social organisations like the nation-state.

hair texture, build and other characteristics, he counted four or five species or races of men in particular whose difference is so remarkable that it may be properly made use of as the foundation for a new division of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

Attributing their differences in skin colour to climate, Bernier grouped Indians and Egyptians with Europeans because “those individuals ... take care of themselves, and are not obliged to expose themselves so often as the lower class, [and] are not darker than many Spaniards.”<sup>4</sup> Bernier’s categories show that, from the beginning, race described more than skin tone and physical appearance: it also reflected traditional aristocratic assumptions about proper behaviour and prejudices toward the lower classes.<sup>5</sup> Although Bernier was the first to publicly describe people in this way, he neither used the term precisely nor placed his races within a broader philosophical or scientific framework. Nevertheless, Bernier broke with the standard travel literature of his age and with the traditional view of history as a Biblical genealogy.<sup>6</sup> His system of organising humanity according to physical traits as well as personal and class prejudices started a shift toward a modern anthropology that was dominated by race.

While Bernier was dividing humanity into different races, Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke were promoting a cosmopolitan humanism in which all people were “equal and independent” and that “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.”<sup>7</sup> The prevailing thought during this period was that all people could become rational, intelligent beings with proper education and training, and that differences between human populations were caused by external agents like climate or geography.<sup>8</sup> For example, George Louis Leclerc Buffon argued that if “negroes” were brought to Europe, “their descendants would gradually lighten in color, eventually to a shade ‘perhaps as white as the natives of the climate.’”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, people still had a persistent belief that God instituted the laws of nature, resulting in continued attempts to harmonise science with Christian faith. The vast majority of racial ideology between 1750 and 1850

upheld the descent of all races from a single original group, and in so doing, was in conformity with both Biblical tradition and with the Enlightenment concept of the essential unity or brotherhood of man.<sup>10</sup>

Optimism about human development was so high that any attempt to rank races according to ability or to suggest that racial traits were permanent would not have been popular.<sup>11</sup>

While most early race theories were moderate in their treatment of non-European people, this stage of “humanitarian racism”<sup>12</sup> was not without its problems or detractors. For example, some people argued

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<sup>3</sup> François Bernier, “A New Division of the Earth,” in *The Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 1–2. Originally printed as “Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races qui l’habitent,” *Journal des Savans* 12 (April 24, 1684): 148–55. Translated by T. Bendyshe in *Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London*, Vol. 1, 1863–64, 360–64. See also Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Bernier, “A New Division of the Earth,” 2. Bernier did not label his races as “Europeans” or the like. I am using that term to designate what we today refer to as Europe and shorthand for Bernier’s lists of people.

<sup>5</sup> For example, medieval poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (death 1445), referred to peasants and serfs as “deformed, black, and ugly,” albeit industrious. Decades later, theorists would use similar descriptors for the “inferior races.” See Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Most sixteenth and seventeenth century writers categorised the peoples of the world by language, religion, customs, and political regime, but did not make much of the different physical features. In addition, previous writers classified people according to a biblical typology (the sons of Noah, the lost tribes of Israel), but Bernier does not mention that typology. See Siep Stuurman, “François Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification,” *History Workshop Journal* 50 (Autumn 2000): 2, 5.

<sup>7</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870–2000* (Hampshire, N. Y.: Palgrave, 2001), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 12–13. See also Gossett, *Race*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 34. See for example, John Locke’s statement that all people share “in one community of nature, [so that] there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another’s uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.” Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 13.

that humanity's primitive ancestors were white and that other races developed in part from slow but steady decline. Meanwhile, influential philosophers like Thomas Jefferson and Voltaire rejected the idea of equality among races, advanced the hypothesis that each race originated from distinct human types (polygenesis) and insisted that racial differences were biological.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this variety, the work of Johann Freiderich Blumenbach represents the majority of racial thought in this period. Although he is most famous for dividing humans into Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malay races in his 1795 work *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, Blumenbach still affirmed a common human ancestry, refused to organise racial categories hierarchically and believed that darker races could be civilised.<sup>14</sup> Enlightenment humanism, which was marked by Jewish emancipation throughout Europe, the American and French Revolutions, and the abolition of the slave trade, mediated the study of race.<sup>15</sup>

## Race Theories in Transition

By the late nineteenth century, early race theories had grown increasingly intolerant and more complex.<sup>16</sup> This paradigm shift was already apparent in 1850 when anatomist Robert Knox insisted, "Race is everything: literature, science, art, in a word, civilization depend on it."<sup>17</sup> In *The Races of Men*, he argued that race is biological, hereditary and thus could not be altered by external stimuli. All the traits exhibited by a person or a group—from intelligence, physical build and morality to one's definition of liberty or government—were determined by race. Knox, who espoused the polygenesis position, was so certain that racial characteristics were permanent that he insisted that each race could only thrive in its native land and climate. Neither climate nor geography nor any other social or environmental pressures could change one's racial category.

Knox not only challenged what he saw as the flawed racial theories of his peers; he also advanced new hypotheses. Perhaps most notably, he divided Bernier and Blumenbach's major racial categories into distinct sub-species and scoffed at the idea of a singular European race. In *The Races of Men*, he provided detailed expositions on five European races, including Saxons, Slavonians and Germans, while reserving a single chapter for all the darker races. In his view,

the Caledonian Celt of Scotland appears as a race as distinct as the Lowland Saxon of the same country, as any two races can possibly be: as Negro from American; Hottentot from Caffre; Esquimaux from Saxon.<sup>18</sup>

He also classified Jews as a distinct race instead of as a religious and cultural community—a shift that increased in popularity as antisemitism<sup>19</sup> developed throughout this era. Because each race was its own self-contained species, Knox strongly opposed interracial marriage and reproduction as detrimental and unsustainable. He identified what he called a "physiological law" that destined "people composed of two or more races" to extinction<sup>20</sup>—a process these "mulattoes" could only slow by continuously mixing with members of the strongest race in their lineage.<sup>21</sup> Because these hybrid breeds were monstrosities of nature, Knox predicted they would become increasingly infertile like mules. He was also convinced that

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<sup>13</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 42–47.

<sup>14</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 37–39.

<sup>15</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 12–13.

<sup>16</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850; reprint, Miami: Mnemosyne Pub. Co., 1969), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> I have adopted Alana Lentin's spelling over the more common "anti-Semitism." She argues that antisemitism is directed exclusively at Jews and does not include hatred of other "Semitic" races, and because on its own "Semitism has no meaning." See Alana Lentin, *Racism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 58.

<sup>20</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 42, 52–53.

<sup>21</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 66.

all races had a natural antipathy toward one another, making it even more difficult for mixed breeds to ensure their survival through intermarriage.<sup>22</sup>

In a move that became increasingly popular among early theorists, Knox also used race to explain European history. For example, he re-conceived the conflict between the French and British in Canada as a war between the Celt and Saxon races respectively. He imagined the Celts as a race with a “furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; a hatred for order and patient industry” and a natural inability to comprehend the meaning of liberty or to be industrious in the new world.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the “tall, powerful, athletic” Saxons were natural democrats with the best understanding of liberty.<sup>24</sup> Their innate independent spirit made them “dislike the proximity of a neighbour” and compelled them to broaden their territory.<sup>25</sup> Given these racial distinctions and the natural law that prohibited racial mixing, Knox saw the Celt and Saxon contest for Canadian territory as an unavoidable race war, saying,

This struggle can only cease when the Saxon has become the preponderating race in Lower Canada ... inextinguishable hatred of races is in full play; unite they never will; one must become extinct.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, race was not only useful for classifying observable human differences; it could also explain military conflict and conquest.

## The Age of Modern Racism

In 1870, there was a definitive shift to “a more radical and modern form of racism,” which was characterised in part by White European “anxiety about its own racial substance, and a fear of physical degeneration.”<sup>27</sup> Despite missing the cut-off point by a year, Francis Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* (1869) is a noteworthy example of these preoccupations. Like Knox, Galton was certain that intelligence, physical strength and other personal traits were inherited, and that no amount of education or training could overcome one’s natural limitations.<sup>28</sup> In an effort to prove this hypothesis, he examined the lineages of English judges, premiers, artists, writers and other prominent people, calculated how many “eminent men”<sup>29</sup> were part of their family trees, extrapolated his findings to the rest of the population, and developed an elaborate system to compare “the worth of different races.”<sup>30</sup>

In light of his study, Galton identified what he saw as a pressing need for English people to improve their racial standing. From his vantage point,

The needs of centralisation, communication, and culture, call for more brains and mental stamina than the average of our race possesses. We are in crying want for a greater fund of ability in all stations of life; ... Our race is over-weighted, and appears likely to be drudged into degeneracy by demands that exceed its powers.<sup>31</sup>

In order to keep up with the demands of modernity, Galton proposed ways to increase the intelligence, creativity and abilities of his race. First, stronger members of the race needed to marry and have children

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<sup>22</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 52–53, 66–67.

<sup>23</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 26–27, 176.

<sup>24</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 41, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 177.

<sup>27</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869; reprint, Cleveland: The World Pub. Co., 1962), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Galton defined an eminent man as “one who has achieved a position that is attained by only 250 persons in each million men, or by one person in each 4,000” (53). His list included military commanders, poets, artists, scientists and wrestlers to name a few.

<sup>30</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 393.

<sup>31</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 400.

at a faster rate than weaker ones. Over time, the elite would “produce more generations within a given period, and therefore the growth of a prolific race ... would be vastly increased.”<sup>32</sup> If the “vigorous classes” shirked this responsibility, however, it would “cause the race of the prudent to fall ... into an almost incredible inferiority of numbers to that of the imprudent, and ... bring utter ruin upon the breed.”<sup>33</sup> Second, Galton also advocated actively attracting “eminently desirable refugees, but no others”<sup>34</sup> to the society and, encouraging less desirable men within the population to relocate to the colonies.<sup>35</sup> His approach differed from Knox, who predicted doom for any nation composed of separate races.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Galton saw an influx of prominent fellow Europeans that would be naturalised, start families and raise the overall calibre of the nation as an opportunity, not a curse. His inspiration in this regard was ancient Athens—a society that produced “a magnificent breed of human animals” and sustained its greatness as long as it did not indiscriminately open its arms to settlers, but instead attracted men of the highest quality.<sup>37</sup>

As previously noted, Galton’s racial theories were rooted in a persistent fear of racial decline that threatened superior races and the entire human species. Racial “degeneration” referred to

a whole range of social pathologies that threatened the biological substance of the European races, from alcoholism, tuberculosis and venereal disease to lack of physical training, cretinism and sexual perversion.<sup>38</sup>

French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau wrote extensively about degeneration in *The Inequality of Human Races* (1853), a text that later influenced Nazism. He believed that degeneration occurred when different races intermarried and produced children, and over time diluted the pure ancestral blood that flowed through their veins.<sup>39</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Gobineau believed that mixing the blood of superior and inferior races threatened the former with extinction. Given the severity of the situation, Gobineau shared Galton’s view that racial inferiors should be segregated, excluded and eliminated when possible.<sup>40</sup>

A major breakthrough in racial theorising came on the heels of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). Although his research focused on how nonhuman species changed and adapted over time, Darwin’s theory of evolution was nonetheless useful for scientists seeking to explain how racial differences developed. In particular, race scientists applied the ideas of natural selection to human relationships at all levels of society. They imagined a world in which people from different classes, races and nations were locked in a battle for survival and supremacy. Far from being a problem, racial theorists believed that this struggle was “nature’s indispensable method for producing superior men, superior nations and superior races.”<sup>41</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Social Darwinism had spread across Europe and the United States, transforming racial discourse and creating new racial pseudo-sciences. The most influential of these new disciplines was eugenics:

the science of improving stock ... which especially, in the case of man, takes cognizance of all the influences that tend ... to give more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 406–407.

<sup>33</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 410.

<sup>34</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 413.

<sup>35</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 413–14.

<sup>36</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 194.

<sup>37</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 396.

<sup>38</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), 25.

<sup>40</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 25n1.



Race theorising was a dynamic process in which academics and aristocrats systematised the wider public's attitudes and beliefs about race.<sup>43</sup> Academic literature of the kind published by Galton, Knox and Gobineau reflected and reinforced the content of travel journals, plays with eugenic themes, and postcards depicting savage darker races and unscrupulous Jews. Scholarly articles and public lectures joined popular novels like *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Robinson Crusoe*, magazine articles in *Harper's* and *Scribner's*, movies, and missionary literature in propagating ideas on racial superiority and inferiority. Race scientists eagerly translated their technical ideas into simpler language in order to reach a broader audience. From the mainland to the colonies, modern Western society was saturated with a racialised worldview.<sup>44</sup> As racial theories became increasingly sophisticated, fear of degeneration and extinction heightened, and the possibility of managing racial decline and supremacy became more conceivable, race also began to influence how states were imagined and organised.

## Race and Nation-Building

Nations emerged out of a complex web of social, political and economic developments that occurred across Europe from the 1500s through the 1800s. Unlike social organisations before it, the nation is characterised in part by policies and practices that regulate citizenship, by solidarity among disparate groups that surpass loyalty to kin, tribe or other associations; by sharp geographic borders that separate insiders and outsiders; and by bureaucratic institutions that manage people who live within and attempt to enter those national boundaries. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in particular, dominant voices in Western society used race to explain the inconsistencies and unexpected consequences of the modern era. These at least included increased competition in domestic and international relationships, militarisation, geographic expansion, tightening territorial controls and economic turmoil. Race was also especially crucial for conceiving and establishing the nation-state.

## Naturalising the Nation

As the modern period progressed, the age of Enlightenment was supplanted by what historians call the Romantic period. Romantic thinkers "called for the state to be driven by common purpose of a people, sharing a common ancestry, and thus a single destiny."<sup>45</sup> Thinkers across Europe wrote works demonstrating that the blood of the people determined the rise or fall of the state.<sup>46</sup> Influenced by Social Darwinism, scholars described nations in natural and scientific terms.<sup>47</sup> For example, Social Darwinist Karl Pearson defined the nation as:

an organized whole, kept up to a high pitch of internal efficiency by insuring that its numbers are substantially recruited from the better stocks, and kept up to a high pitch of external efficiency by contest, chiefly by way of war with inferior races, and with equal races by the struggle for trade-routes and for the sources of raw material and food supply.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, English historian J. R. Green declared that while the state was artificial and temporal, the nation was a natural entity that could neither be made nor destroyed by human hands.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 26, 36 and 54. See also Nicholson, *Who Do We Think We Are?*, 85 and Gossett, *Race*, 183, 240, 262 and 280.

<sup>45</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> For examples see the works of Jules Michelet and Joseph Ernest Renan of France, John Mitchell Kemble of England and Berthold Georg Neibuhr of Prussia.

<sup>47</sup> Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 275.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, 285.

In addition to his theory of degeneration, Gobineau also described race and the nation as natural extensions of one another. He made the complex and paradoxical argument that although mismanaged racial mixing would cause civilisation's downfall, selective racial mixing was essential to the rise of civilisation. He hypothesised that the pure-blooded ancestors of the European races had a high tolerance for racial interbreeding while darker races were naturally repulsed by this practice. In an odd twist, he argued that this disparity in the ability to procreate across racial lines explained why darker races were doomed to savagery while Europeans were destined to build civilised societies. Gobineau believed that when a superior race conquered other lands and people it also grew in strength and attracted other races to its society. Over time these interracial interactions encouraged cross breeding among superior races, creating a nation of people who were less powerful than and biologically distinct from their ancestors. Despite these deficiencies, Gobineau believed this racial mixing was positive because these new nations also "developed special qualities," including more advanced social institutions and customs.<sup>50</sup> As a result, he argued that the key to any nation's growth and survival was establishing the necessary balance between preserving significant amounts its original bloodline while intermingling with other superior races. For when a race was "absolutely drained of its original blood, and the qualities conferred by the blood, then the day of its defeat will be the day of its death."<sup>51</sup> Nothing else—not a tyrannical government nor immorality nor "irreligion" nor military defeat—could bring the nation to its knees like racial mixing with inferior types.<sup>52</sup>

In *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, Ivan Hannaford observes how race dominated political language and thought after Darwin's theory of evolution. Indeed,

What burst upon the scene from 1842 and 1859 ... was a movement that treated political activity as subject to the same rules of evolution that applied to the natural biological world.<sup>53</sup>

Seeing the nation as a natural phenomenon affected state policies and practices throughout the West and its colonies. "Negative eugenicists"<sup>54</sup> called on the state to stop interfering in the evolutionary process and to allow inferior races to become extinct. They advocated extreme but necessary measures like ending social services for the weak and curtailing their reproductive capacity through sterilisation and castration.<sup>55</sup> Although many government officials privately and publicly sympathised with this position, the movement did not affect state policies until after 1914. For example, Winston Churchill served as one of the Vice Presidents of the First International Eugenics Congress in 1912—an event that hosted delegates from France, Britain, Greece, Spain and several other nations. As Home Secretary of England, he also submitted eugenics reports to members of his cabinet. Even so, it was not until 1919 that a cluster of European nations would begin passing premarital examination laws and sterilisation laws aimed at maintaining racial purity.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the ideological popularity of negative eugenics, governments favoured the "positive eugenics"<sup>57</sup> approach to racial degeneration. Positive eugenicists created social programs that encouraged "the birth of children to couples selected from the superior physical and racial stock"<sup>58</sup> in an effort to prevent inferior types from becoming the majority.<sup>59</sup> By the year 1880, various eugenics campaigns and

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<sup>50</sup> Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, 24. See also Lentin, *Racism*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, 275.

<sup>54</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 42. See also George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>56</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 49, 51–52. Some of the nations that passed these kinds of laws in the early twentieth century include Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden.

<sup>57</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 44.

programs throughout Europe spread the message that women were responsible for birthing the next generation of racially superior soldiers, colonisers and leaders. During this period,

the state assumed ever-increasing powers to intervene within the private sphere of the family and to maximize reproductive powers through a range of interventions.<sup>60</sup>

Laws that regulated maternity leave and food hygiene, restricted child and female labour, and instituted compulsory education and school nutrition programs all arose from this racist ideology.<sup>61</sup>

## Masking Economic Inequality

The modern period ushered in a new economic model marked by rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, advances in technology, the rise of global trade, and capitalist competition that disrupted pre-modern communities and transformed Western ways of life. This shift also created a drastic surge in poverty and crime, and increased the number of slums in major cities across Europe. Instead of blaming the economic system for this turn of events, various scholars explained these changes in racial terms, associating problems like overcrowded cities, the spread of disease, and a rise in alcoholism and other immoral behaviour with the supposed biological inferiority of the lower classes.<sup>62</sup>

Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso described criminals as a type of subhuman species with particular physical features, innate moral deficiencies and an uncontrollable, natural desire to harm others. In his opinion, people did not break laws as a result of their difficult social circumstances. Instead, these criminals were simply

atavistic reproductions of not only savage men but also the most ferocious carnivores and rodents... these beings are members of not our species, but the species of bloodthirsty beasts.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the Parisian elite described the poor as primitive savages who were violent, sexually promiscuous and morally corrupt. French scholar Georges Vacher de Lapouge was so sure that the lower classes were biologically distinct from the upper class that he categorised them as Alpine man and *Homo contractus*, a relative of the Alpine.<sup>64</sup> In his view, the “tall, blond, dolichocephalic” Europeans that formed the higher classes were intelligent, profit- and adventure-seeking heroes who were dedicated to the nation, while the “Mediterranean, small, brachycephalic” Alpines were liars and cowards whose loyalties lay only with their immediate kin.<sup>65</sup> By Lapouge’s calculation, these racial types were only suitable as labour for the upper class.<sup>66</sup>

By racialising economic inequality, the elite developed a pseudo-scientific explanation for their class status. For if the criminal and the poor had been born into a social standing that they could not escape, it followed that the elite had achieved their wealth and status by virtue of their superior race and were not personally responsible for exploiting others.<sup>67</sup> The first president of Stanford University David Starr Jordan exemplified this reasoning when he insisted that, “It is not the strength of the strong but the

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<sup>60</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 46.

<sup>61</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Lombroso thought that this fact of criminals being from a different race should “not make us more compassionate toward born criminals, but rather should shield us from pity.” Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 348.

<sup>64</sup> Georges Vacher de Lapouge divided the entire world into about eleven different races: *homo Europaeus*, *homo spelaeus*, *homo meridionalis*, *homo contractus*, pygmy races, *homo hyperboreus*, race of Borreby, race of Furfooz, *homo alpinus*, *acrogonus*, and *homo asiaticus*. See Georges Vacher de Lapouge, “Dominant Race Among the Primitive Aryan Peoples,” in *Race, Racism, and Science*, ed. John Jackson and Nadine Weidman (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 295–96.

<sup>65</sup> Hannaford, *Race*, 292–93.

<sup>66</sup> Hannaford, *Race*, 292. See also MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholson, *Who Do We Think We Are?*, 72.

weakness of the weak” that resulted in the latter’s social situation.<sup>68</sup> Negative eugenicists, who strongly opposed all attempts to circumvent natural selection, advised against providing economic and social aid to inferior breeds that would eventually die out.<sup>69</sup> In that spirit, economist Alfred Marshall declared in 1885 that:

Charity and sanitary regulations are keeping alive, in our large towns, thousands of such [feeble] persons, who would have died even fifty years ago... Public or private charity may palliate their misery but the only remedy is to prevent such people from coming into existence.<sup>70</sup>

Despite this disdain for the lower classes, nations grew more dependent on them to strengthen their economic and military capabilities, and supply their industrial workforce. For example, German biologist and eugenicist Alfred Ploetz suggested assigning physically weaker individuals to the frontlines of battle in order to spare superior males for reproduction.

Influenced by eugenic arguments, governments across Europe began seeking more ways build support, trust and loyalty among the lower classes. Providing them with much needed social welfare was one way to accomplish this goal.<sup>71</sup>

The government’s response to the racialised lower classes was also shaped by “the crucial fact that workers identified with each other across borders,” threatening “the idea of the unified race nation.”<sup>72</sup> As the working class and the poor grew restless about their place in society and began adopting subversive political ideologies as a result, the elite also began viewing them as a political threat as well as being a biological hazard. Social welfare helped suppress resentment among the lower classes, foster national ties, lessen international loyalties and stem the possibility of political turmoil. Earlier arguments that “charity was wasted on the poor” were replaced by programs geared toward

improving the nation’s efficiency ... quelling revolutionary impulses among the disenfranchised poor and working classes, and including them in the project of national “greatness.”<sup>73</sup>

Medical and unemployment insurance, pensions and other government aid served this purpose, hiding the growing class inequalities of the nation in plain sight.<sup>74</sup>

## Determining Citizenship

As fear and panic over supposed signs of racial degeneration spread and international competition increased, emerging nations felt a greater need to preserve and enhance their strength. One way to achieve this goal was to create legal and political barriers to limit the influence of weaker races. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln publicly argued against allowing black races to be political and social equals with whites. Specifically, he was not in favour of “making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people.”<sup>75</sup> In spite of his hatred for slavery, Lincoln was so certain that darker races would remain inferior and unequal to whites that he explored the possibility

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Gossett, *Race*, 159.

<sup>69</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, 14–15.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 41, 45. MacMaster observes that eugenicists did not envision a society that was “devoid of workers and servants,” but rather they sought ways to exploit their labour in service of the emerging industrial capitalist system (45). See also Lentin, *Racism*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 45.

<sup>75</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Charleston, Illinois,” in *Speeches and Writings, 1832–1858*, ed. Don Edward Fehrenbacher (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1989), 636.

of colonising Negroes outside the United States.<sup>76</sup> Toward the end of the war, however, Lincoln softened his original position and encouraged Southern states to give Negroes the right to vote. Yet this shift did not mean he believed *all* Negroes could be citizens. For example, in his 1864 correspondence to the governor of Louisiana, he asked whether Negroes who were “very intelligent, especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks” could be allowed to vote—though he would not punish the state if they refused.<sup>77</sup>

After the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, southern states continued disenfranchising the Negro race on the grounds that they had been “excluded, as a separate class, from all civilized governments and the family of nations.”<sup>78</sup> The governor of Mississippi Benjamin G. Humphreys concurred, saying, “The Negro is free, whether we like it or not... To be free, however, does not make him a citizen or entitle him to social or political equality with the white man.”<sup>79</sup> Although Congress tried to enforce Negro citizenship with the Reconstruction Act of 1867, economic turmoil in the South and racism in the North fostered mass Negro disenfranchisement from the 1890s onward.

Various states throughout the South developed methods for violating the rights of freed slaves without displacing those poor whites that the elite viewed as strategic allies. These tactics included poll taxes, literacy tests, property restrictions and a grandfather clause as a means to limit Negro participation in the nation’s affairs.<sup>80</sup> In *Racism: A Short History*, George M. Fredrickson suggests that post-Darwinian racism thrived in America precisely because of its commitment to equal rights for all citizens:

Egalitarian norms required special reasons for exclusion... The one exclusionary principle that could be readily accepted by civic nationalists was biological unfitness for full citizenship. The precedent of excluding women, children and the insane from the electorate and denying them equality under the law could be applied to racial groups deemed by science to be incompetent to exercise the rights and privileges of democratic citizenship.<sup>81</sup>

For politician James Kimble Vardaman, every Negro was a “lazy, lying lustful animal which no conceivable amount of training can transform into a tolerable citizen.”<sup>82</sup>

Like Negroes in America, the Jewish situation in Europe also demonstrates race’s centrality to the idea and practice of citizenship and the nation. Before the modern period, anti-Jewish persecution was rooted in bad theology as Christians attacked and discriminated against Jews for crucifying and rejecting the Messiah.<sup>83</sup> After race was invented, however, theorists described Jews as a Semitic type that was biologically and physiologically distinct from and inferior to European races. According to Knox, Jews were characterised by African-like features, including

a brow marked with furrows or prominent points of bone, or with both; high cheek bones; a sloping and disproportionate chin; an elongated, projecting mouth ... a large, massive, club-shaped, hooked nose, three or four times larger than suits the face.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 255. Gossett describes how Lincoln seriously considered transporting negroes to the then Colombian province of Panama after determining that Liberia would be an unsuitable destination due to the climate and the financial cost of sending them there.

<sup>77</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “Letter to Governor Hahn, March 13, 1864,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*, ed. John Nicolay and John Hay (New York: The Century Co., 1894), 496.

<sup>78</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 256.

<sup>79</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 256.

<sup>80</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 265–66. The grandfather clause gave voting privileges to people who voted on January 1, 1867—the year that freed slaves were denied voting rights—or were a descendant of someone who had voted. Therefore, the law enabled whites who could not pay the poll tax or pass the literacy test, or did not own property to continue voting (266).

<sup>81</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism*, 68.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Gossett, *Race*, 271.

<sup>83</sup> Hannaford, *Race*, 59.

<sup>84</sup> Knox, *The Races of Men*, 134.

The term “Jew” now referred to a fixed racial condition instead of defining a cultural or religious way of life.

Without an easily recognisable trait like skin colour to make them distinct, nations across Europe feared Jews as the “dangerous ‘race within’” that could spread diseases, pollute the blood of superior races, gain political and economic control, and otherwise infiltrate and undermine European societies.<sup>85</sup> This fear was triggered in part by the belief that the nation could only be comprised of individuals who shared the blood, race and natural identity of a common ancestor. In this framework, Jews would never be fully accepted as citizens in their nations.

In addition, fear that Jews were a naturally

“nomadic race” that had no roots, no sense of belonging, and since they clung to their own ancestral customs and religions, they constituted a “state within a state.”<sup>86</sup>

In short, this community was perceived as a racial and political threat to the nation.

This belief opened the door to antisemitic violence, disenfranchisement and discrimination. For example, privation, exclusion, pogroms and expulsion characterised the Jewish experience under the Tsarist Russian government from 1850 to 1881.<sup>87</sup> This and other forms of early modern antisemitism would shape the extreme anti-Jewish sentiments and practices that plagued European nations during the Nazi era of 1914 to 1945.

## Maintaining Borders

Just as race determined which residents could be citizens of the nation, race also decided which foreigners could reside within the nation’s borders. In *Racism: A Beginner’s Guide*, Alana Lentin recalls a time when people could move from one territory to another with relative freedom. Although monarchies certainly restricted foreigners to some degree, “it was not before the full consolidation of the nation-state that the right to enter and stay in a country became a legal matter”<sup>88</sup>—and I would add, a racial concern. Immigration law is a distinctly modern construction that came into being in the midst of late nineteenth century panic over racial degeneration, the ascendance of Social Darwinism and eugenics, and international competition for economic, geographic and racial power.

America developed its first immigration laws in response to the influx of Chinese labour that flowed into California and other Western states in 1849. Bayard Taylor, an early opponent of Chinese entry into the United States, denounced them as

morally, the most debased people on the face of the earth ... Their touch is pollution, and harsh as the opinion may seem, justice to our own race demands that they should never settle on our soil.<sup>89</sup>

By the 1870s, resistance to Chinese immigration culminated in public protest and even several lynchings. In 1882, the government responded by passing the Oriental Exclusion Act to Chinese labourers entry into America. Further legislation was passed in 1888 and 1889 that practically denied all Chinese people from entering the nation.<sup>90</sup> At the heart of most anti-immigration sentiment against the Chinese were economic and class concerns. Employers used foreigners as cheap labour, which undercut the wages of American workers. This practice heightened resentment among American labourers who were

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<sup>85</sup> Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, 61, 68–69. See also MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 87.

<sup>86</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 93.

<sup>87</sup> Hannaford, *Race*, 318.

<sup>88</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Bayard Taylor, *Visit to India, China, and Japan in the Year 1853* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1891), 354. See also Gossett, *Race*, 290.

<sup>90</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 290–91. See also Lentin, *Racism*, 22 and Nicholson, *Who Do We Think We Are?*, 121.

frustrated by the way newcomers' languages and customs made it difficult to organise unions, improve working conditions and demand better wages.

Although concerns about immigration were rooted in economic inequalities, it was panic over racial and national decline that energised the public and generated support for exclusionary policies. As Italians, Jews, Greeks, Serbians and other undesirable Europeans began migrating to the United States, clergyman Josiah Strong declared, "There is now being injected into the veins of the nation a large amount of inferior blood every day of ever year."<sup>91</sup> Since foreign races were biologically incapable of assimilating into the host nation and inferior races in particular could orchestrate its downfall, it was imperative to exercise due diligence with outsiders:

nation-building involved new passport regimes, work quotas and other bureaucratic mechanisms for the policing of territory and exclusion of aliens seen as racially incompatible.<sup>92</sup>

As a result, France initiated its own immigration laws in 1889 and Britain followed suit in 1905 with its Aliens Act.

## Racism Revised

Although the economic pressures and social upheavals of the modern era were undoubtedly the real impetus for nation-building, the above account demonstrates that it was the concept of race that served as its primary ideological framework. Since race gave coherence to the nation-state in its early stages, it is not surprising that the nation-state continues to be the "main political vehicle for racism" in the present.<sup>93</sup> Throughout Europe and the United States, racism continues to rear its head around issues of immigration, albeit with new language. Today, race war is now described as a conflict between superior and inferior cultures and each culture is said to have traits that are as natural and permanent as the racial characteristics of old. In this new "socio-biological" form of racism, foreigners—especially Africans, Middle Easterners and poor Eastern Europeans in Europe, and Latin Americans, Central Americans, and Middle Easterners in the United States:

can never assimilate into the host society ... separated as they are by cultural or "natural" boundaries as absolute as those of interwar scientific racism which argued that the converted Jew always remained a Jew.<sup>94</sup>

Ironically, this new form of racism thrives in France despite or perhaps because of its long history of immigration.<sup>95</sup> According to the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, France has been a site for "frequent and sporadic outbursts of racist activity"<sup>96</sup> and ongoing discrimination against immigrants in education, housing and employment.<sup>97</sup> It is also the home of the National Front, "one of the strongest and best-established extreme right-wing political parties in Europe."<sup>98</sup> Yet France is only

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, 294.

<sup>92</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> Lentin, *Racism*, xiii.

<sup>94</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 195.

<sup>95</sup> I am referring back to Gossett's point that racism toward the Negro in America might have been especially pronounced precisely because of the nation's commitment to equality and liberty, and suggesting that this idea may also apply to the situation in France. Perhaps it is because France has had a long-standing openness to immigration that racist ideologies are being used to exclude new immigrant groups.

<sup>96</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on France, June 15, 1998, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1998, 3. [hudoc.ecri.coe.int](http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int) (accessed February 20, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Second Report on France, Adopted on December 10, 1999, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2000, 4. [hudoc.ecri.coe.int](http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int) (accessed February 20, 2009). See also European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Third report on France, Adopted on June 25, 2004, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2005, 6. [hudoc.ecri.coe.int](http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int) (accessed February 20, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Report on France, 3.

one example of the surge in the new sociobiological racism. Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities and, in some instances, toward citizens who are descended from immigrants still experience personal and systemic racism and xenophobia in Denmark, Sweden, Albania, Ireland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain to name a few.<sup>99</sup>

Like immigration, the policies and practices of the nation-state still racialises the lower classes. In the U. S. this occurs when police profile people of colour, particularly Black and Hispanic males, in economically challenged neighbourhoods. It is also visible in the ways illegal activity is documented and reported. By tracking criminals according to racial categories, the justice system reinforces the sociobiological argument that certain races are prone to violence, theft and other wrongdoing. Furthermore, this approach to crime also leads to increased state monitoring and repression of people of colour, especially those who live in low-income neighbourhoods. In each of these instances, race—not lack of access to equal education or employment opportunities, or systemic racism itself—remains the privileged discourse for explaining class disparities and masking the inherent inequalities of capitalism and the social injustices of the nation.

Another way of racialising the poor is in the area of social welfare. In 1995, the American government drafted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in an effort to reform welfare. This new legislation contained “the absurd claim that the mere presence of single black mothers in high concentrations within a neighborhood causes crime to skyrocket.”<sup>100</sup> In practice, this reform did not target government bureaucracy in order to make government assistance more effective, efficient and responsive to people’s needs. Instead, it targeted poor, women of colour, especially Black women. In most instances, women seeking basic help for themselves and their families were required to attend parenting classes, get counselling and, do other tasks aimed at changing their behaviour, as if poverty and immorality are linked.<sup>101</sup> Black women in particular

could never be seen as innocent mothers struggling to care for their children, since they are believed to be guilty of immorality the moment that they are born poor and black.<sup>102</sup>

From the U. S. government’s response to poor people of colour in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to the highly racialised “war on terror” to the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rhetoric throughout the West, recent history has repeatedly demonstrated the stranglehold racism continues to have on the policies and practices of the nation-state. As Richard Dyer observes, race still determines how nations identify themselves and how they function, so that:

At what cost regions and countries export their goods, whose voices are listened to at international gatherings, who bombs and who is bombed, who gets what jobs, housing, access to health care and education, what cultural activities are subsidized and sold, in what terms they are validated—these are all inextricable from racial imagery. The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world are at every point, informed by judgments about people’s capacities and worth, judgments based on what they look like, where they come from, how they speak, even what they eat, that is, racial judgments.<sup>103</sup>

Nations, built as they are on the premise of a natural unity within and fear of inherently distinct pollutants from without, will invariably be governed by racism in some form. Furthermore, inasmuch

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<sup>99</sup> The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance is an independent human rights monitoring body that resists racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and other forms of racial and ethnic related intolerance in the 46 member states of the Council of Europe. It monitors racism in each country and evaluates their efforts to be anti-racist on a five-year cycle. Detailed reports on each country are available on the ECRI Web site at [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).

<sup>100</sup> Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women’s Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>101</sup> West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 103–106.

<sup>102</sup> West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 86–87.

<sup>103</sup> Richard Dyer, “The Matter of Whiteness,” in *White Privilege: Essential Readings from the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002), 9.



as schools, laws, social welfare programs and other national institutions exist to make people into good citizens and loyal patriots, they too will be saturated with racist ideologies and racist practices. In light of this understanding of race and nation, I believe that people who are working to dismantle racism must also find ways to resist the logic, mythology and politics of the nation-state. Integral to this resistance are individuals and communities that derive their primary identity and purpose outside of the nation. As a follower of Jesus who is also anarchist, I believe that the Church, when rightly ordered, can be a community that challenges the racism of the nation-state. In making this assertion, I am not saying that other forms of anti-racist action are not effective or important. Instead I only want to highlight the resources within the Christian faith that can support this struggle.

## Christian Resistance to Racism and the Nation-State

On the surface, my suggestion that the Church can be a community of resistance to racism and the nation-state may seem far-fetched and ill-conceived. After all, the prevailing story of the Church from the fourth century onward has been one of complicity with, not opposition to, state power and abuse. By constantly aligning itself with empires and democracies, kings and tsars, tyrants and presidents, Christians have willingly blessed, participated in and instigated genocide, slavery, war, racism, economic exploitation and myriad other injustices. Aside from the Biblical witness of Jesus' followers, the overall example of the early Church before Christendom, and the faithful minority voices and renewal movements of each age, the Church has often refused to stand in solidarity with the exploited people that we are called to serve and to share the good news with. Yet in spite of the "nearly complete, unabashed failure"<sup>104</sup> of the Church, I believe that Christ's community can resist the nation-state and its racist foundation. To do this, we must first reclaim our countercultural political identity, our radical call and our primary allegiance to God.

### The Call of the Church

In spite of the Church's widespread unfaithfulness the relevance and transformative power of our mission remains the same. Christians are still called to be living testimonies to the upside-down kingdom of God in which our primary vocations are love of the triune God and love of neighbour.<sup>105</sup> We are still called to be a community that is reconciled to God and to one another, and that proclaims God's triumph over the oppressive powers of this world. We are still called to be a community that includes strangers and enemies in the list of neighbours to whom we show patient love and generous hospitality. We are still called to the work of Jesus who

was anointed to bring good news to the poor ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.<sup>106</sup>

Subsequently, our life as the Church and our interaction with the world must be governed by forgiveness, grace, love and peace—not violence, domination, retribution and oppression. It must be marked, not by power that lords over one another, but by mutual and voluntary service and the last being first.<sup>107</sup> It must value each of the Body's members as indispensable for proclaiming God's liberating word and doing God's liberating work.<sup>108</sup> It must engage the world in ways that are neither paternalistic nor power- and control-seeking nor beholden to money and possessions, but instead seeks first God's peaceable and just kingdom.

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<sup>104</sup> Michael Budde, "Pledging Allegiance: Reflections on Discipleship and the Church in Rwanda," in *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 214.

<sup>105</sup> Matthew 22:34–40. All Scripture citations in this chapter are from the New Revised Standard version.

<sup>106</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>107</sup> Luke 22:25–26. See also Matthew 20:25–27.

<sup>108</sup> 1 Corinthians 12.

As a community whose relationships are not determined by the power imbalances of male/female, master/slave, Jew/Greek,<sup>109</sup> the Church is also called to the work of breaking-down socially constructed barriers that separate us from others within and outside the Body of Christ. Unlike nations, which can only tolerate and enforce conformity to a mythological and superficial oneness, the Church is called to be a body that includes people from every tribe, every territory and every language in authentic relationship with God and with one another.<sup>110</sup> Christians must remember that we are part of a diverse *transnational* body that serves God, one another and all of creation.

Consequently, the Christian worldview world must extend far beyond the short-sighted vision of the nation-state with its entrenched borders, fear of the Other and social structures that masks injustices and perpetuates inequality. In our time, this necessarily involves resisting personal and structural racism that subjugates some and privileges others. Our call to be a community that is reconciled in Christ across social differences is a public witness to God's transforming and reconciling power. For this reason, it is a serious betrayal to abandon our transnational identity and neglect our loyalty to God in exchange for national identities rooted in hierarchy, domination, violence and racism.

## The Church is Political

In "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," Rodney Clapp reminds us that the Church is political. This is evident in the language the early followers of Christ used to describe their community and their mission. For example, "gospel," "kingdom" and "exodus" are all political terms. The word "liturgy," which is commonly associated with worship, "comes from the Greek meaning 'work of the people' or, as we might put it now, a 'public work.'"<sup>111</sup> Liturgy in the Greco-Roman empire could refer to "military service at one's own expense" and "liturgist" referred to a government official.<sup>112</sup> Even the Greek word for Church in the New Testament, *ekklesia*, is explicitly political. Starting in the fifth century B. C. it referred to

the assembly of citizens called to decide matters affecting the common welfare ... Thus the "Ekklesia of God" means roughly the same thing as what New Englanders might call the "town meeting of God."<sup>113</sup>

In the early Christian context, being a part of the Roman cult involved worship of the emperor and fidelity to his reign. Conversely to be part of God's town meeting or God's assembly of citizens was to belong completely to God.

Before dismissing the political connotations of these "religious" words as purely coincidental, it is important to remember that in the ancient world what was religious was also political, social and public.<sup>114</sup> If the early Christians wanted to be a private community focused on "otherworldly" matters, they could have petitioned to become a *cultus privatus* (private cult). But "instead of adopting the language of the privatized mystery religions the church confronted Caesar, not exactly *on* his own terms, but *with* his own terms."<sup>115</sup>

The political nature of the Church is also reflected in early Christian use of *paroikoi*, a "familiar legal term" meaning "resident aliens," to describe themselves and their relationship to society.<sup>116</sup> As one early Christian apologist explained,

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<sup>109</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>110</sup> Revelation 5:8–10.

<sup>111</sup> Rodney Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," in *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>112</sup> Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," 21.

<sup>113</sup> Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," 21–22.

<sup>114</sup> Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," 19.

<sup>115</sup> Clapp, "Practicing the Politics of Jesus," 22.

<sup>116</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 15.

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric lifestyle ... But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time *they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship*. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.<sup>117</sup>

When Christians understand the political identity of the Church as more than a spiritual metaphor, we can also begin to see that the Church is defined by its allegiance to God, and that its character and mission are not defined by the empire or, in our context, nation-states. Furthermore, we see this thrust throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

## The People of God in the Hebrew Bible

Although the Hebrew Bible is often associated with God-ordained dynasties, it also contains a tradition that persistently critiques monarchies and empires for their violence and injustice, and the ways in which they attempt to imitate and usurp God's power. While there are myriad examples of these challenges to the state in the Hebrew Bible, a few examples from Exodus, Judges and 1 Samuel should illustrate this point.

The first chapter of Exodus exposes Egypt's domestic policy as one motivated by the ruling elite's fear of the growing Israelite non-ruling population.<sup>118</sup> Driven by this internal threat the Egyptian government instituted a policy of killing the Israelites' infants and forcing them to build the empire's infrastructure. After hearing the people's cries, God liberates Israel not by revolt or by military power, but by the hand of an insecure fugitive, named Moses and his brother Aaron. God uses these deeply flawed leaders to demonstrate a power greater than any human ruler or institution. God also challenges Pharaoh's authority by hardening his heart, revealing that God's domain is broader than any territory under Egypt's control. By the end of the contest with Pharaoh, God establishes Godself as one who hears the weak, liberates the oppressed and stands above all human empires.

Although it is easy to interpret the conflict between God and Egypt as God objecting to *one* unjust government, other examples of God's relationship to the state in the Hebrew Bible indicate otherwise. It is interesting to note that God did not give the Israelites a state after they were liberated but instead entered a covenant in which Israel became God's people and God became their God. In *Anarchism and Christianity*, Jacques Ellul notes that up until the time of the judges, Israel did not have a king or state of any kind. Instead:

the people settled by clans and tribes. The twelve tribes all had their own heads, but these had little concrete authority. When an important decision had to be made, with ritual sacrifices and prayers for divine inspiration, a popular assembly was held and this had the last word ... There were no tribal princes. Families that one might be regarded as aristocratic were either destroyed or vanquished. The God of Israel declared that he and he alone would be Israel's head.<sup>119</sup>

In this system, God related to the people directly and through judges who received limited, temporary power during times of crises.<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately, the Israelites' tribal organisation did not last.

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<sup>117</sup> "The Epistle to Diognetus," 5.1 (emphasis mine). The edition used here is from "The Epistle to Diognetus," in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 541.

<sup>118</sup> Exodus 1:7–8.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 46.

<sup>120</sup> Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 46–47.

The book of Judges tells the story of Abimalech, the son of a judge who convinced the leaders of Schechem to let him rule over them. The leaders agree and give him money, which he uses to hire “worthless and reckless fellows”<sup>121</sup> to kill his sixty-nine brothers with whom he was supposed to share leadership. After the massacre, a surviving brother tells the parable of the trees that sought a ruler. In the tale, the productive and valuable trees decline the offer and a worthless bramble takes the job.<sup>122</sup> The story, which paints a low view of kingship, also prefigures what happens to Abimalech. His term as ruler lasted for a grand total of three years, during which time people repeatedly revolted against his reign. After spending his entire kingship fighting his own people, a woman ends the madness by dropping a large stone on his head and the people restore the earlier system of judges.

Although resistance to a king was strong under Abimalech, the Israelites were asking for a king during Samuel’s tenure as judge. They had turned away from God, the Philistines were routinely defeating them in battle and Samuel’s sons, who were also judges, were abusing their power. In response, the people asked Samuel to crown a king so they could be like other states.<sup>123</sup> God grants their request but only after issuing the following warning:

Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; *for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them* ... you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them ... He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; ... He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers ... He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.<sup>124</sup>

This is a pivotal text for understanding how the people of God are called to view the state. When God’s people demand someone to rule over them it is evil, wicked and a rejection of God.<sup>125</sup> Though God cooperates with the people’s wishes, God does not bless this state-making enterprise.

## Jesus and the State

Like the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament also characterises God’s assembly of citizens as a political body that is distinct from the state. We see this most powerfully in the witness of Jesus, whose life began as a threat to Herod’s rule and ended as a threat to the Roman Empire and the established religious authorities. Immediately after Jesus is baptised, he is tested to use power in ways that will expedite but ultimately compromise his ministry. Of each of the temptations, it is the third that deals specifically with state power and control. According to the gospel of Matthew,

the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.<sup>126</sup>

A typical way to approach this text is to focus on the sin of worshipping the devil and to avoid what it says about the kingdoms of this world. But this lopsided reading makes little sense especially in light of texts like 1 Samuel 8. For Ellul, the “extraordinary thing” about these passages is that,

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<sup>121</sup> Judges 9:4.

<sup>122</sup> Judges 9:8–15.

<sup>123</sup> 1 Samuel 8:5.

<sup>124</sup> 1 Samuel 8:7, 11, 14–15, 17–18 (emphasis mine).

<sup>125</sup> 1 Samuel 12:17.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew 4:8–11. See also Luke 4:5–8.

according to these texts all powers, all the power and glory of kingdoms, all that has to do with politics and political authority belongs to the devil ... Those who hold political power receive it from and depend on him.<sup>127</sup>

He also notices that Jesus does not denounce the devil's claim to have power over all the earthly kingdoms.<sup>128</sup> Instead, Jesus simply refuses the temptation to set his face against God and to serve another.

Jesus' fidelity to God and God's call in the face of state power is also evident in the events leading to his crucifixion. In his account of Jesus' trial by the authorities, Luke clearly reveals the subversive nature of Jesus' ministry and the political nature of his death. In Luke 23, an assembly brings Jesus before Pilate for several crimes, including "perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah," and for stirring up the people "by teaching throughout all Judea."<sup>129</sup> In keeping with the empire's hierarchy and bureaucracy, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod to make sure he is tried in the right district despite his growing belief in his innocence.<sup>130</sup> While before Herod, Jesus neither defers to the governor's authority nor performs for him.<sup>131</sup> In response, Herod commands his soldiers to abuse Jesus and sends him back to Pilate in an elegant robe—an act that makes peace between the rival statesmen.<sup>132</sup> Back in Pilate's jurisdiction, the people vote on Jesus' fate and decide that, even though he thinks Jesus is innocent, he will carry out the crowd's wishes. At the end of the trial, Barabbas a known insurrectionist and murderer is freed because he is perceived to be less dangerous than Jesus. Throughout the ordeal Jesus is either silent or elusive. At no time during his arrest, questioning and crucifixion does he attempt to convert or reform the empire. Instead, Jesus exposes the state as an institution that consistently acts out of fear and insecurity, and uses violence against anything or anyone that subverts, challenges or refuses to conform to its will. Yet Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that such power is ultimately futile.

## The Example of the Early Christian Fellowship

At the beginning of the book of Acts, we find a resurrected Jesus visiting with his disciples before departing from the earth. In this account, Jesus assures his followers that they will be given the power of the Holy Spirit so they can "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>133</sup> This promise comes to pass on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit envelops the disciples, causing these ordinary Galileans to speak about God's good work in multiple languages. Hearing the commotion, a crowd quickly gathers around the group and they begin hearing the word in their own languages. The text describes the diverse people who participate in this miracle, saying:

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.<sup>134</sup>

While some people were amazed by what was happening, others attempted to dismiss it as a drunken display. However, Peter responds by preaching from the prophetic texts, testifying about Jesus, life, death and resurrection, exhorting the crowd to repent and calling all who wanted to receive the Holy

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<sup>127</sup> Ellul, *Anarchism and Christianity*, 58.

<sup>128</sup> Ellul, *Anarchism and Christianity*, 58. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 26.

<sup>129</sup> Luke 23:1 and 5.

<sup>130</sup> Luke 23:6.

<sup>131</sup> Luke 23:8.

<sup>132</sup> Luke 23:12.

<sup>133</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>134</sup> Acts 2:9–11.

Spirit to be baptised into the body. The crowd is so compelled by Peter's message that three thousand people are immediately baptised<sup>135</sup> and a radical new community in which "all who believed were together and had all things in common" emerges.<sup>136</sup>

Although race and the nation-state as it has been articulated since the modern period did not exist in the ancient world, this public demonstration of God's reconciling power is nonetheless helpful for understanding the Church's call in the face of present-day racism and nationalism.

First, this event affirms that the Church is a political as well as spiritual body that stands in contrast to that of the governing powers. Each of the groups present in the crowd was a part of the Roman Empire, which was united by bureaucracy, taxation and when necessary, violence. Unlike the Roman state, the Holy Spirit unites the crowd through language, testimony and sign, and draws new followers without the earthly power and might of emperors. In so doing, the disciples follow Jesus' refusal to use the kingdoms of this world to carry out God's reconciling mission.

Second, the Pentecost miracle can be seen as an equalising event. Although the text is not explicit, one can imagine that a crowd in which more than three thousand people were present likely included men, women and children, upper and lower class, as well as people from across the empire. Since "each one heard [the disciples] speaking in the native language of each"<sup>137</sup> it is very plausible that all the people were privileged to hear the word of God, regardless of their gender, age or status in society.

Third, it is significant that the Holy Spirit did not cause the disciples and the crowd to speak, hear and understand in one language. This is in stark contrast to the nation, which expects conformity to a shared albeit superficial identity, masks inequalities with a tenuous unity and only tolerates diversity that does not threaten its power or cohesion.

Finally, the miracle of speaking in tongues served the particular purpose of calling its hearers into a new relationship with God and with one another in which economic sharing, prayer, eating together, generosity and commitment to Jesus' teachings and example characterised their life together.

In short, Acts 2 reveals the character of the Body of Christ as a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, global, reconciled body that lives out the way of Jesus, challenges the logic and practices of the ruling powers and gives its ultimate loyalty to God. This understanding of the early Christian community exemplifies Paul's words to the Philippians that our true citizenship or commonwealth is not of this world but is in heaven.<sup>138</sup> For this reason the Church must resist all temptations to switch the two.

## Concluding Thoughts

The witness of Acts 2, the Hebrew Bible, Jesus and the early Church clearly demonstrate that

Being a disciple of Jesus ... was and is meant to be a *primary, ultimate, pivotal* vocation. By its very nature it cannot share allegiances with lesser goods and commitments.<sup>139</sup>

When the Church forgets that its loyalty lies in God and its liberating work extends to all its neighbours—stranger, friend and enemy alike—it becomes "a quaint add-on compatible with capitalism, militarism, and racism."<sup>140</sup> This is exemplified by the vast number of Christians who wholeheartedly embraced racist ideologies and practices throughout the modern period without hesitation. However, when Christians live faithfully as God's assembly of citizens that breaks down socially constructed barriers and declares our primary allegiance to an alternative kingdom, we can be a community of a

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<sup>135</sup> Acts 2:41.

<sup>136</sup> Acts 2:44.

<sup>137</sup> Acts 2:6.

<sup>138</sup> Philippians 3:20. The word for citizenship can also mean commonwealth, another political term that even more clearly communicates the vision of the Church as a distinct, sovereign body.

<sup>139</sup> Budde, "Pledging Allegiance," 214 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>140</sup> Budde, "Pledging Allegiance," 221.

resistance. This is apparent when professor and “friend of the eugenics movement” E. A. Ross laments that, “The Christian cult of charity as a means of grace has formed a shelter under which idiots and *cretins* have crept and bred.”<sup>141</sup>

How the Church lives out its identity as a people whose citizenship supersedes national identities and social divisions and as a body that resists the racism of the nation-state will be contextual. In the U. S., Christians can declare our allegiance to God and stand in solidarity with fellow believers and their neighbours by protesting against Christians killing on behalf of the nation. We can remove the American flags from our spaces of worship and focus our prayers and concerns on the kingdom of God rather than on the prosperity of the nation and the successful rule of the government. We can abstain from voting and from otherwise participating in the nation-state’s affairs as a protest against its oppression and violence against marginalised people within and outside of its borders.

We can provide sanctuary for documented and undocumented economic refugees as a testament to the primacy of Christ’s justice and compassion over fictional borders and immigration policies rooted in racism. We can confront racism in our local congregations through anti-racism training, sharing power between marginalised and privileged people in our midst, and working to reflect and remember the global Body of Christ in our local communities of faith. We can practice love, hospitality, grace and service to the nation’s social outcasts, and allow ourselves to be transformed by their gifts in the process. In these and innumerable other ways, the Church can publicly witness to a different way of being *one* that does not involve lording power over one another but instead breaks down socially-constructed divisions that impede God’s reconciling work in the world.

The Church has the potential to be a body that confronts one of the major roots of racism—the nation-state. Its very calling to be the body of Christ as outlined above demands that we must not be complicit in this or any other form of oppression. We see in the witness of the Jews who were racialised, persecuted and murdered en masse for being a separate people and in the example of the lower classes whose international solidarity threatened the political structures, that being a distinct people with an identity that transcends national lines and expectations is a powerful social force. May the Church have the courage to live out a similar vision.

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<sup>141</sup> Gossett, *Race*, 170.

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## **PART III: BUDDHIST, DAOIST, AND MUSLIM ANARCHISM**

# CHAPTER NINE. ANARCHISM OR NIHILISM: THE BUDDHIST-INFLUENCED THOUGHT OF WU NENGZI

JOHN A. RAPP

*This essay examines the thought of Wu Nengzi, a Buddhist-influenced thinker of ninth century China. Though Wu Nengzi begins, similar to earlier radical Daoists, by criticising Confucian and Legalist justifications of rule and calling for a decentralised stateless society, his thought eventually breaks down into a kind of passive acceptance of rule as long as one is not attached to it or deceived about its ultimate utility. Comparing Wu Nengzi to post-modernist thinkers who find that a stance of ironic detachment is all one can accomplish for fear of creating new “meta-narratives” that could underlie new forms of oppression, this essay concludes that Wu Nengzi slips into passive nihilism only by shifting emphasis from the dao , or the Way, to wu or nothingness. That is, only by shifting Daoist thought from a stance of embracing the universe as an undifferentiated whole to a denial of the reality of existence, did Wu Nengzi open up radical Daoist thought to nihilism and acquiescence to authority. Following both the organic conservative critique of revolutionary thought, as well as recent critics of postmodernism, this essay concludes that to stay true to the positive anarchist vision, one must not deny the unity of existence, even if one can neither define that existence objectively nor impose it on others.*

I would like to thank Beloit College for a Sanger Sumer Scholars grant that allowed for the translation of the *Wunengzi* by my student colleague, Catrina Siu, and my faculty colleague, Daniel Youd of the Department of Modern Languages, a translation which Professor Youd and I edited for use in this chapter.

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## Introduction: The Main Problems Raised by the *Wunengzi*

The ninth century C.E. Chinese text known by the name of its pseudonymous author, Wu Nengzi (literally, “Master of No Abilities”), was the first piece of writing in five hundred years to revive the anarchist side of philosophical Daoism. Though the text has been referred to by several students of Chinese thought, including Germaine Hoston and Peter Zarrow,<sup>1</sup> it has previously only been partially translated into English by Hsiao Kung-chuan.<sup>2</sup> There is also the partial German translation by Alfred Forke and a full German translation in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Gert Naundorf.<sup>3</sup> This relative neglect is unfortunate, since the text can teach us much about both Daoist and Western anarchism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Germaine Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 158–159 and Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> Hsiao Kung-chuan, “Anarchism in Chinese Political Thought,” *Tien Hsia Monthly* 3 (October 1936): 251–263.

<sup>3</sup> See Alfred Forke, *Geschichte der Mittelalterlichen Chinesischen Philosophie* (Hamburg: Cram, De Gruyter and Co., 1964), 330–332; and Gert Naundorf, *Aspekte Des Anarchischen Gedankens in China: Darstellung der Lehre und Übersetzung des Texts Wu Neng Tzu* (Inaugural Dissertation, Julius-Maximilians-Universität zu Würzburg, 1972).

The surviving text of the *Wunengzi* (hereafter the text will be referred to in this way, while its author will be referred to as Wu Nengzi) contains three books with a total of twenty-three chapters, with a preface by an unnamed friend, who reports that Wu Nengzi wrote the text during the Huangchao rebellion (875–884 C.E.), when he fled his home and travelled about, having no regular abode, finally living with a peasant family.<sup>4</sup> The author of the preface claims to have created the text from scattered scraps of paper that Wu Nengzi left in a bag. From chapters in the text it would seem that Wu Nengzi had disciples and was consulted by many people for sagely advice.

Though starting out in the same radical antistatist and utopian fashion of earlier Daoist anarchist texts of the third to fourth centuries C. E., in the end the author of the ninth century text seems to acquiesce in the idea of rule, as we will see below. Thus, this text creates problems for anyone who would seek to use the radical side of philosophical Daoism to build a modern antistatist critique. The first problem, more narrowly linked to Daoist anarchism, is whether the *Wunengzi* demonstrates more openly a flaw that may be present in all radical Daoist texts or whether the author of this text makes a fundamental shift of his own based on influence from his interpretation of Buddhist doctrines. The larger problem for all anarchists is whether or not the *Wunengzi* demonstrates flaws present in post-modern and/or “lifestyle” anarchist thought. Can an “ironic stance” towards political authority, combined with ways of living supposedly apart from the state and claims to reject any overarching principle or “meta-narrative,” in the end too easily lead to a cynical acceptance of the state and/or a refusal to oppose it directly? Even if one rejects such an “ironic stance” alone as adequate and wants to go beyond it, are there any grounds to do so from a perspective which denies humans’ ability to learn and know objectively any absolute truths?

To answer these questions we need first to examine the nature of Daoist anarchism before Wu Nengzi and then see how Wu Nengzi himself applies and possibly changes the lessons of Daoist anarchism. After examining the main tenets of the *Wunengzi*, we can return to the questions raised above.

## I. Daoist Anarchism before Wu Nengzi

I have written elsewhere on the nature of Daoist anarchism and so will not attempt a complete review here.<sup>5</sup> Given space limitations, we can perhaps most profitably compare the thought in the *Wunengzi* to that of earlier Daoist anarchists by examining the main tenets in the neo-Daoist thinker Bao Jingyan (ca. 300 C.E.).<sup>6</sup> Heavily influenced by the famous Daoist text, the *Zhuang Zi* (ca. 300 B.C.E.),<sup>7</sup> as were most of the thinkers in the revival of philosophical Daoism at the end of the Later Han Dynasty (10–220 C.E.) and the Three Kingdoms era at the beginning of the Period of Disunity (220–589 C.E.), Bao Jingyan completely rejects the Confucian idea of rule by the morally virtuous based on any “Mandate of Heaven” from an impersonal deity.

The Confucian literati say: “Heaven gave birth to the people and then set rulers over them.” But how can High Heaven have said this in so many words? Is it not rather that interested parties made this their pretext? The fact is that the cunning tricked the innocent and the innocent served them. It was because there was submission that the people, being powerless,

<sup>4</sup> For a modern reprint of the classical text, see Wang Ming, compiler (hereafter comp.), *Wunengzi jiao shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju: Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> See John A. Rapp, “Daoism and Anarchism Reconsidered,” *Anarchist Studies* 6, no. 2 (1998): 123–51; and John A. Rapp, “Daoism as Utopian or Accommodationist: Radical Daoism Reexamined in Light of the Guodian Manuscripts,” in *Anarchism and Utopianism*, eds. Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> For translations of Bao’s tract, see Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, trans. M. H. Wright, ed. Arthur F. Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 243–246; and Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 138–140.

<sup>7</sup> For perhaps the greatest English translation, see Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

could be kept under control. Thus servitude and mastery result from the struggle between the cunning and innocent, and Blue Heaven has nothing whatsoever to do with it.<sup>8</sup>

In place of this utopian view of benevolent rulership (based on the ideas of the Confucian philosopher Mencius, ca. fourth century B.C.E.), Bao Jingyan posits the existence of an ideal utopia of original undifferentiated simplicity where there were no rulers and everyone lived in harmony.

In remote antiquity, princes and ministers did not exist... There were no roads and paths in the mountains, nor were swamps crossed by bridges or boats. Because rivers and valleys could not be crossed, wars of conquest between states did not occur... Greed for power and profit had not yet budded in the hearts of men, and therefore unhappiness and confusion did not arise... In mystical equality ( *xuantong*), the ten thousand creatures forgot each other in the “Way,” epidemics and pestilence did not spread, and the people became very old as a result. Pure and innocent as they were, men had no cunning in their hearts. They felt at ease when they could simply eat their fill, and walked about stroking their stomach. It would have been impossible to multiply taxes to bleed the people, or to introduce strict punishments to [en]trap [them].<sup>9</sup>

Rather than follow the Confucian advice to resign office in an immoral government, Bao argues that it would be better if there were no offices in the first place. While there is no evidence that Bao joined or fomented any political uprisings, it is clear that he saw all government as immoral, unnecessary, and dangerous to human survival and there was thus no way that he could ever accept the need for a state of any kind. Bao bases his political stance on the concept of *ziran*, literally, “of itself so,” often translated as natural or spontaneous, a term which other scholars argue is the closest term in classical Chinese thought to the concept of freedom.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, Wu Nengzi starts with this concept in a similarly radical sounding fashion, before coming to a very different conclusion.

## II. The Political Thought of Wu Nengzi

In his first chapter, Wu Nengzi picks up the description of the Daoist utopia in terms very similar to those of Bao Jingyan:

In the most ancient times, the naked creatures and the scaly, hairy/furry, feathery, and shelled lived together indiscriminately, female and male, male and female. They [lived] together naturally, with no distinction between men and women, husband and wife [and no hierarchical order among] father and son, older brother and younger brother. In the summer they created nests and in the winter they created caves; there was no construction of palaces and mansions. They ate raw meat and drank blood, without eating the food of the one hundred grains [i.e., food that did not need to be processed with modern technology]. The living moved around, the dead keeled over, [there was] no [desire for] stealing and murder, [and there were] no funeral [rites]. They followed what was natural; there was no ruling or shepherding, [and everything was] in its original simplicity; according to these principles they could live long lives.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Balazs, 243.

<sup>9</sup> Bauer, 139.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Times of Juan Chi (AD 210–263)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 190.

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the *Wunengzi* in this chapter come from the previously unpublished version by my student colleague, Catrina Siu, and my faculty colleague, Daniel Youd of the Department of Modern Languages at Beloit College, a translation which I and Professor Youd edited for use in this chapter.

Again, as with Bao Jingyan, those who would “help” others by instituting government entered the picture and started to draw distinctions between humans and other animals, which introduced hierarchy and started the process of ruination:

Not long after, among the naked creatures arose a bunch of “wise” and “intelligent” animals who called themselves “people” who established rules under which they could [dominate] the scaly, hairy/furry, feathery, and scaly creatures. Moreover, they taught [each other] sowing and planting in order to eat the food of a hundred grains, and thereafter [learned] to use the plow. They hewed wood and made mud bricks to construct mansions and palaces, and thereupon started to use the blade and the axe. They instituted marriages, which started the distinctions between men and women, and thereafter began the distinction between husband and wife and the hierarchical distinction among fathers and sons and older brothers and younger brothers. They made coffins and shrouds to bury their dead, and thereupon there [developed] funeral rites. They tied knots together to make nets in order to catch the scaly, hairy/furry, feathery and shelled creatures; thereupon emerged the taste for prepared food. Original simplicity was thereby broken up, thereby giving rise to selfish passions and intentions. People were strong and weak by their natural abilities; there was still no way to regulate this. Among the crowd that called themselves the “wise” and “intelligent,” they chose one who would unite the rest of them; this one was called the ruler, and the multitude were called his servants [officials]. The one could control the multitude, but the multitude could not gain supremacy over the one. From this came the distinction between the ruler and the ministers, and the exalted and lowly. The honoured were set on high and the multitude were placed on the same low level [beneath him].

Once introduced, the principle of hierarchical rule and economic inequality became more and more developed, and human oppression increased as a result:

In later times hierarchy and emoluments were established among the “wise and intelligent.” Thereupon, material things distinguished the ranks between the wealthy and the poor, and people satisfied their desires in accordance with their ranks and emoluments. Then they called the wise and intelligent ones “sages.”

But soon the debased and disgraced started to become jealous of the honoured, the poor became jealous of the wealthy, and from this was born the spirit of competition. Those who called themselves sages worried about this and together they said, “in the time of original purity, who was it who called themselves people? We artificially imposed the name “people” and therefore people were separated from the animals. At that time, there were no exalted and debased, [so] who was it who called themselves rulers and ministers? But after we imposed the construction of hierarchy; there came about rulers and ministers. At that time, there was no grasping and no desires, [so] what were ranks and emoluments to them? We imposed assessments on people, so now they started to realise the distinction between honourable and disgraced. Now, the pure and natural has been weakened, and passions and predilections are embraced by vying hearts. If there is competition, there is stealing, if there is stealing, there is chaos [*luan*], [so] what is to happen in the future?

Given the worry of the ruling class about ordinary people’s increasing restiveness, the “sages” then developed the Confucian principle of benevolent rule to justify their authority:

From among the group of the “wise and intelligent,” one who was most “wise and intelligent” spoke and said: “I have a scheme!”; from this he taught the principles of benevolence, virtue, loyalty and trustworthiness and to regulate them by means of ritual and music. When a ruler oppressed his subjects he was to be called cruel, and the ministers would say that the

government was illegitimate. When the ministers usurped [the ruler's authority], the ruler would call them rebels. A father who did not love his son, would be called un-nurturing, and a son who did not obey his father would be called unfilial. When older brother and younger brother were not in accordance, they would be called disrespectful and unfraternal; when a husband and wife were not united as one, they would be called unchaste and inharmonious. People who acted in these ways were called the wrong and people who did not were called the right. The right were honoured and the wrong were disgraced, thus was cultivated the feeling of pleasure in being right and the shame of being in the wrong, and feelings of competition were suppressed.

Thus, far from reflecting Heaven's will and an unchanging human nature, Confucian ideas of cultivation of "virtue" only served to legitimate and protect domination of some humans over others. Based on chapters from the text known as the *Daodejing* (the Classic of the Way and Its Power)<sup>12</sup> and the *Zhuang Zi*, and following the tradition of the Wei-Jin Daoist anarchists like Bao Jingyan, Wu Nengzi goes on to see the Chinese philosophy of Legalism as coming from a natural degeneration of rule once Confucianism could no longer hold people's desires in check:

As even more generations passed, predilections and desires became more inflamed; thereupon [people] turned their backs on benevolence, virtue, loyalty and trustworthiness, and they transgressed from ritual and music and [started to] compete [with each other]. Those who called themselves sages regretted this. They had no other option but to establish laws and punishments and organise armies to keep the people under control. When there were small offences, [people] were punished. When offences were big, an army was set onto them. Therefore punishments such as imprisonment, using the *kang*, and being whipped were spread out over the country. Spears, pikes, bows and arrows were spread out over the world, families were destroyed and kingdoms wiped out. There were too many to count. The common people came to dire poverty and died; this spread without end.

In the end, similar to the arguments of Western anarchists like Michael Bakunin, Wu Nengzi turns on its head the typical question about how anarchists will handle the problem of crime and warfare without government. Instead, Wu Nengzi argues, it is the principle of rule and the imposition of hierarchy which leads to chaos and the destruction of human life:

Alas! It was natural to treat [the people] as beasts; it was not natural to treat them as humans. Imposing the establishment of palaces and mansions, [formal] meals and [prepared] food stirred up desires; imposing distinctions between the exalted and debased and the honourable and disgraced excited competition; imposing benevolence, virtue, ritual and music perverted what was natural. Imposing punishments and laws and [using] military [force] immiserated [people's] lives, this caused people to seek after the branches [the extraneous] and forget about the root [the essential]; this disturbed their passions and attacked their lives, and together in great numbers they died. They could not revive the past. This was the fault of those who called themselves sages.

Thus far, Wu Nengzi's critique sounds as radical as that of his predecessors, including even Bao Jingyan, based on Daoist principles of original simplicity ( *si*), primeval unity without hierarchy ( *hundun*), and especially *ziran* (the natural or spontaneous), which as we noted above could be a metaphor for human freedom in nature. But in later chapters in Part One of his text, though still based on the

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<sup>12</sup> For translations of the *Daodejing* used in this chapter, see Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 1935); and Ursula Le Guin, with the collaboration of J. P. Seaton, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way* (Boston and London: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1997).

Daoist idea of nature as an undifferentiated whole, Wu Nengzi starts to introduce themes concerning the identity of life and death, almost certainly influenced by the spread of Buddhist ideas in China during the Tang dynasty. In chapter three, Wu Nengzi examines human nature and how humans look at the human body.

As for human nature, it is spirit; as for fate, it is ether ( *qi*). Human nature and fate—these two must mutually come together in the vast void; they give birth to each other in nature. They are similar to ... the mutual harmonising of *yin* and *yang*. That which we term the skeletal part is the body; it is the apparatus of human nature and fate. Is it not that fire is on top of the firewood? If there is no firewood then the fire does not burn, if there is no fire, the firewood does not glow (from heat). If there is no skeletal structure and body, human nature and fate has no means of standing up. If human nature and fate attach themselves to the body, then it causes them to be lively; therefore human nature and fate bubbles from nature and is born; the natural skeletal structure and the body comes to a congealed point and dies. That which is born from Nature, although it exists separately and can be broken off, is eternally alive. That which naturally dies, although it moves around, it will always die.

So, beginning with the Daoist principles that nothing exists separately and that the idea of life and death is like *yin* and *yang*, or two sides of an undifferentiated whole, Wu Nengzi denigrates those who would seek to the elixir of long life instead of worrying about the quality of their lives.

Nowadays, not a single person does not like life and despises death, they do not understand the principle of the natural cycle of life and death, they look to the thing that is not moving and is rigid and they worry about it. They cast aside that which is naturally born, devoting themselves to preserving that which is naturally dead. The more diligently they preserve it, the more distant is life. This is desire that sink feathers and floats rocks, how idiotic!

Though based on Daoist principles, Wu Nengzi seems to be introducing a Buddhist-influenced idea of the unreality of both life and death, as in chapter four of Book One:

As for people, they most despise death, which is to say that they despise the shape and skeletal body being rigid and not moving. As for the shape and skeletal body, blood, flesh, ear and eyes, we cannot live without them. They cannot be lacking and still be vital, thus we know that they are not the implements of life. Therefore you should not wait to call death the point at which there is no movement and stiffness; rather, death is at its root already there when we hasten to move around! Therefore that which hastens to move about, relies on nothing more than that which is originally not dead. And, secondly, it is not that which is able to move and hasten about by itself. The body and skeletal shape are originally dead, therefore it is not dying today, therefore it is not dead today, and therefore it is not going to die! As for death, it is the most despised by the people. But there is no death to be despised, besides the shape and skeletal structure; is there anything really to disturb feelings of utmost harmony and satisfaction?

Throughout the next chapter, Wu Nengzi continues to denigrate people's fear of death and their desire for material things and a fine reputation as ideas inculcated and fanned by the so-called sages. While still serving the purpose of undermining Confucian and Legalist concepts of rule, this Buddhist-influenced denial of material needs based on the denial of the distinction between life and death will serve later to undermine his anarchism.

Nevertheless, in the second part of this same chapter, Wu Nengzi continues his radical egalitarian vision. Far from naturally favouring our relatives and close friends, as Confucian thinkers would have it, he argues that we should not differentiate among people but instead treat all equally:

if you use the name that you use to name your relatives to name the people under Heaven, then all people under Heaven will be your relatives! If you use the way you familiarise yourself with relatives to familiarise yourself with people of the world, then all the people under Heaven will all be your relatives! What need is there to speak of an exclusive object of our affections? If there are none to be familial to or paternally benevolent to, then we can be familial and paternally benevolent to all under Heaven; but if there are those that we must be familial and paternally benevolent to, then we will only be familial and paternally benevolent to the people in one single household, and moreover, filial piety and paternal benevolence will become a burden!; but if you get rid of them then there is insincerity, and if there is insincerity, then fathers, sons, older brothers and younger brothers will have dislike and resentment!

Thus again, it is Confucian ideas of benevolent hierarchy that lead to strife and contention.

It is in the second of his three books where Wu Nengzi's political ideology starts to show the effects of his Buddhist-influenced stance of detachment from material things. In retelling a famous incident from the period of the end of the Shang or Yin dynasty and the beginning of the Zhou (ca. eleventh century B.C.E.), Wu Nengzi takes up the eternal question for intellectuals first raised by Zhuang Zi, whether or not to serve in government. At first Wu Nengzi's sage seems to follow the advice of Zhuang Zi to not get sullied by serving the state, though in terms which seem to deny the reality of the people's suffering:

only after Xi Bo [the eventual King Wen of the Zhou dynasty] repeatedly beseeched him [for advice], [the retired official Lü] Wang sat down with his legs crossed like a basket and laughed, saying "Why did you come here?!" Xi Bo said, "the Shang Dynastical government is in chaos! The people are in great pain! I, a foolish peon, desire to save them, yet I think I should get a worthy gentleman to help me." Wang said, "the Shang Dynastical government became chaotic by itself, and the people are in great pain out of their own doing. What is the connection to you? Why do you want to sully me?" Xi Bo said, "Well, sages should not hide their usefulness or keep their benevolence to themselves. They must exhaust their wisdom by universally helping all things. Isn't this so?" Lü Wang said, "Well now, Human beings are floating between heaven and earth, together with the birds, beasts, and many insects, in the middle of unitary ether [ *qi* ], and nothing more. It's exactly the same as castle walls, houses, and cottages all pointing up into the air's hollowness. If something completely destroyed the castle walls, houses, and cottages, then the air would still be the air. If something killed off all humans, birds, beasts, and insects, the ether would still be the ether. How can we do anything about the Shang government's loutishness? How can we say anything of people's hardship?"

Though sounding very indifferent to ordinary people's suffering, this passage could be based on chapter five of the *Daodejing*, which advises the sage to be ruthless and treat the people as straw dogs, advice which Arthur Waley claims is a bait for the Legalists.<sup>13</sup> That is, since "nature is perpetually bounteous" and thus perhaps takes care of people naturally, there is no need for rulers to paternalistically to "take care" of the people. Nevertheless, in a very important shift, Wu Nengzi allows his reclusive official to serve the state after all in the end:

despite all of this, the castle walls, houses, and cottages are already built and so need not be destroyed, just as the people are already formed and need not be killed, so I will save them!, Then, [Lü Wang] [in the end] agreed with Xi Bo and rode back home with him in the same carriage.

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<sup>13</sup> See Waley, 147.



Xi Bo, in answering another of his officials as to why he decided to aid the suffering people of the Shang dynasty despite his talk of the virtue of the Daoist principle of *wuwei* (inaction, or doing nothing), replied with what one could argue is a very Buddhist take on *wuwei*, an interpretation which Wu Nengzi has Lü Wang endorse:

Xi Bo said, “Heaven and Earth are inactive, yet the sun, moon, stars, and constellations move in the day and the night. There are rain, dew, frost, and freezing rain in the autumn and winter. The great rivers flow without pause, and the grass and trees grow without stopping. Therefore, inaction can be flexible. If there is a fixed point in action, then it cannot be inaction.” Lü Wang heard this and knew that Xi Bo really did have compassion for the people and didn’t want any profit from the Shang Dynasty’s world. Thereupon, Lü Wang and Xi Bo finally made the State of Zhou prosperous and powerful.

This conclusion of the chapter goes to the heart of the difficulty of Wu Nengzi’s thought. If life and death are the same and material suffering is just an illusion, then being attached to opposing all government is also an illusion. In the end for Wu Nengzi, one *can* try to help people by trying to govern them, but only as long as one has no desire to dominate them and no illusions about the ultimate worth of government. One then could wonder whether Wu Nengzi’s prior condemnation of all government and his ridicule of the idea of benevolent rule for the benefit of people completely fall apart. If nothing matters, so too opposition to the state does not matter. Perhaps we could use contemporary language to say that Wu Nengzi would not oppose intellectuals taking part in government as long as they have a stance of ironic detachment while they are governing.

In the rest of Part Two, Wu Nengzi turns the tables on both famous officials and famous recluses in Chinese history, making both look ridiculous for seeking virtue and fame, either by holding office and great wealth or by becoming hermits. Both are deluded, he seems to be saying, if they think they have found the truth. It is being attached to any desires, whether the desire to hold high office or the desire to hold a reputation as an honest recluse, that leads people astray. Standing by itself, this message would not depart very much from the ideas of earlier Daoist anarchists, especially those of the poet Ruan Ji (210–263 C.E.). In his great poem, “The Biography of Master Great Man,” Ruan Ji’s hero answers the Confucian gentlemen who came to him to criticise his “immoral” behaviour of not dressing properly or seeking high office by comparing these men ambitious to serve nobly in high office to lice who inhabit a pair of trousers:

When [the louse] runs away into a deep seam or hides in some broken wadding, he thinks he has found a “propitious residence.” In his movements he dares not leave the seam’s edge nor part from the crotch of the drawers, and he thinks he is “toeing the orthodox line” that way. But when [in the event of a great fire] there are hills of flame and streams of fire, when towns are charred and cities destroyed, then the lice, trapped where they are, die in their pair of drawers. What difference is there in your gentleman’s living in his small area and a louse in a pair of drawers? How sad it is that he thinks he can “keep catastrophes far away and good fortune near” and “[his family and descendants] eternally secure.”

Ruan Ji then makes the argument followed by Bao Jingyan that it would be better if there were no offices and honours to seek than to resign office from an immoral government. Wu Nengzi likewise criticises the idea of serving in government for noble reasons, but more cynically than Ruan Ji or Bao Jingyan goes on to argue that serving in office is nevertheless not to be condemned if one has no illusions about the morality of serving. In chapter six of Part Two, he has two officials discuss retiring from high office after achieving success for their king. The first official cannot imagine retiring at the point of their highest achievement, while the other warns that the king will now only be jealous of their success if they stick around:

Therefore [even when] we have gotten rid of harm and not met with disasters and brought material things to a completion, we will have no good fortune. Recently, because he hated the state of Wu, [the king] employed you and me in order to use our schemes. You and I benefitted from the pay and therefore we schemed against Wu [for the king], and we [can] take as a sign of our success, the destruction of the people, and as payback, he gives us our emoluments. The duplicity of people is such that they say that they are like Heaven and Earth's births and killings [and] that they are agents of Heaven and Earth—what sages call getting rid of harm and bringing things to completion, isn't this just a big scam?<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the idea of serving in office is not criticised, not even the destruction of a whole people for the benefit of a king, only the idea that the rewards earned by serving the king will last forever or that the government service has some higher purpose.

In chapter eight of Part Two, Wu Nengzi tells the story of four famous recluses whom a king tried to entice to join his government, probably in order to demonstrate that the most virtuous officials were willing to serve him. Though they agreed that the emperor was more kind and virtuous than his rivals for power, the four recluses made a cynical conclusion to serve the evil Queen Mother and her henchman, the Marquis of Liu, who were scheming to replace the emperor with her son, the Crown Prince.

The four people, in the beginning, refused [the entreaties of the Marquis of Liu], but they got together and discussed [the matter], saying: "Liu Ji was high and mighty; moreover, he knows the means by which he is more exalted than us. He sought after us but we will not go—he has embarrassed himself and nothing more! As for Empress Lu, that woman's nature is cruel and mean, [and] her son Ying is not yet firmly established as the crown prince, so she has necessarily been pushed to a crisis. In crisis, she has come seeking us; the peaceful resolution of the crisis depends on us. If she seeks us but does not get us, she will necessarily bring disaster upon us, therefore we must answer yes to her."

Thus the four former recluses agreed to do the dirty work of the Empress and the Marquis, to the point where her son ascended the throne and her enemies were eliminated. At that point the four men refused further honours and returned to their reclusion.

Empress Lu treated them virtuously and wanted to honour and give them rank and ennoblements. The four recluses discussed this and said: "The reason we came here was to avoid disaster; it was not from the desire of our hearts. Yin is now secure and Ru Yi has been undermined. The Empress Lu has now gotten her wish and Qi Ji was killed. Now we are afraid of disaster, we have caused Yin to succeed and Ru Yi to be undermined, we caused Empress Lu to be happy and Qi Ji to despair; this is called destroying others to keep yourself whole, so this is probably not a case of killing to achieve virtue. Moreover, are we going to deal with the humiliation of being ennobled by a woman and by this means, get a position at court? What difference is this from being a thief and going into a person's home and taking their gold and becoming a rich person?" So they left and again hid themselves in Mount Shang, and Empress Lu was unable to keep them.

We should note again that this chapter does not criticise the idea of serving in government, even serving obviously power-hungry nobles and officials at the expense of more high-minded rulers. The only thing being criticised is the belief that either serving or not serving in office can ever demonstrate moral virtue.

This cynical attitude is perhaps why Hsiao Kung-chuan claims that in the end Wu Nengzi's thought is nothing more than "a pure negation without any suggestion as to what is to be done or what shall

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<sup>14</sup> Translated in Holzman, 192–195.

take the place of the state” and thus demonstrates that Chinese Daoist anarchism is merely a “doctrine of despair” rather than one of hope as in Western anarchism.<sup>15</sup> Peter Zarrow thinks that Hsiao unfairly characterises all Daoist anarchists, some of whom did possess an “alternative social vision” if not a theory of revolution, but he accepts that Wu Nengzi is an exception to other radical Daoists and is closer to a “total cynic than a constructive social thinker.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Germaine Hoston thinks his cynical attitude marks Wu Nengzi’s thought as nihilistic.<sup>17</sup>

In Part Three of the *Wunengzi*, the author speaks more in his own name and says things more directly. The main point is still to argue that people should have no intentionality, and Wu Nengzi continues to interpret the Daoist principle of *wuwei* as taking no *intentional* action out of a desire for personal or social benefit, except perhaps for the benefit of continuing to live, which would seem to be an obvious contradiction to having no desire. Nevertheless, in other chapters Wu Nengzi disparages even the desire for health and long life. Perhaps he is arguing that having no intention and having no desire is not always the same thing. In chapter two of the third book Wu Nengzi tells about a friend named Hua Yangzi who came to him asking about whether to accept another friend’s offer to serve in office:

“I have been practicing to be without intention for a long time. If I go to become an official, then I will be going against my desires, but if I don’t go to become an official, then I will anger that friend. What should I do?”

Wu Nengzi said, “Having no intentionality [ *wuxin*] is not something that you can learn. Having no intentionality has nothing to do with serving in office or not serving in office. If you are confused and your thinking is too deep, it’s like you have seen a blind person on the verge of a pit and you instruct him to walk forward. As for a person who takes no action [ *wuwei*] that means there’s no action that he cannot take, and as for a person who takes action, there are certain actions that he can’t take. Only those people who are closest to their original nature [ *zhishi*] will be able to understand this great principle. That which is closest to the highest public spiritedness [ *zhigong*] is what we mean by no action and it takes its root in having no desires and having no selfishness. So if you have desire then even if you’re a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer, or a shepherd, you’ll have intentionality [ *youxin*]. But if you have no desire, and you’re the emperor riding in his carriage or you’re a marquis wearing his robes, then you’ll have no intentionality. Therefore, sages abide where it is appropriate and take action [ *xing*] where it is appropriate. Principle is located at the point where one cultivates the self. Xuyou and Shan Zhuan [hermits from the time of Shun] were not embarrassed to be commoners, but when the situation is favourable then it is permissible to provide aid to the world. Therefore the emperors Yao and Shun didn’t decline the office of emperor. In both cases [the hermits and the emperors] were united in having no intentionality. When Yao and Shun were on the throne they had no concern for the nobility that the office of Son of Heaven gave them. They merely let their robes hang down and the world was governed. So when it was evident that Dan Zhu [the son of Yao] and Shang Zhun [who was the son of Shun] were of small ability, then Yao passed the throne to Shun and Shun passed the throne to Yu; therefore they cast aside their own sons as if they were scabs and they set aside the world as if it were spittle. For this reason there were generations when the world was at peace. In the time of the Duke of Zhou, King Wen’s son and King Wu’s younger brother, [King Cheng] everyone knew that the Duke of Zhou was virtuous but because King Cheng was alive it was not a favourable time for the Duke of Zhou and therefore he didn’t become the Son of Heaven. Because King Cheng was young it was correct for the Duke of Zhou to remain as regent and this [post] he didn’t decline. He

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<sup>15</sup> Hsiao, 260.

<sup>16</sup> Zarrow, 10, 262, note 23.

<sup>17</sup> Hoston, 159.

did all this in order to make sure that the House of Zhou would last for generations and that the people of the state of Zhou would have good lives and he was greatly successful and the fame of his deeds has never declined. This is all because he had no desires himself and there was nothing that he would not do. If you can understand this, although you might be cock fighting or racing dogs in the butcher's market or grasping an enemy's battle flag on the battlefield, it doesn't matter, you can do both of them, so why are you worried about serving in office?"

Thus Wu Nengzi concludes this chapter on a very Confucian note, even to the point of accepting the official Confucian model heroes Yao and Shun and the Duke of Zhou. Taking away all intentionality and all illusions about trying to rule for the benefit of the people, he seems to be saying, might sometimes allow, not just for serving in government, but in the end even for ruling in ways that would benefit oneself and others, but only if one does not have the desire or intention to benefit people at the outset.

If this conclusion is valid, then one might obviously ask if anything at all is left of Wu Nengzi's anarchism. After all, at a minimum one would think any anarchist doctrine should view the state as unnecessary, harmful, and dangerous. Though some Western anarchists, most famously Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, at some points accepted service in the state, perhaps for tactical or limited reasons, as also for example, some of the anarchists who cooperated with the Republican side in the Spanish civil war, most modern anarchists would point out the obvious contradictions even for tactical or temporary compromises with the state, since the main anarchist principle is that the state's very nature as a monopolistic operation will eventually lead it to dominate other interests, including those of class, interest group, gender, or ethnicity. If there is something in even the radical side of philosophical Daoism that would excuse state service, then it would seem the possibilities for Daoist anarchism are severely compromised, to say the least.

### III. More Narrow Problem: Is All Daoism Nihilism?

At other times as well in ancient China, individuals justified or excused service in the state using Daoist principles. If we can find some common shift in language or rhetoric among those who used Daoist terms to justify rule, perhaps we can determine whether those thinkers who remained loyal to the anarchistic side of Daoist thought shared a common flaw or whether those who accommodated themselves to rule introduced changes in Daoist thought not shared by radical Daoist thinkers, and perhaps not shared in the original Daoist texts such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuang Zi*. The three most important times earlier in Chinese history when thinkers used Daoism to justify or acquiesce in rule included the early years of the former Han dynasty (ca. 202 B.C.E.-9 C.E.), the first generation of the revival of philosophical Daoism at the end of the later Han dynasty (25-220 C.E.) and the third generation of neo-Daoists at the beginning of the Wei-Jin period (ca. 220-300's CE)

In the early Han dynasty, intellectuals were casting around for a suitable legitimating ideology of rule for the Han leaders, given that the previously prevailing ideology of Legalism had been discredited by the harsh rule of the Qin dynasty (221-207 C.E.) that the Han had recently overthrown. For a relatively short time, Daoism seemed to gain ascendancy at the Han court. The basic argument of these court Daoists was that the Han regime ruled lightly, with less harsh taxes and less need for military repression compared to the Qin and so could be said to be like the ideal ruler in the *Daodejing* who is unseen and unfelt by the people.

This use of concepts in the *Daodejing* to justify rule perhaps came from what is known as the "Huang-Lao" tradition, which combined the mythical Yellow emperor with a deified Lao Zi (the legendary author of the *Daodejing*). Most famously, in one of the silk manuscripts unearthed near the village of Mawangdui

in Hunan province in 1973 from a tomb that had been sealed in 168 B.C.E.,<sup>18</sup> the author argues that a ruler in touch with the *dao*, or the Way, should be able to know what is needed and how to get others to accept his rule:

Therefore only Sages are able to discern [the *dao*] in the Formless,  
And hear it in the Soundless.  
And knowing the reality of its emptiness,  
They can become totally empty,  
And then be absorbed in the purses essence of Heaven-and-Earth.  
Absorbed and merged without any gaps,  
Pervasive and united without filling it up.  
  
Fully to acquiesce to this Way:  
This is called “being able to be purified.”  
The lucid are inherently able to discern the ultimate.  
They know what others are unable to know,  
And acquiesce to what others are unable to attain.  
This is called “discerning the normative and knowing the ultimate.”  
  
If sage kings make use of this,  
All-under-Heaven will acquiesce.  
  
...  
One who is truly able to be without desires  
Can give commands to the people.  
If the one above truly acts without striving  
Then all living things will be completely at peace.<sup>19</sup>

The first change one can discern in early Han Daoism from ideas in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuang Zi*, seminal Daoist texts used by later Daoist anarchists to deny the need for all rule, is the Han thinkers’ confidence that the *dao* can be known and interpreted by the sages or even one sage-ruler and applied to others. The second, related shift concerns the blowing up of the concepts of nothingness ( *wu* ) and the emptiness or void at the heart of the universe.

The most famous version of this Daoist justification of rule in the early Han was the text known as the *Huainanzi*, which was presented to the future Han emperor Wu (r.141–187) in 139 B.C.E. as a preferred method of rule that would help justify his regime. The authors continue to use the principle of non-action or doing nothing ( *wuwei* ) found in the *Daodejing* but now interpret it, not as calling for anarchy, but as favouring a ruler in touch with the *dao* who rules by emptying his mind and limiting his and his subjects’ desires.<sup>20</sup> Roger Ames argues, however, that in practice the authors of this text were trying to subvert rule and get the king to rule in a less overbearing manner and thus continued to be influenced by the anarchist side of Daoism.<sup>21</sup> An anarchist-influenced observer, of course, might ask whether these intellectuals’ attempt to soften Han rule in practice was overwhelmed by their participation in aiding the state’s legitimation. In any case, it is the shift toward the belief in one or a few sages knowing how to interpret the *dao* for others based on a *dao* that is equated with nothingness that allows for the justification of rule.

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<sup>18</sup> For an account of the discovery of this manuscript, see Wm. Theodore deBary and Irene Bloom, trans. and comp., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 *From Earliest Times: to 1600*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 241–242.

<sup>19</sup> Translated in deBary and Bloom, 254–255.

<sup>20</sup> For partial translations of the *Huainanzi*, see de Bary and Bloom, 268–273, and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, ed. and trans., *Readings in Han Chinese Thought* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 2006), 63–4, 72–75; for a full translation see Roger Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study in Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Ames, 46, 148.

In the end, of course, the state eventually abandoned most claims to follow Daoist principles when the Han dynasty gradually had to rule more directly and forcefully as more officials and their families became tax exempt, public works needed to be repaired, and armies replenished to fight nomadic invaders and internal rebels. As a result, the Han eventually turned to a new synthesis of Confucian doctrines as its main legitimating ideology.

The second major period when philosophical Daoism was put in the service of rule was in the early Wei-Jin period (ca. 220–62 C.E.). At this time, after the fall of the later Han dynasty and the beginning of a long period of political disunity in imperial China, some of the intellectual figures around the legendary general Cao Cao (155–220), who was seeking ways to legitimate his rule as the leader of a would-be new imperial Wei dynasty, returned to the *Daodejing* find ways to justify his rule. The Daoist-influenced intellectuals serving him also returned to the idea of *wu*, or nothingness as the main principle of Daoism. According to this version, all things in the universe come not from an underlying unity in the world but from nothing. All actions should be carried out according to a principle of spontaneity (*ziran*), but for these Daoist advisors there was nothing wrong in principle with the idea of rule. Thus Cao Cao's rise from a person of low birth to that of possible emperor was the rise of a ruler coming "out of nowhere." Cao Cao's apologists used this version of philosophical Daoism against the rival Sima clan, who came from the higher class of land-owning gentry and whose preferred ideology of rule lay in the Confucian doctrine of the time known as *mingjiao*, or "teaching of names."<sup>22</sup> As Richard Mather puts it:

In the [early Wei] era the debris of Confucian ritualism had to be cleared away and room made for the new values of "Naturalness" [ *ziran*] and "Non-actuality" ( *wu*) to buttress the new order of government... [Originally] the new men like Cao Cao had risen to power by virtue of their ability alone, and the [Confucian] shibboleths of the old aristocracy concerning "goodness and morality" [ *ren-yi*] "loyalty and filial submission" [ *zhong-xiao*] were meaningless to them if a man could not conduct a [military] campaign successfully or manage an administrative post efficiently... And the men he gathered about him quickly furnished this pragmatic policy with an ideological base.<sup>23</sup>

Daoism was only one of many philosophical strands picked up by Cao Cao's coterie, who also borrowed concepts from Legalism and even Confucianism to justify his rule. In this synthesis, some intellectuals claimed that Confucius was a better sage than Lao Zi, as in the following exchange from the biography of the noted Wei philosopher Wang Bi (226–249):

[As Pei Hui asked Wang] "Nothing ( *wu*) is, in truth what the myriad things depend on for existence, yet the sage (Confucius) was unwilling to talk about it, while Master Lao expounded upon it endlessly. Why is that?" Wang Bi replied, "the sage embodied nothing ( *wu*), so he also knew that it could not be explained in words. Thus he did not talk about it. Master Lao, by contrast, operated on a level of being ( *you*). That is why he constantly discussed nothingness; he had to, for what he said about it always fell short."<sup>24</sup>

This elevation of Confucius above Lao Zi by the neo-Daoist intellectuals around Cao Cao mirrors their elevation of sages who rule over those who refuse to participate in rule, reversing the praise of the latter type of sages found most famously in the *Zhuang Zi* that the full-fledged Daoist anarchists Ruan Ji and Bao Jingyan had copied.

It was only after the Wei rulers were overthrown by the Sima clan, who founded the Jin dynasty, that some of the descendants of the Wei intellectuals turned philosophical Daoism into a doctrine opposing

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<sup>22</sup> See Balazs, 234–235.

<sup>23</sup> Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties," *History of Religions* 9, no. 2–3 (Nov. 1969 and Feb. 1970): 161, 163.

<sup>24</sup> In the *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*, translated in de Bary and Bloom, 385.

all rule, as reflected in the ideas of the poet Ruan Ji and the thinker Bao Jingyan. But as the Jin dynasty itself broke down into infighting among royal princes and as northern nomadic groups moved into northern China and the political situation became even more chaotic at the end of the Wei-Jin era of the Six Dynasties period (220–589), Daoist-influenced intellectuals and members of the upper classes turned neo-Daoism once again into a nihilistic doctrine. As Balazs puts it:

What had been, with men [of the second generation of antistatist neo-Daoists] a high state of tension that was part of a serious effort to transcend human limitations, relapsed into mere abandonment of the ordinary decencies of life. The frenzied attempt at emancipation had turned into wanton frivolity, the cry of cynical revolt to cynical acceptance, liberty to libertinage.<sup>25</sup>

Men of this third generation of neo-Daoists began once again to justify government service as being in line with *ziran* or spontaneity, based again on the idea of *wu* or nothingness as the basis of the *dao*.

What all three prior instances of Daoist anarchism turning into nihilism share then, is the emphasis on the universe as based on nothing and the idea of the superior ability of properly detached sages to realise this and to interpret principles for others without getting sullied or corrupted by rule. Of course Wu Nengzi shares at least the former belief, and implicitly the latter in his claim that the truly enlightened sage knows when serving in government is folly and when it is permissible. The shift in emphasis in all these instances was literally from everything to nothing, that is, from the belief in an overarching unity of the universe that cannot be objectively known and applied by some to rule over others to the idea that everything that seemingly exists comes from nothing and thus that there were no a priori principles that would make all rule illegitimate. The shift in all instances was also from the idea of rejecting all participation in government as inherently corrupting to the idea that the wisest people with the coolest attitude of detachment could have the superior knowledge and ability to allow them to acquiesce in rule, or even to rule over others themselves, without being corrupted.

The flaw then, is not in the Daoist principle of *wuwei* itself but in the denial of any pre-existing overarching principle underlying the unity of existence and equality of all things. What is also missing from those Daoists who justified rule and service in government is any true belief in human equality and freedom for all, not just for superior sages, despite the talk of favouring all equally in *Wunengzi* Book One, chapter five that we examined above.

## IV. Larger Problem: Is Post-Modern Anarchism Nihilism?

The larger problem presented by the breakdown of Daoist anarchism in the thought of Wu Nengzi into passive nihilism is the lesson for post-modernist thought, especially those post-modernists who call themselves anarchists.

Anarchists up to the post-modernist period would reject the classic conservative critique that by denying the existence of pre-existing standards of morality, all anarchism is nihilism in the end. This conservative stance is perhaps most cogently summarised by Fyodor Dostoevsky's claim that "once God is abolished, anything is possible" and in his denunciation of early Russian revolutionaries as immoral nihilists too easily duped by power hungry would-be supermen, such as Sergei Nechaev, the associate of Michael Bakunin and the basis for the character of Pyotr Verkhovetsky in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Devils*.<sup>26</sup> Classic anarchists, most notably Peter Kropotkin, are more easily able to reject this critique

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<sup>25</sup> Balazs, 247.

<sup>26</sup> The title of this novel has also been translated as *The Dispossessed* and more recently, by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky as *Demons* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), who note in their foreword, vii-viii, that Dostoevsky based the character of Verkhovetsky on Sergei Nechaev and his actions in the actual murder of the fellow revolutionary Sergei Ivanov.

in their claim that there is a natural underlying morality of humans based on human evolution that exists prior to the establishment of organised religion and the state.<sup>27</sup>

Many post-modernist thinkers, on the other hand, would seem more open to the conservative critique, to the extent that they accept the premise that all “meta-narratives” meant to explain the world and give people a guide to action are inherently just constructions of new forms of domination that stand in the way of liberatory goals. While they claim to deny any overarching “meta-narrative” as valid for all other people, one must ask whether post-modernist anarchists reserve for themselves the right to be critical of all other narratives while preserving their own ideas as something other than a true narrative. Even if they claim their own approach is not a meta-narrative but only a stance of “ironic detachment,” then one could argue that this stance too easily smacks of intellectual superiority.

While they clearly remain within the tradition of classical anarchists who viewed all religious and political doctrines as attempts to enslave people with metaphysical or real authority, one must ask whether post-modernist anarchists go further to deny the existence of all truth, even truth that cannot be known objectively or imposed on others. If so, as many critics have asked about post-modernism, how is one to criticise any political doctrine or state as evil, even fascist ones? This charge was most famously and perhaps for post-modernists most infuriatingly raised by Richard Wolin, who tries to relate the collaborationist and even fascist background of some of the seminal post-modernist thinkers in order to expose flaws in post-modernist thought as a whole.<sup>28</sup> While those who want to find a genuine liberatory critique in post-modernism may decry his attack as relying almost completely on guilt by association, perhaps it is too easy for post-modernist anarchists to make this charge and ignore the need for serious self-examination. It seems obvious to me that the move among Daoist thinkers such as Wu Nengzi from pacifist anarchism to passive nihilism was based on a similar shift in emphasis from the non-existence of hierarchical distinctions to the non-existence of everything.

This charge of nihilism against post-modernist and/or “lifestyle” anarchists who think their intellectual stance alone will serve to achieve anarchism may be the opposite side of the coin of those who find Daoist anarchism a mystical doctrine that relies on a supernatural authority and is thus inherently un-anarchist, a view of Daoism with which I obviously strongly disagree.<sup>29</sup> Even if Daoists believe in the existence of an overarching, undifferentiated whole, they would deny that one can objectively reconstruct that whole for others. More dangerous, a Daoist anarchist would argue, is any doctrine based on the idea that some may know objective truths better than other people, and thus also when to apply those truths on behalf of others, which may too easily lead to would-be anarchists acquiescing and even participating in establishing authority over fellow humans. Only by embracing the whole, not denying its existence, a Daoist anarchist would argue—that is, by accepting the underlying unity and thus equality of all things, even if by its very nature that whole cannot be hierarchically organised—can one stay loyal to a fully anarchist vision.

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<sup>27</sup> Kropotkin expressed this idea of a naturally existing human morality most famously in his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Heineman, 1902), and also in his unfinished but posthumously published work, *Ethics: Origin and Development* (New York: Dial Press, 1925).

<sup>28</sup> See Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> A charge made against Daoism by Janet Biehl, an associate of Murray Bookchin and the Social Ecology school, in our exchanges on the Research on Anarchism (RA-L) listserv at [listes.univ-montp3.fr](mailto:listes.univ-montp3.fr). See Biehl, “Re: Comment on Bookchin,” part two, Sep. 30, 1998; “Reply to Rapp,” parts 1 one and two, Oct. 22, 1998; my original post on Oct. 2 1998; and my rejoinder to her critique on Oct. 28, 1998. My own postings from this debate at least are also accessible online at [www.zpub.com](http://www.zpub.com).



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# CHAPTER TEN. KENNETH REXROTH'S INTEGRATIVE VISION: ANARCHISM, POETRY, AND THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN POST-WORLD WAR II SAN FRANCISCO

MICHAEL T. VAN DYKE

*San Francisco became the locus for the development of an anarchist and spiritually-tinged counter-culture in the fifteen years following the Second World War because of several interrelated factors. First, it was a culturally and religiously diverse city that had been a hotbed of labour radicalism throughout the first half of the century. Second, due to the confinement of many of its Japanese-American and pacifist citizens in internment camps during the war, it had felt the power of the state in an especially acute way. Third, Kenneth Rexroth lived there. Rexroth, who had grown up in Chicago during that city's own cultural renaissance, drew upon an encyclopaedic knowledge of cultural history and a wealth of personal experiences to create a unique communal consciousness in the Bay area that eventually cohered into practices that offered a radically alternative model of social reality. This consciousness directly countered certain prominent trends in American (literary) culture at that time—namely a common “cultural religion,” the Zen-inspired “escape from reality” of the Beats, and the traditionalist “return to religion” among East-coast literary intellectuals—and it was deeply influenced by an interest in anarchist thought. Rexroth played a prominent role in disseminating the writings of the foremost anarchist thinkers at his Friday evening “at homes,” and he also theorised how the poetry reading could act as a force for social cohesion in the emerging counter-culture. Fundamentally, he saw the poetry reading as a means for creating a religious sense of reality that was neither confined to the isolated self, nor dependent upon the legitimising power of the state.*

The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.<sup>1</sup>

—Gary Snyder, “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution”

Every day all states do things which, if they were the acts of individuals, would lead to summary arrest and often execution.<sup>2</sup>

—Kenneth Rexroth

Before the Second World War, San Francisco was a fairly insignificant city on the world stage, cut off from the centres of commerce, politics, and the arts in the United States by thousands of miles of

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Snyder, “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution,” in *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 92.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, “Introduction,” in Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (Farra: Straus Giroux, 1961), v.

geography. It was also marked by cultural traditions that, like those of New Orleans, were relatively exotic to most Americans. For example, it was a religiously heterogeneous city, more dramatically diverse than even New York City, with a lingering Catholic presence (established by the numerous missions in the area) existing side by side with Asian meditative traditions brought over by Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Protestantism was only a minor contributor to the spiritual stew of the region.

San Francisco also had a strong heritage of radicalism, with the general strike of 1934 being only one episode in a long history of labour revolt. In the early twentieth century San Francisco was a centre of Wobbly (Industrial Workers of the World) activity, and in the North Beach section of the city a large population of Italian immigrants carried on the legacy of Malatesta by holding discussion groups and continually agitating for better working conditions on the docks. It was not until after the Second World War, however, that these two traditions—heterogeneous spirituality and uncompromising radicalism—merged in a meaningful way. And it happened, strangely enough, through the auspices of literary renaissance, for which much of the credit must be given to Kenneth Rexroth, who was the leading poet and cultural instigator in the city by that time.

Rexroth came to San Francisco in 1927 from Chicago, where he had taken part in certain aspects of the burgeoning ferment of radicalism and the arts that would later be called the Chicago Renaissance. An orphan from the age of thirteen, Rexroth had lived a somewhat wild life on Chicago's South Side; but he had also taken it upon himself to engage in a massive program of self-education, turning himself into an artist and a competent intellectual by his late teens. He never received a high school diploma, but he did learn quite a bit about radical social and political philosophies from the soapbox speakers who hung around "Bughouse Square" (Washington Square Park) on the North Side. Along the way he also had several intense mystical experiences, recounted in his *Autobiographical Novel*, which led him to spend some time in a monastery in New York. He chose the life of the poet over the life of the mystic at that time; later, though, he would discount any sharp dichotomies between the two activities.

Rexroth ultimately decided to live in the Bay area because the mild climate mitigated his wife, Andree's, epileptic seizures. It was not long before he realised, however, that the city held many possibilities for a young poet and radical. Throughout the 1930s Rexroth wrote for labour weeklies, started a John Reed Club, helped to paint the interior of Coit Tower as part of a Works Progress Administration project, and wrote most of the poems that would go into his groundbreaking book *In What Hour*.<sup>3</sup>

He also struggled to reconcile his early Christian mysticism with his evolving radicalism. Though he joined the Communist Party for a short time in the mid-1930s, his basic attitude towards the institution of the Party remained sceptical, and he gradually became a consistent critic of Stalinism from the Left. Anything that coerced and thus violated the integrity of the individual conscience was anathema to him.

As he expressed to poet Louis Zukofsky in a series of letters<sup>4</sup> in the early 1930s, for Rexroth the poet was always the figure of ultimate disaffiliation whose role was to express a sensibility in which personal and social values cohered. The poet was the circulator of a vision of the community of love, in which free individuals found transcendent meaning in their relationship to each other. It was a vision that superseded all political programs and that merged literature and social responsibility in a way that was inconceivable to the proletarian poets of the 1930s. Nonetheless, Rexroth's activities during that decade were hardly consistent in bringing about coherence to his own life and career, much less that of his community in San Francisco. The 1930s, while fertile in artistic and political experimentation, was largely a time of scattered energies.

The Second World War brought everything to a focus. Most of the writers in the Bay area were forced to consider whether they would join in the war effort or stand against it, and many, like Rexroth, decided to register as conscientious objectors. In Rexroth's case, this gave him the opportunity to clarify his relationship to the American state, and set him on a course towards espousing a more definite

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, *In What Hour* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1940).

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Rexroth to Louis Zukofsky, 16 January 1931 and 10 March 1931, *Chicago Review* 52, no. 2–4 (Autumn 2006): 17–40.

anarchist stance. His move in this direction was further solidified when President Roosevelt signed the Internment Act, sending many Japanese-Americans off to camps that were harsher than those reserved for conscientious objectors. During this time Rexroth participated in a type of “underground railroad” to hide citizens of Japanese descent from the authorities. He also made contact with many of the literary and artistic conscientious objectors in the Northwest who came to San Francisco when they were allowed to take weekend leaves from the camps. A good number of these poets and artists later took up residence in the city and were a part of the post-war renaissance, to which they brought not only their artistic abilities but also the religious sentiments that caused most of them to be conscientious objectors in the first place.

The final straw in the creation of an incipient anarchist consciousness on the West Coast was the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. For many residents of the Bay area who were accustomed to mingling with people of Japanese descent, this was a psychological blow that even the more radical literati on the East coast could not fully understand. The various strands of political dissent, religious sensibility, and artistic practice that had occasionally intertwined in the past in the Bay area now came together to create something that American culture had never seen before.

Since many books and articles have explored the literary scene in post-war San Francisco from a literary perspective, in this chapter I want to focus more on the religious and anarchist substrates that gave the literary culture of the Bay area its truly *alternative* nature. It must be kept in mind, however, that Kenneth Rexroth’s views on the role of poetry in society have been consistently misunderstood by critics because his views were pure reflections of these under-acknowledged substrates that to date have been relatively ignored. Hence, Rexroth himself has been largely underappreciated. I believe it is time, though, to reconsider what was going on in San Francisco after the war, since it may have many implications for a realignment of religion and anarchism today.

## Religion in Post-War America

Post-Second World War America was not a culture marked by great religious depth. Writers such as Peter Berger and Will Herberg, among others, have argued that the nation was dominated throughout the period by a common cultural religion (usually cloaked in Protestant forms) that by and large affirmed the values of technological “efficiencies,” and of unbounded economic prosperity, over traditional spiritual values. It was a religious culture that valued “adjustment” to a society which was believed to be “fundamentally good,” but that, according to Berger and others, had also abdicated an independent prophetic function.<sup>5</sup> It was a religious sensibility that had also denied, in a psychological sense, the more grisly realities of American life. Herberg explained that

the religion which actually prevails among Americans today has lost much of its authentic Christian (or Jewish) content ... American religion and American society would seem to be so closely interrelated as to make it virtually impossible to understand either without reference to the other.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in the analysis of Herberg and Berger, American religion had become just one more prop to a burgeoning sense of American exceptionalism. In regard to the effects on the individual American, Berger asserted that this “cultural religion”

provides [him] with the means by which he can hide from himself the true nature of his existence. Religion reassures and strengthens him in his social roles, however “inauthentic”

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City: Doubleday Books, 1961), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), 3.

these may be. Religion thus tends to be an obstacle in the progress towards “authenticity” as a person. In a word, religion prevents ecstasy.<sup>7</sup>

This last sentence was hardly indicative of the approach to spirituality in the post-war Bay area, where religion never was a means of accommodation to the larger society. Instead, by focusing almost solely on the primary religious texts, and reading them in an historical way, San Francisco writers saw the religious sensibilities reflected in those texts as providing the route to deeper insights about humanity and more profound experiences than were allowed under the dominant cultural mores. Indeed, for the poets of the Bay area, religion as expressed through its primary texts was one of the primary vehicles of ecstatic experience, especially in the sense of transcending the self in the Other through love. Unlike Berger, though, the Bay area writers would not have articulated their critique in doctrinaire existential terms, since existentialism as a formal philosophy was, in many cases, another impediment to the kind of experience they were seeking to inhabit. For Rexroth, existentialism was a logical outgrowth of the dualistic Augustinian and Cartesian philosophies that had dominated Western thought for so many centuries. It posited the Self within an ultimately impenetrable aloneness. Rexroth and Robert Duncan, a major San Francisco poet and Theosophist, would have argued that existentialism was itself an impediment to authenticity, if they had ever wanted to use such terms, since it created artificial psychological barriers to intense interpersonal experience.<sup>8</sup>

Instead of adopting existentialist rationales for the relevance of religion, most of the San Francisco poets found religion *qua* religion to be valid on its own grounds. When used as a prop to social, cultural, or philosophical identities, it was always perverted and made into less than it actually was. They saw religious modes of thought and action as providing the most significant ways of confronting and mitigating the accumulated ills of humanity. And, like Jesus or Sakyamuni, they found that their reinterpretations of older traditions put them into a position of advocating a non-violent anarchism towards temporal institutions, while stressing the virtues of personal responsibility and counter-cultural wisdom. On this nakedly historical and simple approach hinged much of the alternative status of the San Francisco literary community.

Indeed, San Francisco’s literary culture during the post-war period gradually posited, or became self-conscious of, its own cultural meaning, especially in regard to its pivotal geographical status between the dominant political structures of Western culture and the soon-to-be pervasive religious modes of Southeast Asia. Thus, to a certain extent it became the testing ground for both the continuing validity of these structures and modes within a new internationalist perspective, and for the possibilities of legitimately blurring the boundaries between even such fundamental cultural categories as religion and politics .

Kenneth Rexroth was possibly more conscious than anybody of this junction of cultural meanings and opportunities that San Francisco represented following the war, and out of this understanding he developed his ideas about how a counter-culture based around poetry could negotiate the interweaving of religious and political energies in the Bay area. For Rexroth, a cultural renaissance that gave poetry a public role had the potential to enliven and maintain the community of freedom and love that mystics and anarchists have always talked about. Such a renaissance was, potentially, both a mode of disaffiliation and a remedy to cultural nihilism.

## Rexroth and the Anarchists

Though Kenneth Rexroth was certainly political active during the 1930s, he never embraced Marxism or communism with the religious fervour of many of his contemporaries. It seems that he did not need to

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<sup>7</sup> Berger, 102.

<sup>8</sup> After Rexroth, Duncan was probably the most respected intellectual of the Bay area literary scene. Yet Duncan always gave Rexroth credit for his own political education.

fill the same sort of existential void the others seemed to feel. Moreover, he never threw himself into the communist cause as if it were a divine prophetic truth to be accepted at face value and blindly trusted because it was the only description of reality. Neither did he accept the mythological underpinnings that were psychologically attractive to many who became militant communists during the Thirties. Arthur Koestler describes the parallelism between communist and religious militancies in this way:

From the psychologist's point of view, there is little difference between a revolutionary and a traditionalist faith. All true faith is uncompromising, radical, purist; hence the true traditionalist is always a revolutionary zealot in conflict with pharasaian [ sic] society, with the lukewarm corrupters of the creed. And vice-versa: the revolutionary's Utopia, which in appearance represents a complete break with the past, is always modeled on some image of the lost Paradise, of a legendary Golden age. The classless Communist society, according to Marx and Engels, was to be a revival, at the end of the dialectical spiral, of the primitive Communist society which stood at its beginning. Thus all true faith involves a revolt against the believer's social environment, and the projection into the future of an ideal derived from the remote past. All Utopias are fed from the sources of mythology; the social engineer's blueprints are merely revised editions of the ancient text.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than falling into this sort of bi-polar thinking, Rexroth's loose allegiance to Marxism was, seen retrospectively, merely a theoretical aid to comprehending the dynamics of social relations while also serving as an adjunct to his view of history. It was never, to him, "the god that failed" (the title of Crossman's book, which the above Koestler quote comes from). He accepted communist activism during the Thirties as the most radical, yet practical, means for improving the relations of production and consumption on a large scale. He saw communist social relations as a much more humane way of organising society than was possible under industrial capitalism, and he also saw communism as conforming to primitive religious virtues more than any other system. However, when methods were dictated to him from the Party that he felt were coercive or merely bureaucratic, he was not willing to sacrifice his identity as an independent artist or his personal integrity as an intellectual to the Party.

By the mid-1930s, in fact, Rexroth had already become disillusioned by the Communist Party's willingness to subsume the full reality of persons to an abstract cause and to arbitrary decrees. When the revelations about Stalin's regime came out in the next few years, it was too late for him to be surprised. By then, he was well on his way towards moving into a full-fledged anarchism, a stance that complemented, with fewer contradictions, his basic identity as a poet and religious mystic.

And if Rexroth can be credited with fanning the flames of anarchism in mid-century San Francisco, as I think he can be, it would be on account of his constant dissemination of the primary international anarchist writers like Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Michael Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin in the various anarchist meetings he was involved with, and even through his K. P. F. A. "Classics Revisited" broadcasts. In these writers he found an anarchism that was rooted in human personality, a practical theory for direct action in the interests of an integrated society, and somewhat surprisingly, a radical stance that did not disallow his mystical leanings. They provided theoretical fundamentals for a modern anarchist movement, but not programs to be systematically carried out.

The anarchists named above were motivated by a radical humanism. In their writings they constantly extolled the inherent powers of human intellect and agency. They were not all Rousseauian idealists, but they all felt that the whole question of human nature, as usually posed by philosophers and theologians, was based on bogus a priori assumptions that admitted very little connection between human nature and the social environment that affected it. As Emma Goldman wrote,

Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name? Every fool, from king to policeman, from the flat-headed parson to the visionless dabbler in science,

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur Koestler, quoted in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949), 16.

presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature. The greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weaknesses of human nature. Yet, how can anyone speak of it today, with every soul in a prison, with every heart fettered, wounded, and maimed? John Burroughs has stated that experimental study of animals in captivity is absolutely useless. Their character, their habits, their appetites undergo a complete transformation when torn from their soil in field and forest. With human nature caged in a narrow space, whipped daily into submission, how can we speak of its potentialities? Freedom, expansion, opportunity, and, above all, peace and repose, alone can teach us the real dominant factors of human nature and all its wonderful possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

By and large, the principal anarchist thinkers contradicted a simplistic reading of Darwin's notion of "survival of the fittest" and never really allowed for the possibility that in the last analysis, after all the chains upon it had been loosed, that human nature would not turn out to be basically benevolent. Instead, as Alexander Berkman writes, they had seen enough, had caught sufficient glimpses, of the potentialities of the strictly human (within inhuman conditions) to make grand generalisations about what an anarchist future would be like.

Life in freedom, in anarchy, will do more than liberate man merely from his present political and economic bondage. That will be only the first step, the preliminary to a truly human existence. Far greater and more significant will be the *results* of such liberty, its effects upon man's mind, upon his personality. The abolition of the coercive external will, and with it the fear of authority, will loosen the bonds of moral compulsion no less than of economic and political. Man's spirit will breathe freely, and that mental emancipation will be the birth of a new culture, of a new humanity...Instead of "thou shalt not," the public conscience will say "thou mayest, taking full responsibility." ... Life will mean the striving for finer cultural values, the penetration of nature's mysteries, the attainment of higher truth. Free to exercise the limitless possibilities of his mind, to pursue his love of knowledge, to apply his inventive genius, to create, and to soar on the wings of imagination, man will reach his full stature and become man indeed... He will scorn uniformity, and human diversity will give him increased interest in, and a more satisfying sense of, the richness of being; ... he will attain ... freedom in joy.<sup>11</sup>

Prince Petr Kropotkin was a central figure for Rexroth because of how he extended a positive view of human nature into the social realm. In *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin explicated a theory of human sociability that directly subverted most of the major political ideas of western culture and that provided anarchists with a historical justification for their optimism about the possibilities inherent within a society not dominated by institutions. Moreover, the implications of the following passage for Rexroth's hopes for fomenting an alternative communal consciousness in San Francisco after the Second World War should be apparent. Kropotkin wrote:

Sociability and need of mutual aid and support are such inherent parts of human nature that at no time of history can we discover men living in small isolated families, fighting each other for the means of subsistence. On the contrary, modern research ... proves that since the very beginning of their prehistoric life men used to agglomerate into *gentes*, clans, or tribes, maintained by an idea of common descent and by worship of common ancestors. For thousands and thousands of years this organization has kept men together, even though there was no authority to impose it. It has deeply impressed all subsequent development of mankind; and when the bonds of common descent had been loosened by migrations on

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<sup>10</sup> Emma Goldman, quoted in Henry J. Silverman, ed., *American Radical Thought: The Libertarian Tradition* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970), 173.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Berkman, quoted in Silverman, 194-195.

a grand scale, while the development of the separated family within the clan itself had destroyed the old unity of the clan, a new form of union, territorial in its principle—the village community—was called into existence by the social genius of man. This institution, again, kept men together for a number of centuries, permitting them to further develop their social institutions and to pass through some of the darkest periods of history, without being dissolved into loose aggregations of families and individuals, to make a further step in their evolution, and to work out a number of secondary social institutions, several of which have survived down to the present time. We have now to follow the further developments of the same ever-living tendency for mutual aid.<sup>12</sup>

Anarchism, for these thinkers, was not a program that could be definitively and universally stated in a manifesto, like the multiple pronouncements of the Italian Futurists. Where Marx wanted to expose ideologies because they masked the true sources of economic oppression, the anarchists went further in condemning every single restriction upon human freedom and the human spirit, except in cases where communities created non-coercive conditions for mutual reciprocity. On the issue of “anarchist method,” Emma Goldman writes:

Anarchism is not, as some may suppose, a theory of the future to be realized through divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions. The methods of Anarchism therefore do not comprise an iron-clad program to be carried out under all circumstances. Methods must grow out of the economic needs of each place and clime, and of the individual and temperamental requirements of the individual ... Anarchism does not stand for military drill and uniformity; it does, however, stand for the spirit of revolt, in whatever form, against everything that hinders human growth. All Anarchists agree in that, as they also agree in their opposition to the political machinery as a means of bringing about the great social change.<sup>13</sup>

Just as was the case with religious anarchists, like Tolstoy, who historically preceded him, Rexroth’s mystical religious leanings did not conflict with his endorsement of anarchist virtues, since the anarchist rejection of the church as an institution was based on its historic role as an exterior controlling force upon the lives of individuals. In this role it was rendered equivalent to the state and the capitalist system. Anarchists believed that these institutions imposed order through physical, economic, or psychological force and justified themselves by claiming to be the necessary safeguards of freedom. The standard anarchist response has been that “liberty is the mother (and not the daughter) of order.”<sup>14</sup>

To Rexroth, what amounted to a practical escape from institutional control was quite simple, requiring, though, a measure of courage, integrity and self-reliance. In the tradition of Thoreau, one could carry out the firm decision to step outside the system in a personal act of autonomy, or, in the language that many of the churches degraded, one can *sanctify* oneself. One could do this in a religious sense by opting out of the hollow religious value systems of the dominant cultural religion and returning to the simple doctrines and experiences of the primary texts and communities. Such a return to the type of religion revealed in the primary texts, though, would do much to undermine the bases upon which institutional churches have justified themselves. As Rexroth writes,

The great churches have indisputably compromised the simple ethics of the Gospels, and yet, Protestant and Catholic, they have always represented the Christian ethic as extraordinarily difficult and even unpleasant. It is nothing of the sort.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Petr Kropotkin, quoted in Emile Capouya and Kietna Tompkins, eds., *The Essential Kropotkin* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 170.

<sup>13</sup> Goldman, quoted in Silverman, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Usually attributed to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the mid-nineteenth century French anarchist thinker.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, “The Kingdom of God is Within You,” in *More Classics Revisited*, ed. Bradford Morrow (New York: New Directions, 1989), 128.



Rexroth claimed that the ethics of the Gospels are neither difficult nor unpleasant. They are simply the ethics that arise out of a community attempting to live together in illuminated harmony, or even, more simply, those of a social group which values its own survival. In a review of Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Rexroth brushes aside as ironic the criticisms that have labelled Tolstoy a crank. He writes that the religion of Tolstoy

in the final analysis ... is not cranky or odd at all. It is common. The significant thing is that, by and large, give and take a few pathetic sins, men do not behave in their daily relations with one another as states and churches and even abstractions like classes behave on the stage of history. If they had, we wouldn't be here.<sup>16</sup>

The Second World War did much to cement the fusion between Rexroth's anarchism, his mystical temperament, and his aesthetic vision. It first of all left no doubt as to the potential for evil inherent in the modern state. It revealed to him that the primary function of the modern state was to wage war, or, as Randolph Bourne's old adage put it, "War is the health of the state."<sup>17</sup> Also, as a conscientious objector himself, and as someone who actively came to the aid of other conscientious objectors, he greatly admired religious groups, primarily Quakers, who during the war resisted the government with a sense of purpose that obviously emanated from a core of mystical piety. Finally, Rexroth became linked up with artists and poets of a religious temperament, many of whom, like William Everson, resided in conscientious objectors' camps all over the Pacific Northwest. Many of these sought him out when they were on weekend releases, and later they took a large role in the broad cultural activities that made up the San Francisco renaissance.

All of these factors in combination led to a crystallisation and focusing of Rexroth's activities after the war. No longer would there be attempts to be a part of a larger (inter)national organisation, or to compromise in a sort of "united front" mentality. In a 1969 interview, Rexroth described how his newly-focused activity grew out of, but also constituted a break from, his earlier activities.

All during those years [1930s] we always had poetry readings and discussions and then during the war we set up a thing called the Randolph Bourne Council in which we gathered up the radical intellectuals in town that were not Stalinist. We tried to gather the Trotskyites, which was hopeless. Immediately after the war we simply organized an open and aboveboard Anarchist Circle. We used to have bigger meetings than any other radical group.<sup>18</sup>

This "Anarchist Circle" gradually developed into regular Friday evening soirees at Rexroth's house where he exercised an intense cultural influence. At these meetings there was, in reaction to the habits of orthodox Bolshevism, neither hierarchy nor agenda. Most of the time was spent working out "new techniques of group relationships" which proved fundamental to anchoring a pervasive anarchist sentiment within San Francisco culture by the time of the Six Gallery reading.<sup>19</sup> About this evolution in the cultural atmosphere, Rexroth observed,

Between 1950 and 1955, the necessity for organization began to die out because other people could become activist. It was no longer necessary to educate somebody to make an anarchist poet out of him. He had a milieu in which he could naturally become such a thing. But for years, it was a slow process of breaking down rigid ideologies and then creating a different thing.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rexroth, "The Kingdom," 128.

<sup>17</sup> Randolph Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 71.

<sup>18</sup> Rexroth, quoted in David Meltzer, *Golden Gate: Interviews with Five San Francisco Poets* (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1976), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Meltzer, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Meltzer, 26.

That “different thing” was a cultural atmosphere in which all ideological political and social orderings which did not grow out of the organic experience of the local community were viewed with suspicion. They were seen as imposing artificial values upon a community whose shared daily life did not reinforce the legitimacy of those values. The end of such an imposition was an atmosphere of social alienation and cultural fragmentation, if not actual death. The alternative was to live as if the community existed in a state pre-existent to all ideological systems. Yet as the quote above attests, this was no easy process.

Herbert Read, the English anarchist and art critic, has pointed out that anarchy means “without ruler,” not “without order”.<sup>21</sup> Though some San Francisco writers of the time may have subscribed to the extremism of an “anarchical” disorder, most, including Rexroth, viewed anarchism as an existential mode wherein the debris of “consumerised” political stances were gradually cleared away so that social values and orderings could arise out of intense and deeply shared experiences, and not just by reverting to “natural law.” And the poetry reading (sometimes to jazz) came to be seen as an opportunity for the poet to enter into a type of communion with the audience based upon how he or she valued and imaginatively ordered a realm of shared experiences.

## Literary-Religious Styles of Anarchism

Rexroth’s emphasis on how the “religious experience” helped to maintain an organically healthy community and culture serves to highlight his divergence from other literary sensibilities and groupings that were at least tinged with an anarchist flavour in the post-war period.

Geoffrey Ostergaard, in a contemporary analysis of the beat movement, lumped beats, beatniks, and hipsters together as “latter-day anarchists.” He saw them as individuals who were concerned primarily with present and immediate personal relationships, and who were eschatological or apocalyptic, rather than utopian, in outlook. Primarily through the practice of Zen, they also sought a type of existential salvation.

This salvation, though, could only be found deeply within the self and its individual resources, with Ostergaard characterising Zen as

an intensely personal, subjective religion ... and one which discounts logic, intellect, memories of the past and present, and fear of the future, relying instead on flash-like moments of intuition.<sup>22</sup>

It was a type of salvation that has become a cliché of both Hollywood and the self-help industry—“look deep inside yourself to find the key to happiness and success.” Ostergaard’s description of Zen as a religious mode of expression that was primarily irrational, uncommitted and centred on the self explains why it was easily popularised within certain segments of American culture. On this basis its true alternativity, especially according to Rexroth’s ideas, must be questioned. The possibility remains that it was merely the (Jungian) shadow of the dominant culture expressing itself through a dramatisation of the self’s plight under institutional control.

According to Rexroth’s post-war vision, in order to be truly alternative the beats would have had to disaffiliate not only from those dominant forms of religiosity in post-war America that resisted creativity, individuality, and all that was potentially ecstatic about life, but also from those lingering forms of romanticism that ultimately rejected all social values as illusory. In their failure to disaffiliate in this regard, they fell short of being religious anarchists, and were merely literary and cultural romantics who were caught within the vicissitudes of the alienated self.

Lionel Trilling saw John Keats as helping to create this particular romantic archetype, and strangely celebrated it in his essay “The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters.” Trilling claimed that Keats found in

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<sup>21</sup> Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Ostergaard, *Latter-Day Anarchism: The Politics of the American Beat Generation* (n.p.: Harold Laski Institute of Political Sciences, 1964), 17.

Shakespeare's dramas a suggestion of the only salvation possible, which is a "tragic salvation, the soul accepting the fate that defines it."<sup>23</sup> This is essentially salvation through withdrawal, a stoic casting of the creative Self ever deeper into the Self in order to escape outside forces of disintegration. This withdrawal leaves open no avenue for entering into social (or spiritual) unity with the Other, in whatever guise it may present itself.

The only meaningful reality then becomes a heroic elaboration of the Self within an ultimate aloneness, since that is what is recognised as the defining fate. It is inevitable that such a tragic romanticism would bring about a perverse conflation of art and religion, since a religion that carried with it values of a more comprehensive order than solely aesthetic values would be impossible to conceive. Thus, religion as religion is lost, along with its potentially life-affirming social values.

Ironically, Keats found descendents not only in the beat movement, but among the seemingly anti-revolutionary inhabitants of the East Coast literary establishment. One of the most remarkable developments to hit English Departments and literary quarterlies in mid-twentieth century America was a massive so-called "return to religion." In some ways this was related to the general swelling of the church rolls in the post-war period, but in other important ways it was similar to the type of withdrawal from creative interaction with the Other that Keats exemplified. In this case, though, it was not a falling back on the semi-divine Self that occurred; rather, it was the investment of religion with a role as literature's keeper, as literature had already been invested with the role of maintaining a certain kind of civilised ideal.

Since most of English literature had been written within a Christian milieu, Christianity became an essential link to a past, or tradition, which was now accorded semi-divine status in a world of chaos. Partisan Review editor Philip Rahv was one of the most perceptive observers of this subtle intermingling, or even equation, of the values of literature and religion. In a 1950 essay entitled, "Religion and the Intellectuals," he explained that post-war writers and critics were embracing traditionalism, not belief in God, and that

the center of gravity of traditionalism *is seldom in religious experience*. Its center, clearly, is in the attachment to the social and cultural order of some past age in which religion, in a highly developed and institutionalized form, played an integral part.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, religion became one more means of social control and not a mode of existence in which life became centred around the multi-faceted experience of transcendence. The core of such a "bloodless religion"<sup>25</sup> was inherently alienating, in that the Self continually attempted to re-enact the past in the midst of present realities that called for creative attention. This was accomplished by a type of measured withdrawal from experience in the name of authority.

Variations on this type of paranoid religious mode have occurred throughout the history of American culture. It is a mode that prefers a codified order over a more spontaneous openness to experience and new meanings; it finds its identity within long or successfully established institutions; and it prefers to maintain a sort of aura around specialised social roles and activities that have perhaps outlived their original meanings. Almost by definition, those who seek to exist within alternative, and in some cases more primitive, religious modes are seen to be propagating a dangerous anarchism.

It is also ironic that it was the academic keepers of literature in the post-war period who looked to the artist to fulfil the autonomous and semi-divine role of saviour of society, whereas the avant-garde writers of the San Francisco Bay area usually saw themselves operating within a community of artists (in which the poetry reading functioned as a sort of metaphor). These academics also saw the artist as much more of a contributing member within, instead of outside, society, and they allowed art and

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<sup>23</sup> Lionel Trilling, "The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters," in *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 47.

<sup>24</sup> Philip Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 170–171 (italics mine).

<sup>25</sup> Rahv, 171.

religion to occupy their separate, yet complementary, spheres of activity. By tapping into much more enduring traditions and conceptions of the artist in society, the San Francisco poets were, in a sense, the true traditionalists. As Rexroth put it,

modern literary and artistic society tends to substitute art for religion. Much modern criticism places a burden on the artist that he was never designed to bear. On the other hand, modern social practice, rather than theory, has led to a radical divorce between the professional practice of religion and the practice of the arts. This is just part of the overspecialization of modern life. There is no reason why a saint or a theologian should not be a very great poet... It would be very nice if this sort of thing were to come back into fashion.<sup>26</sup>

The difference between this vision and Keats' is subtle, and yet crucial. The anarchist view, as opposed to the romantic view, allows individuals to explore all of their potentialities within a fluid social order without forcing the artist to take up an existential position outside the free social order. Rexroth himself was an example of this exemplification of different social roles within one person. As a poet, journalist, painter, labour agitator, teacher, outdoorsman, and community leader—to name only the most prominent—his personality was an integration of many roles and perspectives. This openness to a fluidity, and yet subtle distinction, between artistic and political roles can also be seen in the careers of Gary Snyder, William Everson, Allen Ginsberg, and Michael McClure.

## The Practice of Religious Anarchism

Kenneth Rexroth fundamentally agreed with Herbert Read, contra Marxist materialism and anarchists like Michael Bakunin and Emma Goldman, that a healthy society rested upon an irrational religious or mystical base. In *Anarchy and Order*, Read wrote that “there has never been a civilization without its corresponding religion, and the appearance of rationalism and scepticism is always a symptom of decadence.”<sup>27</sup> “Communist” anarchism, such as that which was held to by Bakunin and Goldman, was useful as a practical revolutionary method; yet, despite the warm-blooded pragmatism it ideally exercised, Rexroth observed that it was also liable to fall into ideological obfuscations, non-relevance, and organisational wrangling in its actual extenuation. George Woodcock, an old anarchist friend of Rexroth's, gave some reasons why Rexroth could have been no longer be considered a “pure” communist-anarchist, part of an international anarchist movement, by the turn of the half-century.

there was indeed a doctrinaire aridity about anarchism in the later 1940s that made it almost qualify as one of George Orwell's “smelly little orthodoxies.” The old movement of Kropotkin and Malatesta was virtually moribund, and the new movement of the late 1960s had not yet risen from the cooling ashes. The atmosphere of petty intolerance drove me out of the movement, and I suspect this was what repelled Rexroth—this and an absence of passion, which had breathed out of the British movement when Marie Louise Bernieri died in 1949.<sup>28</sup>

Toynbee and Spengler had famously postulated that religion was a key factor in social upheaval and reconstruction. It was the force that caused the downfall of a civilisation's inert institutions. Whereas anarchism was logically the end of the road in political disaffiliation, it also showed that it was insufficient by itself to repel, or even practically resist, the subtle forces of disintegration that had corrupted every ideological movement and party in the history of Western culture. It was a necessary stance in the economic, social and institutional realms of American life for the San Francisco poets of the post-war

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<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, “Morals, Ethics, Religion, Ideology, The Poet, Poetry,” *The Alternative Society: Essays from the Other World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Read, 45.

<sup>28</sup> George Woodcock, “Rage and Serenity: The Poetic Politics of Kenneth Rexroth,” *Sagetrieb* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1983), 75.

era, but it had to be sustained by something much more comprehensive, or direct, in its apprehension of reality.

For Rexroth, that reality had to be conceived of as encompassing both social vision and quotidian detail. It had to be conceived of as pertaining to the same type of reality that religion had always attempted to speak to in its ideality. Yet when religion failed to be relevant to both vision and the physically real, when it failed to somehow equate them in a transcendence of the real through the real, it was religion in stasis, a religion that had also, from one point of view, lost its connection to poetry.

The Mexican modernist poet Octavio Paz observed that both the “poetic word” and the “religious word” reflect experiences we have of our constitutive “otherness,” our strangeness to what is real, and our attempt to bridge the gap. According to Paz, religion is that which depends on theological formulations for its identity, theology being fundamentally an *interpretation* of our condition. Poetry, on the other hand, is a *revelation* of our condition, and serves to open up possibilities of being.<sup>29</sup> Both theology (as a type of criticism) and poetry are necessary to our self-understanding and self-integration, yet poetry takes primacy, for without it theology loses its conduit to revelation, whereas poetry without theology exists primarily as potential. Accordingly, a theology that rejects the revelations of poetry is open to all sorts of artificialities and, moreover, encourages a wariness of the Other, which is now seen as a threat rather than a means to a more nuanced sense of both self and reality.

When Rexroth spoke of religion in the sense of providing the basis for the genuine anarchism which ushers in the new organic society, he was referring to an experience of religion that, in terms of theology, is not estranged from its sense in the poetic word. It is also a religion that is highly applicable to normal, everyday life. When philosophers and theologians view reality, or our condition in reality, as something abstracted from quotidian existence and the struggle for physical survival and culture, they are guilty of over-spiritualisation, according to Rexroth. Additionally, when physical reality is seen as possessing absolute contingency within an abstract framework built around beliefs about some higher, trans-mundane reality, religion, poetry and even vision, have parted ways. With echoes of William James in the air, Rexroth wrote, in an article about Lafcadio Hearn’s experience of Buddhism in Japan, that

for Hearn, Buddhism is a way of life, and he is interested in the effects of its doctrine upon the daily actions and common beliefs of ordinary people. Like the Japanese themselves, he thinks of religion as something one does, not merely as something one believes.<sup>30</sup>

And in the same article, he went on to observe that “nothing could be less like the life of Jesus than that of the typical Christian, clerical or lay”—a statement which defines the basis of his view that San Francisco could most fundamentally provide an alternative, living culture in its contrast to the religious culture of the rest of America in the post-war period.

That religious culture, exemplified in the Protestant Church in America, had been a “general failure,” according to Rexroth, in terms of halting the erosion of ultimate values in society.<sup>31</sup> As stated before, Peter Berger reported that the churches of the post-war period were more intent on propping up the “American way of life” than on proclaiming spiritual values that opposed what America was coming to stand for. According to Berger, this cultural religion never challenged the individual’s ultimate relationship to the mystery of the Other, and thus never produced deep experiences of the traditional religious type. Such a psychological, cultural religion was also not likely to maintain even its function of providing a broad social cohesion through consensus, since it denied the validity of transcendent experience as a social value. Thus, it was ultimately self-defeating. In the Lafcadio Hearn article, Rexroth asserted that

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<sup>29</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Bow and the Lyre: The Poem, the Poetic Revelation, Poetry, and History* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1973), 139.

<sup>30</sup> Rexroth, “Lafcadio Hearn and Buddhism,” in *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 308.

<sup>31</sup> Rexroth, “Cathedral Windows Address” (n.p., n.d.)

philosophies and theologies come and go, but the group experience of transcendence is embedded in human nature, and when it is abandoned, theology, philosophy, and eventually culture, perish.<sup>32</sup>

The most popular alternative to cultural Protestantism, and an alternative which indeed sprang up in the 1950s and 1960s among large numbers of young people, was Zen Buddhism. The embrace of Zen was fed from three sources: the returning G. I.'s who had experienced Asian culture while serving in the Pacific theatre; the writings of such Zen popularisers as Daisetz Suzuki and Alan Watts; and the growing Asian-American population, especially on the West coast, that had brought with them, or carried down, inherited religious sensibilities.

Yet Rexroth also rejected most manifestations of American Zen, because of his observation that it was often used as an excuse for social irresponsibility, and promoted a spurious emphasis on visions (to be distinguished from "vision," which is always referred to in the singular). He said of them that

They're trips that don't go anywhere. The measure of the defect of vision is visions. And no Buddhist said that, St. John of the Cross said that. And the more trips we have, the further away we're getting.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, the primary contemplative traditions merge around the claim that the transcendent vision is ultimately an alternative way of looking at reality, not a way of escaping it. It is a realisation that existing conditions are subject to dissolution by being part of the organic process of the universe. To hold on to a static and inevitably despairing view of reality reveals one's psychological dependency on it, and means one is held by illusion and suffering, the very thing Buddhist practice was supposed to mitigate.

Therefore, as Zen in America many times reflected an existential despair in the face of social realities, it was really only the mirror image of the dominant American religiosity, which blithely accepted the present social reality as the summum bonum. The political stance that accompanied Zen was often a type of anarchism that was based on a nihilism towards the value of all institutions; yet it was also ultimately nihilistic toward all social relationships as well. So this is again neither alternative, nor truly religious in any basic sense. Instead it is the mirror image of a conformity that also despairs of creative individual acts of love within a social environment, seeking to avoid the contemplative vision that feeds such individuality along with its extreme concomitant of social responsibility.

Contrary to both reactions towards an environment of despair was Rexroth's belief, based on longer-standing Buddhist traditions that reach back to the personality of Sakyamuni

that there is a community in the world, a community of love. It is a community of contemplators. And the only reality is a perspective, but the perspectives are infinite because the contemplators are infinite.<sup>34</sup>

The contemplators are not infinite in *number*, but in the scope of their vision. Vision operates autonomously from all external authority, yet is the highest form of authority in and of itself. It goes beyond anarchism in its political implications, since it offers freedom within a heightened sense of social responsibility. And in the end, Rexroth believed, it offered the only hope for the continuance of human culture apart from its destructive elements, which are still probably ineradicable on any large scale.

So the idea that a community of illumination and insight, can *change* the world is an illusion. But it can probably save it. Because when the contemplative life dies out the civilization

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<sup>32</sup> Rexroth, "Lafcadio Hearn," 309.

<sup>33</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Carole Tonkinson, ed., *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 341.

<sup>34</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Tonkinson, 342.

dies with great rapidity... When the flame goes out, then there's nothing but darkness. But I don't think that this can reform the world.<sup>35</sup>

So in contradistinction to both the dominant cultural religion in America, and its supposed antidote in Zen, Rexroth pointed the San Francisco literary community towards deeper historical realities that could be found within widely diverse cultures. And the deepest thing that cultures have in common, according to Rexroth's view, is that their health is directly related to the vitality of the group experience of transcendence within the culture, not just on an occasional basis, but as the store from which the culture draws its perspectives on the reality it has to live within on a daily basis. Contrarily, according to Rexroth, the state in its modern form was the force that drained this contemplative life out of the society.

Thus an anarchism based on a type of religious contemplation was the only real alternative to cultural religion and Zen nihilism. They were both wrapped around and dependent on what Rexroth called "the social lie," the consciousness of contingency when there was no contingency, the feeling of powerlessness when there was really no relevant power under which you were held in bondage.

A person who lives the Buddha life to the best of his ability does not need the State and does not need law. That's a different thing from being a political anarchist... Buddhism really isn't even passive resistance; it's ignoring the state, in all of its ways. It's ignoring the social lie.<sup>36</sup>

In the post-war period, Rexroth believed that the poetry reading—communicating a poetry of sacramental vision and reinforcing individual values within a communal setting—was the most powerful force in creating the cohesive relationships that could allow an alternative culture to thrive, utterly detached from the destructive dynamics of the social lie.

And that is why the San Francisco poetry renaissance, so often treated as a mere literary event, needs to be explored anew as a powerful and illuminative chapter in the long history of religious anarchism.

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<sup>35</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Tonkinson, 345 (Rexroth's italics).

<sup>36</sup> Rexroth, quoted in Tonkinson, 345.

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# CHAPTER ELEVEN. TO BE CONDEMNED TO A CLINIC: THE BIRTH OF THE ANARCA-ISLAMIC CLINIC

MOHAMED JEAN VENEUSE

*In this chapter, I discuss the theologically Islamic and anarchistic conceptual and pragmatic resonances I contend are necessary in the creation and development of an Islamic interpretation of anarchism and an anarchic interpretation of Islam, which I seek. There are two nodes discussed, for now, of intersection—anarchistic tendencies in Islam(s) and Islamic tendencies in anarchism(s)—between Islam(s) and anarchism(s): anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian. The two nodes signify reasoning(s) leading me—an anarca-Muslim subject—to becoming anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, yearning for an “us,” a Nous—a Nous premised upon lines of alliance, collaborations, and indeed new ways of living, for the dual disparate communities to come together to (re) create and bear witness to the (re) created coming community.*

## Introduction

“Anarchism” and “Islam.” “Islam” and “Anarchism.” “*Their similarities bear no resemblance?*” How dare “thee” ask as if they, this brochette of two, could keep their parenting of me apart, distant as divorcees, one from the other, the other from the other? “*Is there a relation, but then what is the relation?*” “*In which direction does it move?*” Already a “traitor,” I am guilty of betraying neither side but both sides of these two, my paternal figures. *Already*, it is too late for me, a child, a patient, a son, a daughter and “heir” to arrive, without an attorney present, to unite, to (re) oedipalise them, me, in “my” Clinic— *Anarca Islam*.<sup>1</sup> Everything starts off blank then come the one, two, three, a thousand murders, via remote control levers, in black till the black stays black with the white destined for *the present* to stay white.

In this chapter I set out to identify Anarchistic tendencies, Anti-Capitalist and Anti-Authoritarian currents and commitments, in “Islam” and Islamic tendencies in “Anarchism,” all which amounts to the same, “in a parody of the very self-defeating symptoms,” Capitalist and Authoritarian practices, that sent me, a patient, seeking help from both parents, “Islam,” “Anarchism,” in a Clinic— *Anarca-Islam*.<sup>2</sup> At heart, in overturning, in taking a position and through a questioning of syntax and semantics to revising themes in the field of Muslim and Islamic politics, I will justify my existence, a “Muslim Anarchist subject,” theologically, epistemologically, having already proven my presence empirically, so that I no longer become an illusory image gripped by repression, “autistic” and turned inward on myself as I could have myself believe.<sup>3</sup> My primary method will be a critical exegesis of the Koran as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Malabou, “Polymorphism Never Will Pervert Childhood,” in *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Gabriele Schwab, trans. Robert Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Dina Al-Kassim, “Resistance, Terminable and Interminable,” in *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Gabriele Schwab (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 115.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Félix Guattari, *Chaosmoby*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1995), 82.

theoretical and philosophical, Islamic and Anarchistic texts. This is my pathway to radically contest the validity of that which is assumed as “is,” politically, ethically, Islamically, Anarchistically, therefore no longer neutralising or accepting by virtue of naturalising that which is given of “Islam” and that which is given of “Anarchism” but rather opening up a new Anarchistic and Islamic horizon beyond in place of both.

First though, in a narcissistic act, “me”...

## The Patient Comes to Their Own Aid

I am not an assassinating imposter transformed “into [an] incendiary projectile;” I am not a “neo-pilot,” an arrow, shot against an enemy target; I am not a *Terrorist*<sup>4</sup> albeit I always wanted to be one.<sup>5</sup> But that day, too bad about that day, the day Babel’s twin towers fell, another gang of Muslim and non-Muslim fascists camouflaging their fascisms with retaliatory acts of vengeful violence. That day something so secret, unquenchable, even heated, besides and other than me, arrested me giving life to me having already realised itself in me, forever changing me. Above all, before that day, I thought I knew who I was, who was allied with who, adamant, determined to closing off all borders “non-Muslim.”<sup>6</sup> Then from the tightest mesh of that rubble’s flesh, it crossed my path, till this secret, “Anarchism,” now reigns without rooftop hanging over me having given itself to me. And so over my past determination I cry, and in the depths of my present “unhappiness I tremble with joy.”<sup>7</sup>

The unhappiness I feel is the thought of an Anarchist’s eyes, innocent and disarming, yet never having “been so obedient to their self as at the moment when” I see them in a delirious wishful wish, wish that they could take themselves and “Anarchism” back from me, maintaining their autonomy, excluding me on account of my spirituality.<sup>8</sup> You ask of my unhappiness. It is an Anarchist dogmatic in sight. One who intrinsically shoulders bad faith towards me never having even met me and yet settles for a whole theatre of hysteria and debility when it comes to me; one who wishes that perhaps someone else could take my place or that I could “occupy several others at once” without their presence side by side with me.<sup>9</sup> But my will has not ceased and now, at some moments, stuttering it becomes all the more sweeter: I am a Muslim and an Anarchist, in the same heartbeat and the same breathe. As for believing in God: It is not an aesthetic thing or a ritual I do, but the strength from which I derive reason to drive myself to stand and share the same ethical and political commitments with those same “eyes I fear and dread.” And already now I have started spending the rest of whatever days I have left trying to understand how I have spent them when I admit that my greatest crime will have been naming, “tattooing,” writing and even saying it: “Muslim Anarchist,” “Anarchist Muslim,” one always before and one always after the other, with the initiative of them always together— *with* each other; but already there are too many gashes; already I am guilty, a traitor, of violating such a promise, except when keeping it for myself in silence.

As for “Islam” and Muslims, whoever and whatever you are: I can feel you as well. You are in flames. You too are burning. The most evident thing with you though is that I can see your eyes and feel your ailments without even closing mine. And my interest here rests on not bending “myself to your

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<sup>4</sup> Yesterday the word *terror* was associated with abuses in relation to “the exercise of State power[s].” But today it has come to “designate ... from the position of the dominant, [the State,] all those who engage in a combat [, militant or any other,] using whatever means at hand, against a given order which is judged to be unacceptable.” Disclosed in this sense I confess; I am a terrorist as: the “Anti-Nazi resistors for Pétain and his militia;” “Algerian patriots of the N. L. F. for every French government without exception between 1954 and 1962;” “Chechens for Putin and his clique.” See Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2003), 144–145.

<sup>5</sup> Badiou, 141.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 186.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, “The Post Card,” 186.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, “The Post Card,” 186.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, “The Post Card,” 186.

determination” by domesticating, naturalising and neutralising or believing in automatic barriers when discussing anything with Anarchists.<sup>10</sup> No, it is stifling your “Islam” and mine. Already, by right, your “Islam” and mine have given me their arms. Come closer to my lips, you will hear better: Know that this interpretation, this “contract,” *Anarca-Islam*, what already arrived and what I hope will live never belonged to me, only my “way of sight,” my line of flight, for the rest of my days left; for at the end I am nothing more, nothing less, than “out of dust then out of sperm then out of a leech-like clot then out a morsel of flesh partly formed and partly unformed” on exodus, to return, scattered again as dust.<sup>11</sup> And so I am neither a messiah nor a prophet, just deafened by the subtraction of dialogue in what I see as decimated elements missing from our everyday equations: our ambivalence and complacency towards patriarchy, trans-queer-phobia, racism, ageism, capitalism and authority, all that can serve as appetisers for starters, unwarranted and existing in our communities; all the fetishicised and fabricated talk, the whole “Good” Muslim, “Bad” Muslim debates, the pointing of fingers we do all day. It is time we understand the world we live in today and put an end to false provocations to the absurd. So after reading, come up with your own interpretations and I welcome all criticisms, after study, as long as they are done respectfully.

“Finally,” what is left, what I expect from all Muslims and Anarchists, essentialist and dogmatic included, *for who am I to dare exclude you*, is: nothing but absolution, to slowly and not turbulently burn for a qualm before I have even begun to lift off and take flight. Fascism is everywhere these days; it has already won.<sup>12</sup> It is crystallised at the centre of everybody’s heart. And remember, like a dear friend once taught me in say: *all this and what’s yet to come is not a plea for your attention but a cautionary tale of your irrelevance*. Still I hope you listen.

## The Birth of the Clinic

By what *right* and how dare “we” be tempted to fight to transform, to indeed pronounce the aggregate Islams as “Islam,” into *Islamism*, with the wishful twisted thinking that it be forgotten that the latter operates in the name of the former. How dare “we” forget that there is no singular monolith and never more “Islam;” “Islam” is dead. How dare “we” forget that there are a pluralistic series of traditions, perspectives and cultural discourses radiating from Islams—they, Islams, are not all One or monolithic in their essentialist conception of subjectivities and identities, *not* to mention their laws. How can “we” paint, talk

religion, talk Islam? Of religion, of Islams? The Singularity of religion, the singularity of Islams today? How dare ... [we] speak of [them] in the singular without fear and trembling, this very day? And so briefly and so quickly?<sup>13</sup>

For is it not always that the aggregate Islams, the *names of Islams*, by “nature” creative, disavow, negate and destroy the knot of obligation to “Islam” incestuously? How dare “we” when they arrive out of recognising that

the “hyper-orthodox” and the ulemocracy can’t ... reduce [“Islam”] to a hegemonistic/universalistic ideology ... to rule out divergent forms of “sacred politics” informed by Sufism [like the Naqshabandis], “radical” Shia-ism [as Ali Shariati’s], Ismaelism, Islamic Humanism and Sunni-ism, the “Green Path” of Col. Qaddafi (part neo-Sufism, part anarcho-syndicalism) ... not to mention the “cosmopolitan Islam of Bosnia” [etc].<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, “The Post Card,” 186.

<sup>11</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 22, Chapter of “The Pilgrimage,” Verses 5–7.

<sup>12</sup> Guattari, 244–245.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hakim Bey, *Millennium* (1996), www.hermetic.com (accessed February 20, 2007).

And this enigmatic inscription of resistance inscribed within “Islam” itself is precisely one of the grave dangers when writing or pronouncing anything about “Islam” or as an example, its branch Shi’ism—which is also not singular—without recognising the field of possibilities that were, that indeed are open in the politicisation of a particular interpretation of Shi’ism, and ever more so “Islam,” in say Iran in ‘79. One could almost talk endlessly about the “Islamic-Leftist Mujahedeen al’Khalq,” “the Marxist-Leninist Fedayeen i-Khalq” and “Ali Shariati’s synthesis of Marxism, existentialism, Heideggerianism [with] ... a militant form of ‘traditional’ Shi’ism”—as just three preliminary examples, interpretations and hybrids of political Shi’ism that were being practiced in Iran in ‘79.<sup>15</sup>

It is essential not to let things fizzle out, since from the start anyone can object to a cohabitation of “Islam” and “Anarchism,” that it is “impossible” and contradictory; after all, “Islam” means submission. So to establish things as fast and as effectively as possible, now, but ever more so thoroughly soon and throughout, I will start by explaining and justifying *Anarca-Islam* as an interpretation of the entropies “Islam” and Anarchism.” A resistance: to the “Euro and logo centrality” of the “West,” and neo-conformity in general. That it lends itself on the promise of Islam(s) and Anarchism(s) going together by folding upon or against itself in always questioning and rebelling against and for itself, politically, ethically; (re) creating itself by challenging its commitments *anew* towards both “Islam” and “Anarchism.” *Anarca-Islam*’s most basic, preserved, and least restless “foundation” is “governed” by and founded upon its Anti-Authoritarian and Anti-Capitalist Anarchistic currents that are identified using a specific tool, *Anarchic-Ijtihad*,<sup>16</sup> which was given to me by *right* to write on what I call *Anarca-Islam*.

And this *right*, whose classical form is *Ijtihad*, is an Islamic right and duty to track, identify, intercept, pick up, translate, decipher, interpret, and re-interpret Islamic principles and values to meet the social conditions of the present, all while appreciating and wandering in the vertigo of “Islam’s” past and future; henceforth permitting and giving birth to *the names of Islams*.<sup>17</sup> Names that emerge for Muslims to witness, to remember, to preserve and to forget home, “Islam,” using their Holy text, the Koran; for this is the wager, either God got arrogant with God’s word:

Will they not ponder on the Koran? If it had not come from God [ *adaptable for all time* ], they could surely find in it many contradictions... [For] If all humankind and the other intelligent life were to band together to produce the likes of this Koran, they could not produce the like thereof... Bring then a single surah [verse] like unto it, and call upon whomsoever you can if you are truthful.<sup>18</sup>

Or that in truth God fulfils God’s word and promise; that this text is confident, *adaptable*, in its program, capable of situating strategically, tactically, exoterically, esoterically any analytic activity

<sup>15</sup> Janet Afrey and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 38–40.

<sup>16</sup> In the context used, *Anarchic-Ijtihad*: (A) Is out to contaminate or poison, any discourse, subjects “touched,” be it theoretically or practically, with priority to the grass-roots of what Day calls *Newest Social Movements* (2005) of today; in an anti-authoritarian stance it is out to challenge the position of anti-religious actors and/or actresses in these *NSMs* who are sceptical, intentionally or not, towards Islams and religion in general. It is daring these actors and actresses to create and open up further room for dialogue between Muslim Anarchists or Anarchist Muslims active in these *NSMs* and themselves. (B) It is also a re-appropriation of its own self as a “term/word/concept” in what is already a state of mass produced texts, and thus the stereotype of its original usage i.e. *Ijtihad—jihad*. That way, *Anarchic-Ijtihad* is not interested in regurgitating already pre-existing stereotypes of it; it is not out to be an origin of “already said(s).” It is not out to become a simulacric event, but to offer a different pathway for the usage of it as a term itself, adaptable to different contexts and conditions provided particular ethical-political stances as positions and that ought to come and arrive with it; ethical-political commitments that it ought to be indefinitely committed to. In this sense it is anti-capitalist, or has “that” as its other, second Anarchist tendency. As for *NSMs*: Day wrote an entire book on this concept, the *Newest Social Movements*. I use, summarise, contextually, the term to imply social movements that in his words are “non-universalising, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid, and shared ethical commitments.” See Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>17</sup> John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 159.

<sup>18</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 4, Chapter of “The Women:” Verse 82; Chapter 17: Chapter of “Children of Israel:” Verse 8; and Chapter 10: Chapter of “Jonah:” Verse 37.

grappling with truth, where truth plays a piece limited by a more powerful functioning of the text itself, translating hence the docile “names of Islam” into “names” that turn as foliage, made *anew*, upon contact with the substrate—the Koran, as primary text. “*Ayn*,” an Arabic word, alone, in the Koran, could turn from meaning “an organ of sight” to “running water,” from “pure gold” to a “spy.”<sup>19</sup> The Holy Koran

reveals human language crushed by the power of the divine word; God’s word *unmakes* all human meanings, all the proud constructions of civilisation, of high culture, and then returns all the luxuriant cosmic, imagery back to the lowly and the oppressed, so that in their imaginations it can be made *anew* (emphasis in original).<sup>20</sup>

And this is how through *Ijtihad* that always already Islams, and no longer Islam, re-find themselves in what was originally found—“Islam.” God gifts Muslims *Ijtihad* as a detouring, a rigorous and violent theoretical and practical inscription, an Islamic deconstructive type of force, in a testimony, divinely decreed, and that testifies to *differance* in the Derridean sense.<sup>21</sup> God bears witness and promised so in the Holy Koran:

“Not all of them [beings ought be or] are alike” and so

unto every one of you We [God] have appointed a different law and way of life and if God had pleased, God would have made you a single *Ummah* [community], but that God might try You in what God gave you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To God you will all return, so that God will inform you of that wherein you *differed*.<sup>22</sup>

All of which then makes what I called *Anarchic-Ijtihad*, “naturally,” an Anarchic militant “style” of *Ijtihad*, one guided and committed to particular political, ethical, Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Authoritarian commitments that will soon been proven to be in hand.

In this order of things then hence begins the binding of *Anarca-Islam* to its two preliminary Anarchistic quarters of resistance in the three residues or sedimenting sections left as remnants or remaining parts of this chapter precisely: First, a resistance to *Daddy*, authoritarian practices in the section to follow, *Castrating Daddy*, through a “new” set of Islamic concepts and practices: *Shura*, *Ijma*, *Maslaha*, devoted to repeating the obstructing, limiting, refusing and rebelling off of inescapable authoritarian power relations, dynamics and differentials; micro-fascisms that play out on a daily basis in everyday sets of social relations and equations vis-à-vis our egos; our little internalised Mussolinis encased in the space between a ribcage and two breasts. In doing so and to follow *Shura*, *Ijma*, *Maslaha* in turn, with the company of *Anarchic-Ijtihad*, I will supply a healthier track in giving a clean-cut Anti-Statist Anarchistic reading of “Islam.” Only then will I end by wresting the “authority” of the two left: the Prophet Muhammad and God. These (re) readings, this reshuffling(s), awaken, give birth, and raise from the grave “Islam,” a resurrected Anarchic Anti-Authoritarian “Islam.”

The second quarter of resistance is in *A Disinterested Love in Mommy*. At stake a war waged on *Mommy*, Capitalism, through an army of “new” Islamic concepts and practices irritated with *Anarchic-Ijtihad* from the once upon a time singular “Islam.” Irrupting, falling and apprehended are alternate anti-capitalist readings, obstacles, limits, refusals, rebellions, repeated: *Public Property*, *Caretaker*, *Mudarabah/Musharakah*, *Zakat*, *It’am*, *Sawm*, *Infraq of Sadaqah*, *Ramadan* and *Islamic banking* that

<sup>19</sup> Taha Jabir Al’Awani, *The Ethics of Disagreements in Islam* (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 82.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel: The Prophetic Tradition and the Battle for the Soul of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 122 (emphasis in original).

<sup>21</sup> Not a “word” or a “concept,” but that which resists order, repetition, the familiar in speech or what is indeed written, both as living acts, testifying or bearing testimony to the existence of the singular, the unique as *differance*. See Jacques Derrida, “Excerpt from Difference,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3–27, [www.hydra.umn.edu](http://www.hydra.umn.edu) (accessed November 11, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 4, Chapter of “The Women:” Verse 113; and Chapter 5, Chapter of “The Dinner Table:” Verse 48.

anarchically characterise or give anarchic character to the interpretive tradition I seek; an Anarchic Anti-Capitalist interpretation of “Islam.”

Lastly in the last residue, section and territory *To (Re) do away with the Clinic*, Anarca-Islam will stand *for now* on solid ground or sovereign position with these two resistive currents as my and its two feet.

## Castrating Daddy

First and in a militant stance on the whole business of authority, to put it bluntly, my apologies but “sorry,” in no way do any Koranic verses prescribe, legitimise or give it a stamp of authenticity. The truth is completely different and to the contrary: any “hierarchal, dictatorial system has been condemned as non-Islamic.”<sup>23</sup> Access only to general principles is given Koranically in the field of politics, with particulars left for Muslims to formulate, soak and drown themselves in according to whatever *present* space and time they live in; it could then be Anarchy.<sup>24</sup> In this sense as far as “Islam’s” fine text, the Holy Koran is concerned, as a general principle:

For those who take as *Awliyâ*’ [guardians, supporters, helpers, protectors, etc.] others besides Him [i.e. whom take other deities, other than Allâh as protectors, and worship them, even then] Allâh is *Hafîz* [Protector] over them [i.e. takes care of their deeds and will recompense them], and you [O Muhammad] are not a *Wakîl* [guardian or a disposer of their affairs or have say] over them.<sup>25</sup>

But and with that said, the “lack of guidance” in term of generalities, “Islam” took it upon itself to invest in certain specificities instead. To dictate less and catalyse more, “Islam” created pragmatic references, counter-measures, and practices like *Shura*<sup>26</sup> (mutual consultation), *Ijma* (community consensus) and *Maslaha*<sup>27</sup> (public interest) to minimise anyone and communities from derision rather than limit itself to observations, empty rhetoric, on the excessive price, in blood, of authoritarian practices and politics.<sup>28</sup>

But nowadays, despite and against this truthful mirror, we no less see a Monarchy of Meccan Kingdoms, *Sultans*<sup>29</sup> and Sheikhs, decadent dictators and corrupt foot soldiers; self-proclaimed bearers of God’s trust, “armed to the teeth,” with stamped decrees purchased cheap from Muftis.<sup>30</sup> Muftis who legitimate, supposedly “Islamically,” the formers’ authority as a necessary right; for them as heirs to the manna of black gold, under the disguised pretext of the *Khalifah*.<sup>31</sup> Yet this move on their part,

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<sup>23</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Identity, and Conflict Resolution in the Muslim World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>24</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, The West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001), 148.

<sup>25</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 42, Chapter of “The Council:” Verse 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Shura* is not merely a practice but exists emphasised in its allocation as a Chapter, 42, in the Holy Koran, *Surat Ash-Shura*, named after it.

<sup>27</sup> The Koran favours and “envisages the ... *Ummah* as a perfectly egalitarian, open society based on good will and cooperation” through *Maslaha*. And it is because of *Maslaha* that the Koran “laid down the principle of *Shura* [as well] to guide the community’s decision-making process.” What *Anarca-Islam* calls for wherever it is blacked out, is not the “classical doctrine of *Shura*, as it developed, [and] was in error ... [where] it viewed consultation as the process of one person, the *Khalifah*, asking other people for advice.” No, quite the opposite: “the Koranic understanding of *Shura* does not mean that one person ask others advice, but rather mutual advice through mutual consultation.” See Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> As for labels like “sultan/king” ( *Malik* ), there are no absolute grounds in the Koran for what really is just arbitrary personal dictatorship and domination. See Esposito, *Islam and democracy*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida, “The Post Card,” 186.

<sup>31</sup> *Khalifah* “according to the Arabic lexicon, means ‘representation.’... In addition to the connotations of ‘successor’ that the Arabic term *Khalifah* involves there is also a sense in which a *Khalifah* is a deputy [or] representative.” See Esposito, *Islam and democracy*, 26. The *Khalifah* is not a *Malik*, a king, or ruler but someone whom is chosen by the community as a temporary representative. “Classically,” the “choosiness” may take place “by means of elections, a representative system or any other original

adhering to the classical lexicon and meaning of the word respectively, all too obviously but necessary, undermines and clashes head on with the anti-authoritarian specificities of *Ijma*, *Maslaha* and *Shura*. No less I have no doubt, and regardless of any prodigious revolts, that given the lack of *conditions* necessary for a *Khalifah* as well as the non-binding nature of the idea itself that a more “radical” interpretation can be posited and ought exist instead of the attention that its classical form has received so far into the twentieth-first century.<sup>32</sup> *Anarca-Islam* arrives then by marking, ceasing, a different political territory of reference, one bound with an Anarchistic alternative and the never ending aspiration of an anti-authoritarian commitment during social relations at all times and all levels; all Muslims are bearers of God’s trust. Muslims are collective caretakers of each other, their affairs, as they are all God’s vicegerents on this earth. They collectively are bearers of “the trust” with collective responsibility each towards the other since it is assuredly

possible to interpret ... sections of the Koran as identifying human beings in general as God’s vicegerents [ *Khalifahs*, multiple, as opposed to the singular, *Khalifah*,] on earth and human stewardship over God’s creations.<sup>33</sup>

The Anarchic dosage injected then is that

after subscribing to the principles of *Tawheed*, to believing in God as Absolute Authority [ , the sole instance in which a Muslim under “Islam” is to be understood as in “submission,”] Muslims are then collectively and as a group ready to fulfil their responsibilities of representation towards one another.<sup>34</sup>

Each

carries the responsibility of the *Khilafah* ... [and] each one shares the divine *Khilafah* ... [where] *every* person in an *Ummah* enjoys the rights and powers of the *Khilafah* and in that respect all individuals are *equal*.<sup>35</sup>

This opens in

a step ... the transfer of power of *ijtihad* from individual representatives of schools [of thought] to Muslim legislative assemblies which in view of the growth of “opposing” sects is the only form of *Ijma*

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ideas ... [provided that] *all the conditions* that allow one the opportunity to choose with full knowledge of the facts” are present. The other “Classical” criteria for such “choosiness” is that “any pressure or attempt at *coercion*, to influence public opinion” is unacceptable. These two criteria then assume that people within a given Muslim community are capable of participating in the decision making process of choosing itself, are not coerced and have knowledge of all the “facts” regarding whatever candidates are to be “chosen” from in the first place. However with ignorance, illiteracy, corruption and misery, social phenomena very much predominant in Muslim societies, these criteria cannot be fulfilled Islamically therefore obstructing the real participation of the grassroots in the decision making process of choosing someone to lead. See Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 148 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>32</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 26.

<sup>35</sup> The identification of *Khilafah* with humanity as a whole, rather than with a single *Khalifah* or political institution, is affirmed further in the Islamic *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; “a document [ , that emphasises that the objective of the *Ummah*] ... is to reach the level of self-governance.” Thus “this perception of ‘*Khilafahs*’ becomes a foundation for concepts of human responsibility and of opposition to systems of domination ... [providing along the way] also a basis for distinguishing between democracy” in “Western” traditions and “Islam.” This vision, of bearing the communal right to self-govern, therefore “do[es] not fit into the limits of *Eurocentric* based definition[s] ... [because of its anchorage in] ... consultation ( *Shurah*), consensus ( *Ijma*) and independent interpretative judgments ( *ijtihad*).” See Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 26.

now possible.<sup>36</sup> A kind of *Ijma* that secures “contributions to ... [and] discussion[s] from” lay individuals who desire, have a right and are keen in participating in political decisions making processes, and that is how therein rises from the ashes an Anti-Statist and an anti-authoritarian Anarchic “Islam.”<sup>37</sup> The only two things left then, with respect to authority, since the conditions of choosing the classical singular (as opposed to the multiple, plural) *Khilafah* fail as they do, and due to the fact that the fields of the political “lack in any further generalities or specificities,” opening wide thus anti-authoritarian possibilities as an Anarchic way of organising outside what is presently a post-colonial Islamically inherited Eurocentric State, are: the Prophet Muhammed and God.<sup>38</sup>

In so far as the former, I appreciate everything that my Prophet Mohammad taught me, but, well, a *prophet* signifies *prophecy* and nothing more. He is not a *Malik* (King), *Sheikh* or God and his function is nothing but a *Rasul*, a messenger, for a religious call, purely for the sake of religion, unblemished by any necessary tendency to rule or call for the formation of a nation or state. The two Koranic verses to prove this are: “Say (O Muhammad) that I am a man like you; [and] I am nothing but a man and a messenger.”<sup>39</sup>

As for the latter, God, first, it is important to realise clearly as the Koran says: *la ikrah Fi'd-din*; “there is no compulsion in religion.”<sup>40</sup> More so and secondly, “God has not been completely usurped ... as has always been claimed [in Anarchistic discourses] ... only reinvented in the form of essence.”<sup>41</sup> Respectively and respectfully, one must admit that just because some proclaim and chant God dead while others argue for the possibility or usefulness of divine presence in their lives instead, both are still on the same boat, neither here nor there, a problem of gadgets, no proof of life or death. All that could result then from focusing strictly and arguing cruelly over this “moot” point is a massive loathsome increase in flattened-out conceptions of the world—conceptions which are internalised, consciously and unconsciously, between both parties, Religious and Non-Religious Anarchists after the same Anarchic sensibilities, and who are now caught in an endless palpitating ambiance that spreads over just about everything. That said,

as long as [Anarchisms and Anarchists] continue to believe absolutely in grammar, in essence, in the metaphysical presuppositions of language ... they will continue to believe in God.<sup>42</sup>

“Anarchism” has

not ousted God ... [because] the place of authority of the category of the divine remains intact, only re-inscribed in the demand for presence... Atheism changes nothing in this fundamental structure.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, if still, for some, slaughtering God a thousand times, in as many stabs, jabs, blunders as they like, is their attempt at a “solution,” in an extraordinary dance of jubilant liberation,

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<sup>36</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> There exist a number of “significant problems with *Eurocentric-style democracy* ... as every Muslim [is required, each according to their abilities,] ... to give a sound opinion on matters ... entitled to interpret the law of God.” The “theory that the influential persons could represent the general public was [and still is] operative in [‘Islam’] ... but in view of changed circumstances and in consideration of the principles of consultation ... it is essential that this theory should give place to the formation of an assembly ... [a] real [representation] of the people.” See Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> See reference to Ali Abdel Razeq (1925), “Al-Islam wa Ushul al-Hukm — Islam and the Principles of Governance,” in Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, *Muhammad: Prophet and Politician* (May 9, 2004), 74.125.95.132 (accessed December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008.); The Holy Koran, Chapter 18, Chapter of “The Cave:” Verse 110; Chapter 41, Chapter of “Explained in Detail:” Verse 6; and Yunan Labib Rizk, “Cabinet Toppled by a Book,” *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 522 (February 22–28, 2001), weekly.ahram.org.eg (accessed January 2, 2009) (emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 2, Chapter of “The Cow:” Verse 26.

<sup>41</sup> Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Newman, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Newman, 6.



from there, there comes an expense in one and the same equation. With God dead at the push of a button, there arrive a thousand idiots with grins, infinite demagogues, mini-gods each upping the anti, one on the other, squabbling over a displaced God's space and power; a place that is now open to the highest bidder. But I was under the impression Anarchists were trying to stop the unleashing of an Apocalypse, where no body laughs, in a collective commitment at becoming anti-authoritarian. In this manner, as far as *Anarca-Islam* sees it and is committed, people are the rightful bearers of "the trust," whether that trust comes from atheists or from others believing that God is welcome over and over again. Either way at least within this framework and interplay, the absolute sovereignty of God makes any human hierarchy in theory impossible, since before God all humans become equal.<sup>44</sup>

To continue then, because up until now this discussion has only taken up anti-authoritarian commitments, is to return to the level of great conceptual and practical inscriptions of the dead "Islam" where one finds an ensemble of fundamentally anti-capitalist currents, and upon which *Anarca-Islam* is founded, that exist as well.

## A Disinterested Love in Mommy

*No longer seeing, no longer looking, my vision impaired save for a light gaze curled, directed, turned and inverted inwards towards the Koran to a point one can never see after or insist on enough: a verse that firmly stands, that attests, indeed that commands that property drags,<sup>45</sup> is always given back and belongs in God's hands. Decreed "we" are collectively not glorious capitalist thieves but honoured, guests, Caretakers of God's property:*

O believers, expend of the good things you have earned, and of what We have produced for you from the earth; and intend not the corruption of it for your expending, *for you would never take it yourselves...* Those who expend ... night and day, secretly and in public, their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow.<sup>46</sup>

Limping, feeble and finite, limited to simply raising our hands to show we are alive, "everything [subjects and objects] ultimately belong to God ... Human beings are simply *Caretakers*, or *Vicegerents*, for God's property" on Earth.<sup>47</sup> The You, the I, combined, intertwined as grape vines, are *Caretakers* of "ourselves;" the You, the I, together are *Caretakers* of *one another*, equal; collectively we are but *Caretakers*, legatees, of God's objects, strictly and solely. God *creates* God's property, the *object*, with all objects of this world readily flourishing in abundance giving way to God's intent and maxim that this property become shared and distributed in equity, naturally and fervently hopefully "without corruption" or "mantles of fraud."<sup>48</sup>

To the clear sighted, *property*, then, *Anarca-Islamically* already at the end appears via bonds, void of a centre, and its trajectory acts towards that which is communal, *public*, rather than the personal, the *private*. That individuals are let, retained and willed, in a right ordained by God, to have claim to *at least* that which suffices to have a decent "quality of life" rather than shamefully, merely, a shanty "standard of living;" *and this right no one ought be able to take away even if by force by virtue of Al-Dururiyat*

<sup>44</sup> Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 25; Newman, 6.

<sup>45</sup> It is reported in the prophetic oral tradition, the *Sunnah*: through "Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said: 'The poor will enter paradise five hundred years ahead of the rich'" as the latter accounts for their accrued and hoarded wealth, how they got it, how they spent it, whereas the former will not be answerable for any such thing; in that sense property *drags*. See Safdar Hasan Siddiqi and Muhammad ibn Abd Al-H, *Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) Messenger of Allah, on Social Behaviour* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1984), 91.

<sup>46</sup> The Holy Koran: Chapter 2, Chapter of "The Cow:" Verse 269.

<sup>47</sup> Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 165.

<sup>48</sup> John Thomas Cummings, Hossein Askari and Ahmad Mustafa, "Islam and Modern Economic Change," in *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 37.

*Al-Khamas*.<sup>49</sup> Sung like this, it is thus with *property*, *Anarca-Islamically*, absolutely owned by God, that there appears a newly wedded welcome, a “contract,” a “license,” a new economic relationship: God-Caretaker. A *Caretaker* as a temporary “beneficiary,” a *Caretaker* as a “trustee” or “borrower” of God’s *Property*, never to be confused with the ego of that an absolute owner.<sup>50</sup> And a *Caretaker* has available two types of economic relationships: *Individual* and/or *Communal*, the difference of which we will pay homage to shortly. But step by step and not a step fleeing beyond oneself yet, regardless of *Individual* and/or *Communal*: *Caretakers*, *Anarca-Islamically*, are to “conduct their affairs by mutual consultation” if they want or are to fulfil the criteria of the inescapable *Shura*, where these “*new associations*,” this “*new economy*,” then are “automatically” replaced and comprised of *Caretakers* united, dealing in “business” matters, as “a large number of *small firms*” through *borrowed property* from God.<sup>51</sup> “*Small borrowed firms*” decentralised, without a C. E. O. conductor-leader, intermingling, loosely textured, characterised instead with continual, temporal and perpetual “states” of abduction and transformation of *property* as they, *Individual* and/or *Communal Caretakers*, now revolve around and round, in control, out of control, as if in a butoh-like dance,<sup>52</sup> in temporary states of borrow-ship of God’s *property*. *Caretakers* in *Shirakah*, partnered “nuptials,” mixing with each other in partnership in everything economic, and who

decide freely [ *Ikhtiy’ar*] ... [to participate or not] without outside influence ... [in whatever *small business* unlike *those* haughty, beastly, economic relations un-consented to through influential visitations by] capitalist suppliers, planning authorities.<sup>53</sup>

These participations, associations, bonds in these “*small borrowed firms*” then are founded, grounded, characterised, contorted, given character, by a paradoxical, squeaky, stance of “unconditional” hospitality, openness to “everyone,” interlocked *conditionally* with a conditional adherence to certain principles; *anti-authoritarian* and *anti-capitalist* Anarchic commitments, sensibilities, as an ultimate responsibility

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<sup>49</sup> The fundamental *qualities of life*, also termed, *Maqasid of Al-Shariah*, objectives of Shariah or *Al-Dururiyat Al-Khamas* are five of which two responsibilities and protected rights are *life* and *property*; the former not merely constricted to human or animal existence but the maintenance of health, education, a peaceful and reasonably pollutant-free environment; “And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all things in due balance. And We have provided therein means as subsistence, for you and for those whose subsistence ye are not responsible. And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us; but We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures. And We send the fecundating winds, then cause the rain to descend from the sky, therewith providing you with water (in abundance), through ye are not the guardian of its stores, so intend not corruption of the earth” and “Do not kill a soul which Allah has made sacred.” See The Holy Koran, Chapter 15, Chapter of “The Rock:” Verses 19–22; and Chapter 6, Chapter of “The Cattle:” Verse 151. The emphasis here is on “We,” God, as the giver of rights of which no Authority, “no leader, no government, no assembly can restrict, abrogate or violate in any way [these] rights” to existence, life, or property, they are Gods,’ not covered with shit, pissed on by demagogues. See Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, ed. and trans. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 106. *Al-Haqq*, an Arabic word meaning “The Just,” is God, the transcendent of all beings to whom anyone has not only a privilege of access to but also rather the inherent right to access. *Al-Haqq* radiates from the singular, the transcendental, to a plural multiplicitous *Huquq*, rights here on this Earth, so who but God gifts all beings *Huquq*? See Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Inter-religious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 158. See Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Akhtar A. Awan, *Equality, Efficiency, and Property Ownership in the Islamic Economic System* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 30; and The Holy Koran, Chapter 42: Chapter of “The Council:” Verse 38.

<sup>52</sup> Said to have “originated in post-world war II Japan ... first performed in 1959,” Butoh is a traditionally performed dance by “farmers celebrating harvest,” marking the cycles of life, birth and death, and is with as “many styles as there are dancers,” conventionally, in white body makeup. The “most unconventional aspect of Butoh is its movement” deriving “its power from what the individual who dances it brings to it in a very mental as well as physical sense ... a directing of energy to the audience from the surroundings, the environment and the audience themselves as much as from the mind;” hence, a similar analogy in terms of the fluidity between the singular *Caretaker* and all that surrounds the singular, the least of which is the communal, especially in terms of the recognition of *Caretaker* relationships to “*small borrowed firms*” as being cyclical, as life is to birth and death—a Butoh like dance. See Dan Hermon, “What is Butoh” (March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003), [www.butoh.net](http://www.butoh.net) (accessed December 31, 2008); and Alexandra Paszkowska, “What does Butoh Mean?” [www.paszkowska.de](http://www.paszkowska.de) (accessed December 31, 2008) (emphasis added).

<sup>53</sup> Awan, 32.

back towards the community.<sup>54</sup> That way, participations, associations, bonds are opposed to *involuntary relations*, in favour and born out of *Ikhtiy'ar*, choice, where *Caretakers* become free creatures and rebels in voluntary relations and associations.<sup>55</sup> These participations and associations are a *Fardh*, a religious duty unto and for these *Caretakers* themselves, tantamount to affording them dignity to decide for themselves, un-deprived hence of keeping their word or voices—free to make choices with none permitted to taking hold a position of enjoying any innate, benign, useless, moral superiority over the other.<sup>56</sup> In this vein, *Communal Caretakers* are

accorded a dignity in keeping with ... [their] status as ... vicegerent[s] of God on earth ... [whose] return[s] can take the form of ... a share in the useful profit of enterprise.<sup>57</sup>

*Upside down, inside out*, these are the sort of clawed thoughts that *Anarca-Islam* tears away at and marks territorially (externally, “*small borrowed firms*,” internally, *voluntarily*) as its anarchic territory of reference—a territory carved vis-à-vis the condemnation of the “exploitation of [*Caretakers by one another* and] seeking to promote the greatest amity between” *Caretakers*.<sup>58</sup> *Caretakers* as myopic multitudes of a community commanded to “withhold not things justly due to others,” due to each other, to act as a community.<sup>59</sup>

Not undoing but redoing what was absorbed and read instead: since “every entity is multiple and at the same time linked with other” multiples, it is only right as well to take delight that though, in the last analysis, *Communal Caretakers* are preferred, enthusiasm, security, appreciation and room ought be made for the arrival, the survival, of the unique, the singular, the stem of every root, the individual.<sup>60</sup> Or must the singular always be compelled to living in servitude, forgotten, reduced to a state of sludge and regarded as shamefully inferior in an act of forceful enslavement of our subjectivity on account of the whim of a collectivity? Why harden, forgo, forsake the singular, individual, when it is absolutely not necessary to repress neither desire as a sacrifice; a despotic communal plural over the singular individual, a selfish singular individual over the plural communal, one on the part of the other? Why, when one gives life to the other and where each of their rights can be negotiated with one another? After all, without convulsions, there are always jolts, untainted by infamous desires for greed, that move and turn a subject, an individual, into someone with an attraction, who imaginatively “creates,” with a wish to “innovate” or introduce a “new” desire into their corresponding field that is a community. A community not necessarily inclined towards or interested in exploring that same zone of desire, and a subject not carried away by the lullaby of their ego but after opening up new territories of reference, prisons or fields of possibilities. A subject who ought instead bear admiration, perhaps wholeheartedly encouraged, given further courage, by the community, not mixed up, trampled upon or aggravated, made to quiver or tremble, on account of the pursuit of a dream even if it is nothing more than just an “empty” acquired phantasm. Therein thus rises, not cowardly hides in a cave, the possibility for the existence of an *Individualised Caretaker*, a “*small borrowed firm*,” yet one who residually remains subject, “nailed,” to a *specific template*, comprised of at least three impediments, that they are not to exceed. Why? Because as a key idealism has no place here. For, already without a *template* present a milieu of differences in *Mal*, money, a consequence of productivity, work ethics and the negotiation and building of an equilibrium, a compromise, between the ways, the desires and rights of an *individual* and

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<sup>54</sup> Awan, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Rodney Wilson, *Economics, Ethics, and Religion: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Economic Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 134.

<sup>56</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Ziauddin Ahmad, *Islam, Poverty and Income Distribution: A Discussion of the Distinctive Islamic Approach to Eradication of Poverty and Achievement of an Equitable distribution of Income and Wealth* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1991), 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 120; The Holy Koran: Chapter 29: Chapter of “The Spider:” Verse 183.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 120; Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 42.

those of a *communal* will always be present, audible, no matter what; one *Caretaker* likes to dash, work, boom, while the other prefers to be lazy, coast, crash.

The *first* “impediment” then, is that any attempt on the part of the *Individual Caretaker* to claim, to proclaim, what are regarded as base, natural, resources for their selves is constrained by the demand of a return to the principle of *Tawheed*; absolute ownership is that of God’s.<sup>61</sup> Natural

resources [objects] in the universe, such as land, capital, general circumstances such as shortages for reasons of war or disasters as well as laws of nature, *all these belong to the whole of society, and all its members have equal shares and rights of access to them.*<sup>62</sup>

The *Individual Caretaker* is not only leashed by *Tawheed* but also bound, fixated, as well by an enforced communal will, permitted only the borrowing of specific types of property. The *second* impediment is that if the use of *property* is in an ignoble, indignant, “manner which damages ... others” then the community is to arbitrate, break its silence or prop itself up from whatever slumber, to intervene, to halt this solitary individual from inflicting any further harm or damage.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately and always in the end, as a *third* impediment, if

a segment of society is without [a *quality of life* that includes, though not limited to] shelter, clothing, food, and adequate economic opportunity, then societal needs ... take priority over

this myopic *Individual*.<sup>64</sup>

In an echo of the first anti-capitalist current, arrives the second: *Mudarabah/Musharakah*, is an anti-monopolistic vestige and external financial subtending body, “structure,” established communally, minimising tirelessly by investing rhythm, keeping mobile, radically open or fluid any attempt by the same *Caretakers*, to establish the concentration or concretisation of *borrowed firms* in their hands. It obstructs the possibility of monopolies or oligopolies by extending existing *Caretakers* relationships thus creating *new Caretakers*, new organs, as revitalised independent nourishing offshoots of already existing *Caretakers* and the “original body”—the *small borrowed firm*.<sup>65</sup> There are three beneficiary effects of *Mudarabah/Musharakah*. The *first* is the creation by way of division of present *small-borrowed firms* into a greater number of other diversified autonomous “*small borrowed firms*” for these *new Caretakers*; a pathway to less animosity due to jealousy, above all and rather *Ehsan*, kindness or generosity, effective complementary cohesive inter-linkage and adequate resource allocation between *Caretakers* of the same body, community.<sup>66</sup> The *second* effect is a minimisation of *stockpiling* or in Islam what is called *Israf*.<sup>67</sup> *Mudarabah/Musharakah*’s trajectory is more adequate resource allocation, investments, through the minimisation of waste in production, consumption and commodity exchange values, all due to *Israf*; a desire to minimise the gap of *stockpiling*, the *surplus* of objects and subjects, to prevent unnecessary depletion or destruction once a *threshold*, the *threshold* in which excess stock begins to pile, is reached.<sup>68</sup> *Mudarabah/Musharakah seeks to minimise then the production of shit we do not need and that You and I will never consume* by transforming the threshold of production or consumption into the *exchange limit*, in which *exchange* is of interest to both parties: consumer and producer. It, *the exchange limit*, is

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<sup>61</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 41. Also see Abdul-Hamid Ahmad Abu-Sulayman, “The Theory of Economics of Islam,” in *Contemporary Aspects of Economic Thinking in Islam*, proceedings of the Third East Coast regional Conference of the Muslims Students Association of the U. S. A. and Canada, American Trust Publications (April 1968); and Ahmad, 33 (emphasis added).

<sup>62</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmad, 34.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmad, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Masudul Alam Choudhury, *Money in Islam: A Study in Islamic Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 110.

<sup>66</sup> Choudhury, 110.

<sup>67</sup> Choudhury, 110.

<sup>68</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Gilles and Pierre Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 440.

one of temporal succession[s] because ... [it] preserves itself [from *Israf*] ... by switching territories [of what is produced and what is consumed by way of a joint consensual collaborative operation between both parties] at the conclusion of each period ( *itinerancy, itineration*) ... [and it is] this *iteration* [that] will govern the apparent *exchange*.<sup>69</sup>

*Capitalism*, on the other hand or the other way around, thrives on *stockpiling*, as its law and concern is that of

the simultaneous exploitation of different territories; or, when the exploitation is successive, the succession of operation periods bares [exploitation] on one and the same territory

till “the force of serial iteration is superseded by ... global comparison;” over-producing, under-producing, intentionally, serially, locally and globally; exploitative assemblages, markets, in the absence of consensual collaborations.<sup>70</sup> The “concluding,” *final*, affect is that *Huquq al-Ibadah*, dutiful responsibility to *new Caretakers*, and *Huquq al-Allah*, duties to God, as consequence of *Mudarabah/Musharakah* expressly become (re) affirmed through a fulfilment of God’s intent for the preservation of *Huquq al-Ibadah*.

To pass from the second to the third anti-capitalist current: *Anarca-Islam* brings down the iron curtain on *Interest* or in “Islam,” *Riba*. It, *Riba*, is forbidden, at least, thrice, throughout the Koran, but here are just two verses:

Those who benefit from interest shall be raised like those who have been driven to madness by the touch of the Devil; this is because they say: “Trade is like interest” while God has permitted trade and forbidden interest... If the debtor is in difficulty, let him [and her] respite until it is easier, but if you forego out of charity, it is better for you if you realise.<sup>71</sup>

*Riba*, and its “collection ... was and is forbidden [in ‘Islam’] because it served [and serves] as a means of exploiting” all who undergo dire and bare poverty.<sup>72</sup> *Riba* sickly props up one hegemonic life while exhausting, taking harshly the life of another on account of their weak economic position or strata; *Riba* is repugnant of the spirit of *Anarca-Islam* whose underlying philosophies are *al-‘adl wa’l-ihasan*, justice and benevolence.<sup>73</sup> *Riba* advances the exploitation of those already exploited, as “nobles” take and determine its rate, multiplying their class privilege, then correspond, justifying, to “slaves” under the guise of derogatory undignified edicts its “fairness” or that “*this is just simply the way things are ... it is just the state of economic normalcy*,” these highs and booms, then these lows, recessions and depressions burning hence the foundational spirit upon which all concerned parties in a community ought live together; already, I swear, I can hear the defiant ghost of *Nietzsche* screaming over my shoulder: “May men higher than you stride over you” oh “noble men” of the lowest degree, for at the end you all merely “signify steps.”<sup>74</sup>

Carrying us forth is the fourth anti-capitalist move by *Anarca-Islam* to minimise the concretising of inheritance, and to maximise the mobility of comfort and “success” with wealth accrued through it, a capitalist mechanism directed at folding back wealth on itself. Islamic inheritance laws are cold and deep seeded as an anti-capitalist,

aimed at achieving a wide distribution of wealth amongst the close relatives of the deceased; at the same time the laws are geared to avoid hoarding and individualistic discrimination and squabbling within the family unit.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 440.

<sup>70</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 440.

<sup>71</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 2, Chapter of “The Cow:” Verses 275, 281.

<sup>72</sup> Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 163.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmad, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking, 1954), 395.

<sup>75</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 35.

Looking at them, Islamic Inheritance laws are after the reshuffling, the emission and de-centring of the “pettiness” of the deceased individual’s pleasures and glory, displacing them, as the fabric of a community is placed “ahead [of and above] the emotional whims of the deceased ... a dispersal of wealth from the one to the many, instead of channeling wealth from the many to the one.”<sup>76</sup> As the Koran says, for

never let those who hoard the wealth which God has bestowed on them out of His bounty think it good for them: indeed it is an evil thing for them. The riches they have hoarded shall become their fetters on the Day of Resurrection. It is God who will inherit the heavens and the earth. God is cognizant of all your actions. God has heard the words of those who said: “God is poor, but we are rich.” Their words We will record, and their slaying of the prophets unjustly. We shall say: “Taste now the torment of the Conflagration. Here is the reward of your misdeeds. God is not unjust to His servants ... [and] the multiplication (of possessions and its boasting) occupied you (from worshipping and obeying) until you visit the graves. But no, indeed, you shall soon know.”<sup>77</sup>

To toil around, one is always destined to come back round, rotate and arrive at the fifth anti-capitalist current *Zakat*, progressive alms tax. *Zakat* oriented the way it is weighs heavily in minimising the forgotten shameful horror of worshipping *Mal* as Samiri “who took the [golden] calf (for worship).”<sup>78</sup> *Zakat* is a *Haqq*, a right for those who do not have over and above those who do, keeping social equity integrated into the wider social field, in an effort at desegregating, seeking and establishing balance. *Zakat* as the third pillar in Islam(s), and there are five, is vitally and creatively a divinely sanctioned obligatory necessity for those who Islamically believe in eternal salvation.<sup>79</sup> *Zakat* is an expiation for past sins, a lust for having created a tomorrow filled with the pleasure of one having temporarily overcome one’s fascist self. “Overcoming” without constituting a self-righteous ego *about Zakat* as an act and that would cancel the act out, until the next time it is paid over and over again; a perpetual “disassociation of oneself from one’s accrued wealth.”<sup>80</sup> *Zakat* as a power concentrated for those handicapped financially ought to be repeated indefinitely till the sufficient qualities of life are fulfilled and met. And since *Zakat* as an endogenous money multiplier precludes “the annual payment of alms in income and savings, in trade commodities, in crops, and in certain other properties” it acts as an anti-thesis to *Taxation*.<sup>81</sup> For

*taxation ... creates money ... and it corresponds with services and goods in the current of that [ economic] circulation... [In it] the state finds the means for foreign trade, insofar as it appropriates that trade ... and which makes Monopolistic appropriation of outside exchange possible.*<sup>82</sup>

But *Zakat* is not this abject voyeurism, this conventional source of “nourishment supposedly for the poor,” like some government revenue distributed via taxation or used for the appropriation of an outside exchange as a means for foreign trade.<sup>83</sup> Erected quite the opposite, *Zakat* is to be paid specifically, directly, by hand and face to face, never impersonalised by way of government or a revenue-collecting agency.<sup>84</sup> It is not to be distorted as some sort of free generosity of some towards others in the hope that the wealth of the rich and the destitution of the poor may somehow miraculously

<sup>76</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 35.

<sup>77</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 3: Chapter of “The Family of Imran:” Verse 180; and Chapter 102; Chapter of “Rivalry in Worldly Affairs—Competition:” Verses 1–3.

<sup>78</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 7, Chapter of “The Elevated Places”: Verse 152.

<sup>79</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 26–27.

<sup>80</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 27–28.

<sup>81</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 193.

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 443.

<sup>83</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 27.

find a point of balance.<sup>85</sup> *Zakat* is the right of the poor over the rich and not a privilege honourably bestowed in an honorarium to “those in whose wealth is a right known for the beggar and the outcast.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, *Zakat*’s charm is that it ought be given willingly “not to be paid begrudgingly, if the divine law [associated with it] is to be fulfilled.”<sup>87</sup> The Koran shines as moonlight:

The free will offerings are for the poor and needy, those who work to collect them, those whose hearts are brought together the ransoming of slaves, debtors, in God’s way, and the traveler; so God ordains.<sup>88</sup>

*Zakat* is therefore not

just a widow’s mite to be paid out of [spite or] duty and distributed as charity ... anything but that ... woven into the very fabric of society ... [it] aims at freeing the poor from their dependence so that eventually they themselves will pay *Zakat*

to help less fortunate others.<sup>89</sup> *Zakat* that way “demands ... [a kind of cohesive bondage and] knowledge of the environment, the community, and the social and economic situation” and hence arrives through a sense of communal responsibility continuously reborn.<sup>90</sup>

But then *Zakat* populates, pregnant, and gives birth to our sixth and seventh anti-capitalist daughters *Infaq* and *It’am*. *Infaq* of *Sadaqah*, denotes the act of the voluntary spending of charity and though unlike *Zakat* in that it is un-obligated to impregnate itself, it is still always like it in that it is directed to the welfare of those in more need, is always insolent and cheerfully encouraged. Of course there is *It’am*. *It’am* is the act of leaping beyond worldly glory, to hosting and being able to do so without cost, calculation or rationalisation, thus co-existing with “the other” by voluntarily feeding guests, foreigners, brothers and sisters in need of sustenance; un-obligated, it stills brings strange freedom into one’s world by basking in the company of those poorer on a dinner table.<sup>91</sup> The Koran, as only the Koran can, affirms:

As for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of God give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]: on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told] “these are the treasures which you have laired up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!”<sup>92</sup>

And yet another Verse:

as does he [and/or she] who spends his [and/or her] wealth *only to be seen and praised by others* ... for his [and/or her] parable is that of a smooth rock with [a little] earth upon it-and then a rainstorm smites it and leaves it hard and bare.<sup>93</sup>

These are the verses, and this last verse as a point is an impassioned witness for the attitude, this duty to give, its *discretion* bearing

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<sup>85</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam*, 178.

<sup>86</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Cummings; Askari; Mustafa, 27.

<sup>88</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 9, Chapter of “Repentance and Dispensation:” Verse 60.

<sup>89</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 189.

<sup>90</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 193.

<sup>91</sup> Ahmad, 42.

<sup>92</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 9, The Chapter of “Repentance and Dispensation:” Verses 34–35.

<sup>93</sup> The Holy Koran, Chapter 2: The Chapter of “The Cow:” Verse 264.

the mark of respect for an individual's dignity in all circumstances, even the most intimate ... to give before the poor who need to beg ... to avoid being seen by anyone so that no one has to be embarrassed ... [to give members of a community what they] are entitled to have;

for one is to experience, to feel the "shame" the other feels, and the affect of the effects that hover over the other's body when it is judged in what really is a rightful act of giving what is already due.<sup>94</sup> Innumerable is the character of one who has chosen "to bare faith ... to bear responsibility for social commitment at every moment ... to possess is [tantamount] to have the duty [and obligation] to share."<sup>95</sup>

As if by order of my list, from one to the next, *Ramadan*, an entire anti-capitalist apparition all by itself, a fasting, a *Sawm*, from dusk till dawn, for a lunar month every year. *Ramadan* is not a ritual lonely, alone, by itself, though it is a "costly" and taxing one that hollows out the mind, the body, and that "humiliates" and magnifies them both at the same time. Officially it is an

act of worship ... [to] lead Muslims to perceive, to feel inwardly, the need to eat and drink and by extension to ensure that every human being has the means to subsist.<sup>96</sup>

*Ramadan's* end commences with *Sadaqat Al-Fitr*, "another [obligatory] charity [added to *all the rest*, that never rest] ... imposed on every Muslim who has the means for themselves and their dependents."<sup>97</sup> *Sadaqat Al-Fitr* is launched in connection and

related to property and is obligatory on every Muslim that possesses more than the prescribed amount of provisions after giving the charity ... [and is] to be given in person into the hands of those who are eligible to receive ... [not] the wealthy.<sup>98</sup>

And it is through this profound *Ramadan* that the purification, the glorious act of expiation, plays out in a voluntary *washing out* of oneself internally and externally; a reducing of surplus, the idea of excessively consuming and producing, discouraging and disengaging oneself from the madness of the incessant engagement in extravagant spending and the wasteful use of resources placed in one's trust; a "sanitising" of one's body even if it is just temporary and just for a month.

As a finale, *Islamic banking* is a concrete contestatory act of resistance to Capitalism that gives way to a new form of unrestricted access to financial resources in banking systems without reference to the criteria of "creditworthiness."<sup>99</sup> It appeared in

the mid-nineteenth century ... [and consists in] funding trading activities ... [opening] saving accounts with no interest ... [and] whose patrons participate in investments and either earn a share of the profit on the return or suffer a portion of the losses sustained by the bank.<sup>100</sup>

For their part, transactions involve risk, "the use of equity sharing rather than debt financing."<sup>101</sup> And though dare I say it is a "cost in so far as risk," it is a way out and a beginning that seethes at heart in its arming willing resisters, any impoverished communities, with a preliminary necessary set of arms that can be used to ward off current hegemonic capitalist orders. Islamic banks are a move that put their fingers on the pulse, the essential problem, sensitising and mobilising the entire social context, *perhaps having foretold the 2008 global financial meltdown*, by creating conditions favourable

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<sup>94</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 181.

<sup>95</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 182.

<sup>96</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> Ali Budak, *Fasting in Islam and the Month of Ramadan: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. Suleyman Basaran (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005), 93–96.

<sup>98</sup> Budak, 93–96.

<sup>99</sup> Ahmad, 46.

<sup>100</sup> Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 167–168.

<sup>101</sup> Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 168.



to real transformation. It empowers “grassroot levels by extending their social funds towards developing a diversity” of “small firms” in generating an alternative resistive rhizome modified in a more humane way towards organising differently, autonomously, grassroots workplaces.<sup>102</sup> Islamic Banks are a way of demanding the reopening up of what are cordoned credit-worthy asylums by setting up real alternatives and encouraging an engagement in inter-communal economic cooperation and participation, restoring agency back to those whose agency it belongs to in the first place; everyone in the community.<sup>103</sup>

It seems to me, with what was mentioned and what are an unmentioned ample more, that certain anti-capitalist currents, commitments and conditions rise as evidence in offering alternatives to a god whose inflations and deflations militate against and give support to my and *Anarca-Islam*’s existence and stance of giving fair measure of value in all transactions; in my and *Anarca-Islam* becoming anti-capitalist.

## To (Re) Do Away with the Clinic

As such, this is how the taste of a sour lemon and its words coursed through my veins. As such I ate the lemon and spat out the words as seeds. For when yesterday I supposedly woke up I found myself in this Clinic sucking what you might call a “lemon,” now a dried “lemon” whose seeds are like these words I just spat. Perhaps now they, the seeds and their company of words will sprout into inverted trees of half red, Anarchist, half green, Islamic, and partially rotted black apples instead. As such my duty for now, but for now, becomes fulfilled. As such my infringement upon good tastes and manners comes to a temporal beginning of something new. This was the vision I had sometime in the afternoon and you could call it poetic terrorism if you like. All I propose to know is that it was but a combat-like portrait of two dreams, redeeming one another, never complete and hence always partially rotted by an ongoing tragic symphony of misconceptions still to be resurrected and unearthed. As such, in this certain sense but not only in the strict sense of which I spoke of, “I” stand in reality with a theological and epistemological certitude in hand, becoming anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian, saturating, by the very politicisation of my subjectivity, breaking through, disturbing and melting two archaic walls, “Islam” and “Anarchy.” But breaking through walls is not void of difficulties, and if it is done too brutally there is the possibility of headaches, crumbling, collapsing, a great fall, due to pre-existing misconceptions that are always already threatening the coexistence of these two identities and communities.<sup>104</sup> For I myself have taken part in these troubles because of my silence. And so to the formidable difficulties to come, in an effort at breaching another wall, and to further minimise such misunderstandings *soon* I will clear, clarify and work to add, in a breath of fresh air, to Anarca-Islam’s Anti-Capitalist and Anti-Authoritarian commitments so far, an Anti-Trans-phobic one. Yet *for now, I am content with Deleuze’s final words on the back cover of Desert Islands (2003): “if you don’t admire something, if you don’t love it, you have no reason to write a word about it,” but there are No castles on the Rhine to be enshrined here. Read this once, tempt Nous, cry Brûle then burn it.* For now, this patient has “done” away, fleeing like Genet their playpen and Clinic, running whilst looking for a weapon. Feel free to call the cops.

Salam et Salut. More appropriately, Adieu.

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<sup>102</sup> Choudhury, 178.

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<sup>104</sup> Guattari, 89.

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# CHAPTER TWELVE. IMAGINING AN ISLAMIC ANARCHISM: A NEW FIELD OF STUDY IS PLOUGHED

ANTHONY T. FISCELLA

*What research has been accomplished hitherto on the subject of anarchism within Islam? How has Islamic anarchism been approached and conceived by researchers and advocates? How might this field be approached? What are some of the challenges inherent in the study of anarchism in Islam? This chapter attempts to answer these questions while raising new ones. Work by Ahmet Karamustafa, Patricia Crone, Harold Barclay, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Michael Muhammad Knight, ‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney, Heba Raouf Ezzat, Michael “Salim” McCarron and Sharif Gemie is discussed and analysed in light of the goals and reference points of the authors. Material from the Najdiyya Kharijites and Mu‘tazilites of the ninth century to the contemporary Taqwacore scene is addressed in an attempt to chart the realm of what might be considered to be variations of an Islamic anarchism. Concluding with a tentative model for the study of this new field, the chapter ends by raising questions about the efficacy of current taxonomies and terminologies.*

There are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it.<sup>1</sup>

—Aziz al-Azmeh

[A]narchists from all kinds of backgrounds with all kinds of ideas have sought to make contemporary anarchisms relevant to them in their own unique situations.<sup>2</sup>

—Jason Adams

## Introduction

Time and again scholars inform us that Islam is neither homogenous nor monolithic. The same could be said of anarchism. Both are highly diverse movements with a wide range of internal clashes, debates and questions about identity and boundaries. Can one then look at such diversity and speak of Islam or anarchism in the singular sense without committing an injustice to one’s intended meaning? The two epigraphs above would imply that the task is tricky at best.<sup>3</sup> Yet as broad and diverse as these two spheres are, they do speak of distinct ideological, social, and physical territories. One does not enter an anarchist Infoshop in Europe in order to join fellow Muslims in prayer. Nor does one

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<sup>1</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islam and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Adams, “Nonwestern Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context,” *Infoshop Library* (2003), [www.infoshop.org](http://www.infoshop.org) (accessed January 25, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The singular sense shall be the standard in regard to this study because it is both the more popular usage as well as the less clumsy. The advantage of the plural usage is that it is more technically correct but the nuance of multiplicity that it alludes to is already made abundantly clear by the material here and need not be emphasised. In line with Gemie’s own critique of the plural usage, the singular also has the advantage of emphasising inherent commonality which in this context seems more relevant. Sharif Gemie, “Beyond the Borders: The Question of Third World Anarchism,” *Siyahi Interlocal: Journal of Postanarchist Theory Culture and Politics* (April 12, 2005) [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com) (accessed January 25, 2008). Originally published in Turkish: “Üçüncü Dünya Anarüzmi Sorunu,” *Siyahi* 1, no. 1 (2004): 76–81.

enter a mosque in Indonesia in order to find a book by Bakunin. Traditionally those territories have been viewed as so distinct that they have been regarded by scholars on both sides as not sharing any common ground whatsoever. Nowadays, despite the recognition of internal diversity within both of these global movements, the tendency remains to regard them as entirely separate phenomena. If you look through the *Oxford History of Islam* you will not find a single mention of anarchism.<sup>4</sup> Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas from 300 B. C. to 1939* similarly makes no mention of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Both of these cases are examples of the traditional understanding that anarchism and Islam are two completely separate social, political, and historical phenomena.<sup>6</sup>

That understanding has finally begun to be questioned. On the side of Islamic studies, the French scholar Charles Pellat used the term "anarchists" nearly fifty years ago in order to describe certain unnamed Mu'tazilites.<sup>7</sup> On the side of anarchist studies, Peter Marshall included Islam in his 1992 work *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*.<sup>8</sup> Although it amounted to less than a paragraph of comments, his mention of Ismailis, Sufis and the Qarâmita (the latter on grounds of communism) reflected a willingness to reconsider the traditional understanding that anarchism and Islam are completely separate entities with no significant points of convergence. Only within the last twenty years or so has a connection between anarchism and Islam been seriously examined and this has been mostly thanks to the work of Peter Lamborn Wilson, Ahmet Karamustafa, and Patricia Crone. Harold Barclay, the anarchist anthropologist and author of *People Without Government*, made his own contribution to the study of anarchism and Islam with his article "Islam, Muslim Societies, and Anarchy" published in *Anarchist Studies* in 2002.<sup>9</sup> Since then, there has been an increase of the number of articles, essays, and manifestos on the Internet that relate anarchism and Islam, often authored by individuals who self-identify as Muslim and anarchist. These range from the short and succinct "Muslim Anarchist Charter" by Yakoub Islam to the lengthy poststructuralist-inspired "Paths to Becoming a Muslim Anarchist" by Mohamed Jean Veneuse, from the Jordanian anarchist group who states that "after reading a book called *Sufi Tropics* written by an Iraqi writer (Hadi al Alawi), we found that Sufism is ALL ABOUT anarchism" to the "786. Anarcho-Islamic Philosophy" by an Australian who declares that "Anarchism as an Islamic philosophy offers the only natural way to bridge the gap between the world we wish to live in and the world we currently live in."<sup>10</sup> Ilham Makdisi, currently a professor at Northeastern University, has written a doctoral dissertation which contains a section that deals with the spread of anarchist and socialist ideas and praxis in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire by migrant European radicals more than a century ago.<sup>11</sup> A Persian man in Sweden by the name of Mohammad Mehdi Sefidgar has written an entire book devoted to the idea of an Islamic society going even beyond the laudable ideals of "anarchist

<sup>4</sup> John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Graham, Robert, *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* (Montreal: Black Rose, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> This tendency is so deep-rooted, in fact, that even when one is looking for evidence to the contrary it can be difficult to find. Anarchist researcher Bas Moreel tried to find evidence of a connection between Islam and anarchism for his *Religious Anarchism* bulletin but located no more than the solitary example of one anti-authoritarian individual, Gustave-Henri Jossot (1866–1951), who converted to Islam but did not self-identify as anarchist. See Bas Moreel, "Islamic Anarchism: Gustave-Henri Jossot's Religious Conversion," *Religious Anarchism* no. 4 (May 2003) [www.raforum.info](http://www.raforum.info) (accessed January 5, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Pellat "L'Imamat dans la Doctrine de Gâhiz," *Studia Islamica*, no. 15 (1961): 38.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Harold Barclay, *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchism* (London: Kahn & Averill and Cienfuegos Press, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> See Yakoub Islam, "Muslim Anarchist Charter (amended 19/02/09)," *Tasneem Project*, [www.bayyinat.org.uk](http://www.bayyinat.org.uk) (accessed February 26, 2009); Mohamed Jean Veneuse, "Paths to Becoming a Muslim Anarchist," *Indymedia* (February 3, 2007), [indy-media.us](http://indy-media.us) (accessed February 26, 2009); H [pseudonym], "An Overview of Anarchism in Jordan Today: Theory and Activities," *A-Infos News Service* (March 27, 2008), [www.ainfos.ca](http://www.ainfos.ca) (accessed February 12, 2009); NuKungFu, "786. Anarcho-Islamic Philosophy," *Tribe* (June 29, 2007), [anarchism.tribe.net](http://anarchism.tribe.net) (accessed February 26, 2009). It may also be noted that none of this online material has been discussed by any of the researchers covered here.

<sup>11</sup> She does not however document any developed synthesis between Islam and anarchism and therefore no "Islamic anarchism" appears in her study; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories: The Formulation and Dissemination of Radical Ideas in and between Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria 1860–1914*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 2004).

direct democracy.”<sup>12</sup> There is indeed a wealth of potentially relevant material—so much so that while the aim of this chapter is to plough this new field of study, the following limits have had to be applied.

First of all, there is a tendency to describe Islam and especially the *shahada*, the first pillar of Islam and the Muslim declaration of faith, in terms that sound very close to anarchist ideals. For example, Syed Abdul Latif writes in “Islam and Social Change”:

Man ... should neither be lord over another man, nor a slave to him. [Muhammad] raised the slogan, *la-ilaha-illallah* (there is none worthy of worship except God), to inspire the rise of a new order of life for man... It was the slogan of the freedom of man, of his emancipation from every form of bondage under which his thought and life had quailed in the past... [I]t placed man next to God, brushing aside all the scribes, intercessors and priests and ... swept away all distinctions of race and colour and every hierarchical concept of life, making righteous conduct, *Amal-i-Sâleh*, the sole criterion of one man's superiority over another.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Asghar Ali Engineer in *Islam and Liberation Theology* quotes the Egyptian scholar Ahmad Amin as drawing similar conclusions:

the ruler who wants to humble us wants to be a god; but “There is no god but God.” We accept from any man whatever or from any nation whatever only that they should be a brother or brothers... Democracy, socialism, and social justice in their true meanings will survive and advance because these call for human brotherhood, and this is one of the consequences of “No god but God.”<sup>14</sup>

These descriptions of Islam and the *shahada* may share some common ground with anarchist thought or could easily lend themselves to such an interpretation but, for the limited purposes of this study, the vast terrain that such an examination could entail will not be traversed here. The same holds true for the lack of a priesthood or clerical hierarchy, particularly within Sunni Islam, which, in combination with Islam's egalitarian character, almost implies an anarchic structure in itself.<sup>15</sup> This lack of central order has been amplified by the fall of the caliphate in 1924 and the rise of globalisation. Mandaville speaks of this development of increasingly pluralistic authority as an “intensification of a tendency towards decentralized authority that has always been present in Islam.”<sup>16</sup>

Volpi and Turner go so far as to refer to it as “a functional type of anarchism.”<sup>17</sup> This brings to mind the sort of “anarchical society” that Hedley Bull spoke of when analysing international relations between states in a global arena.<sup>18</sup> To discuss or even review research about the anarchic or egalitarian nature of Islam as such is beyond the scope of this study but it can be helpful to bear in mind that

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<sup>12</sup> Mohammad Mehdi Sefidgar, *Islam Beyond: Western Representative Democracy, Marxist Democratic Centralism and Anarchist Direct Democracy* (Göteborg: Chandel Förlag, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, “Islam and Social Change,” *International Social Science Bulletin* 5, no. 4 (1953): 691–692; Another example is Sharif Gemie's (2006) brief but intriguing comparison between the structures of debates within the French *Fédération Anarchiste* and within Islamic culture in general. See Sharif Gemie, “The Trial of Fatima: Anarchists, Muslims and the *Monde Libertaire*, 2003–05,” *Anarchist Studies* 14, no. 1 (2006): 9–19.

<sup>14</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990), 8.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) or M. Zuhdi Jasser who cites Islam's lack of institutional hierarchy as a key link between a politically libertarian perspective and the Islamic faith, in “The Synergy of Libertarianism and Islam,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 72, no. 14–15 (2006): 456. Also relevant is Charles Lindholm, “Quandaries of Command in Egalitarian Societies: Examples from Swat and Morocco,” in *Comparing Muslim Societies*, ed. Juan R. I. Cole (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 63–94.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Mandaville, “Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 102.

<sup>17</sup> Frédéric Volpi and Bryan S. Turner, “Introduction: Making Islamic Authority Matter,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1995).

this type of structural analysis of Islam as anarchic is qualitatively distinct from the conception of an Islamic anarchism even if the former may be conducive to the latter.

Secondly, this chapter only addresses English language research. If there is any significant amount of research on anarchism in Islam in other languages, I am unaware of it. There is, however, some relevant literature by individuals who had close relations with both Muslim and anarchist circles such as those works by or about Isabelle Eberhardt (1877–1904), Ivan Aguéli (1869–1917) or Leda Rafanelli (1880–1971) in French, Swedish and Italian respectively (although Eberhardt has been translated into English).<sup>19</sup> As none of them have researched Islamic anarchism nor have any of them become a focal point for contemporary Islamic anarchist research (even if Eberhardt has been mentioned by Wilson), it could be argued that their treatment is better served elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Thinkers in other languages—particularly Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish, undoubtedly exist but have been beyond my reach.<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, this study shall not address economic stances—whether it be capitalism or socialism. Although there are groups or individuals (such as the Minaret of Freedom Institute) who could qualify as anarcho-capitalist as well as any number of Islamic socialist strains of thought and tradition, I have not found any research on the former and the latter, though well-researched, does not fall under the working definition of anarchism, and is therefore beyond the scope of this study.<sup>22</sup>

Fourthly, it happens that certain Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb are sometimes described as “anarchist.”<sup>23</sup> The description is understandable. In his book *Milestones*, first published in 1964, Qutb wrote:

Islam is a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men. Thus it strives from the beginning to abolish all those systems and governments which are based on the rule of man over men and the servitude of one human being to another.<sup>24</sup>

While Qutb’s stance may sound anarchistic, it is not unambiguous and I have not discovered any research that has analysed his political viewpoints as anarchist.<sup>25</sup> This study will not undertake such a task and since Qutb did not himself state that he was anarchist, his ideas will have to remain unexamined here. Ironically, Qaddafi’s ideas are more developed in an anarchistic sense but he is rarely, if ever, called an anarchist, and despite a number of books having been written about him and his theory, I do not know of any that consider him or his theory to be anarchist.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, trans. Paul Bowles (San Francisco: City Lights, 1982) or Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Passionate Nomad: The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt*, trans. Nina de Voogd (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988). While she did not present an explicit theory of Islamic anarchism as such, one could argue that her devout but libertine lifestyle implied it.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegades*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 11.

<sup>21</sup> One example that I am aware of is Hadi Al-Alawi’s piece (translated into Swedish) on anti-authoritarian elements within the history of Islam (even if he does not use the term “anarchist”). See Hadi Al-Alawi, “Oberoendets linjer i den islamiska bildningstraditionen,” trans. Abdul Hussein Sadayo and Philip Halldén, *Tidskrift för Mellanösternstudier*, no. 2 (1997): 31–47.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of socialist thought within Islam see John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), the writings of Ali Shariati, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Benazir Bhutto, Mustafa Siba’i, or start with Wikipedia’s page on “Islamic socialism.” For examples of advocates of anarcho-capitalism within Islam see Tim Cavanaugh, “Revealed Libertarianism: Minaret of Freedom Tries to Square the Quran with the Free Market,” *Reason Magazine* (July 28, 2003), [www.reason.com](http://www.reason.com) (accessed January 2, 2009) or Jasser, “The Synergy of Libertarianism and Islam.”

<sup>23</sup> Robert Irwin, “Is this the Man who Inspired Bin Laden?: On Sayyid Qutb, the Father of Modern Islamist Fundamentalism,” *The Guardian* (November 1, 2001) [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) (accessed May 17, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Sayyid Qutb quoted in Albert J. Bergesen, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 37.

<sup>25</sup> Esposito does, on the other hand, posit the revolutionary Qutb as more top-down in his approach than the grassroots-oriented philosophies of his predecessors, Al-Banna and Mawdudi. Suffice to say that the characterisation of Qutb’s political views as “anarchist” is contested. See John Esposito with Natana J. De Long-Bas, “Modern Islam,” in *God’s Rule*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 171–172.

<sup>26</sup> See for example John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987); Mohamed A. El-Khawass, *Qaddafi: His Ideology in Theory and Practice* (Brattleboro: Amana Books, 1986); Mansour O.

Also, mostly due to space limitations, those groups or individuals that do not consider themselves to be Muslim (such as the Five Percenters or any number of anarchist Alawis) shall also remain outside the realm of this examination even if their anarchistic aspects may be of relevance. Nonetheless, it may be relevant to mention that one could draw a major distinction between orthodox Sunni Islam and heterodox sects within Islam. Khuri, for example, suggests that Sunni dominance of the city and state predisposed them to develop a political philosophy that favoured a central government based on coercion and force. The sects, being more rural-based and not having the same degree of access to force, resorted to moral measures and social bonds as a means of regulating social order and adopted “rebellious ideologies rejecting the state.”<sup>27</sup> In line with fourteenth century sociologist Ibn Khaldun’s urban-rural dichotomy, Khuri discerns between the coercive government of the Sunnis and the *asabiya* (bonds of solidarity) of the sects, placing an urban state-friendly religiosity on one side and a tribal state-antagonistic religiosity on the other. While interesting, the exploration of Khuri’s (or even Khaldun’s) stance and the position of heterodox groups in Islam (unless explicitly studied as anarchist) is beyond the scope of this study.

Finally, there have been occasional comparisons drawn between Islamic and anarchist terrorism.<sup>28</sup> As these parallels are drawn primarily on the basis of strategical similarities, and not the concept of anarchism or the opposition to the state as such, they too shall be ignored here.

For theoretical guidance, this chapter shall draw on a piece, by anarchist scholar Sharif Gemie, written in response to an article by Jason Adams wherein he discusses the way we look at “Third World anarchism.”<sup>29</sup> By outlining a framework for approaching anarchist thought and practice in the “Third World,” Gemie simultaneously provides a potentially useful model for analysing anarchism within Islam. The four alternative categories he presents are: 1) Imitations of Euro-American anarchism (which he compares to the export of fashion and/or cultural manifestations that have little root in their surroundings); 2) Anthropological anarchisms (which refers predominantly to the lifestyle and practice of tribal societies that lack strong state structures); 3) Openness to other concepts of anarchism (in which Gemie raises the question of how well we are equipped to see alternative conceptions of anarchism—such as Taoism—in light of the fact that our access is often limited when it comes to foreign cultures and our social references tend to constrain what we recognise as “anarchist”); and 4) Anarchist practice (wherein he cites examples such as the Palestinian Intifada as a social phenomena that bore fundamental similarities to anarchist self-management and direct action).<sup>30</sup> While the first category may be immediately recognised as irrelevant to this study (insofar as it is irreligious), the following three can be tentatively applied as a means to sort through the existing material.

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El-Kikhia, *Libya’s Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997). Two possible exceptions might be Mattias Gardell’s assertion in a Swedish article that Qaddafi’s theory and his attempt to implement it in Libya is relevant to anarcho-syndicalists in “Muhammar Al-Khadaffi och den Libyska Revolutionen,” *Anarkistisk Tidskrift*, no. 6–7 (1992): 11–34 as well as Said Gafourov’s online essay “Social Philosophy of Russian Anarchism (Kropotkin) and of Muammar Al Qadhafi: An Essay in Comparison,” *A-Infos News Service* (May 8, 2003), [www.ainfos.ca](http://www.ainfos.ca) (accessed January 6, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Fuad I. Khuri, *Imams and Emirs: State, Religion and Sects in Islam* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), 35. The sects that Khuri covers here are Alawis, Yezidis, Druze, Ibadis, Zaydis and Shi’ite Twelvers.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Audrey Kurth Cronin, “How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 7–48; “For Jihadist, Read Anarchist” *The Economist*, August 18, 2005, 17–20; Tariq Ali, “Why They Happened: The London Bombings,” *Counterpunch* (July 8, 2005), [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org) (accessed January 1, 2009). One of the most recent examples of this tendency is James Gelvin, “Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian’s Reply to Terrorology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008): 563–581. Gelvin is a scholar of Islamic politics and has previously written about “Islamic nationalism” which he contrasts with the “Islamic anarchism” of Al-Qaeda whose supposed goal is to overthrow all nation-states. He even goes so far as to include Al-Qaeda under the umbrella of the current anarchist movement. Ultimately, this comparison is about as reasonable and effective as it would be for a scholar of anarchism to single out a loosely organised anarchist group (such as the Black Bloc) and then compare them to Islam as a whole—perhaps even calling them Muslims—because they happen to bear certain strategic similarities with the Palestinian Intifada.

<sup>29</sup> Gemie himself questions the use of the term “Third World” but I’ll bypass that discussion here. While I agree with Gemie that it is better than Adams’ term (“Nonwestern”) and recognise that the term is faulty, I fail to see a fully satisfactory replacement.

<sup>30</sup> Gemie, “Beyond the Borders.”



This chapter is as much a study *in the study* of the juncture between Islam and anarchism as it is an overview of various ways in which to examine the intersection between the two phenomena. Rather than attach a rigorous definition to either term, they shall be regarded here more as signposts that imply general areas that are not clearly cordoned off. Islam is here regarded to include the various traditions that revolve around the legacy of Muhammad and the god of the Koran. Without getting into the theological discussion as to who is a heretic and who is a Muslim, that definition is broad without being all-embracing. Likewise, anarchism is here regarded primarily as the opposition to (or disregard for) political authority and sometimes, in addition to that, religious authority as well. As we shall see, the definitions of Islam and anarchism vary according to the perspective of the researcher.<sup>31</sup> Naturally, as there is wide disagreement amongst both anarchists and Muslims as to what is or is not “anarchist” or “Islamic,” the same holds true for the conception of “Islamic anarchism” (or “Muslim anarchy”) which can range from the communistic (Marshall) to the individualistic (Karamustafa, Wilson), from something potentially rooted in segmentary lineage systems (Barclay) to the mere refutation of the idea that the imamate is obligatory (Crone).

Beginning with a brief summarisation of some of the main works within this area of research (Karamustafa, Crone, Wilson, and Barclay), and including a short presentation of a few recent advocates for Islamic anarchism (Knight, Carney, McCarron, and Ezzat), this chapter will follow up with a comparative analysis of the various visions of Islamic anarchism that are articulated by researchers and/or advocates and finally this chapter will conclude with an alternative to Gemie’s model as well as comments regarding the implications of the analysis and the challenges presented to researchers in this area of study.

## The Study of Islamic Anarchism to Date

Ahmet T. Karamustafa is currently Professor of History and Religious Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. A Muslim himself since birth, he authored *God’s Unruly Friends*, a book which charts antinomian dervish groups between the years 1200 and 1550.<sup>32</sup> The specific groups that he mentions are Qalandars, Haydarîs, Abdâls of Rûm, Jâmîs, Bektâsîs, Shams-i Tabrîzîs in Asia Minor, and Madârîs and Jalâlîs in India, with particular emphasis on the first three of these groups.

Though these dervishes often varied in their characteristics—ranging from ascetic hermits to hedonistic groups—they were united in their repudiation of social and religious norms. While the Qalandars are described as dervishes who were “celibates” that engaged in non-productive forms of sexual activity (including the company of boys), the Haydarîs, on the other hand, wore large metal rings on their genitals in order to prevent themselves from engaging in sexual intercourse. The Madârîs are described as “mendicants who refused all clothing and rubbed their naked bodies with ashes.”<sup>33</sup> In addition to wearing iron chains around their necks and heads, the Madârîs wore black turbans, carried black banners, rejected religious observances, and smoked large amounts of cannabis. Indeed, voluntary poverty, unemployment, nomadism and/or group living, nudity and/or uniform dress codes, rejection of orthodox Muslim practice, celibacy, sexual deviance, consumption of intoxicants or hallucinogens, the wearing of bracelets, the carrying of certain paraphernalia (such as begging bowls and clubs), body modification (including tattoos, piercing, self-laceration, and shaving), silence, fasting, sleep deprivation, dancing,

<sup>31</sup> Crone, for example, maintains a narrow definition of anarchism and an orthodox definition of Islam, while Wilson’s is broad on both counts and even goes so far as include the Moorish Orthodox Church (an heretical offshoot of an heretical offshoot—which would place them about as close to Islam as the Baha’i Faith). See Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993): 15–50. Also see George Crowder’s attempt to outline common threads in early anarchist thinkers in *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200–1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Karamustafa, 61

singing, and drumming all featured as characteristics which the various groups selectively employed to varying degrees.

Karamustafa's qualification of these groups as anarchist is based on his definition of anarchism as a practice of "active nihilism targeted directly at human society."<sup>34</sup> Twice he notes that one dervish, Otman Baba, consistently compared property—money in particular—to faeces. Yet the major focus of dervish ire, according to Karamustafa, was not society in general, but rather institutional Sufism.<sup>35</sup>

Karamustafa's main goal here is not to argue that these groups are anarchist but rather to argue that they are Muslim. He begins by observing that these groups have traditionally been discarded as remnants of pre-Islamic traditions, "folk religion" or otherwise un-Islamic. In contrast, he asserts that they are genuine manifestations of an inherent conflict within Islam between world-embracing and world-rejecting perspectives. Whereas heretical Sufism gradually institutionalised in an Islamic world dominated by the world-embracing approach, antinomian dervish groups arose to affirm a more purist and anti-institutional approach to the world-rejecting spirit. In their eyes, the Sufis were sell-outs. True lovers of God had no concern for mundane matters or the approval of aristocrats.

Karamustafa demonstrates that despite the opposition of these dervishes to both the world-embracing stance of mainstream Muslims and the compromising stance of institutional Sufism, their practices and form of organisation copied that of their Sufi predecessors. Like the Sufi *tariqahs*, the communities of antinomian dervishes were headed by elders, they employed master-disciple relationships, and they commonly applied Sufi spiritual concepts such as *faqr* (poverty), *fanâ'* ("death before dying"), and *walâyah* (sainthood). Thus, he regards Sufism as the institutional parent and the antinomians as the rebellious anarchist offspring. He further exemplifies this connection by noting that many antinomians were assimilated into Sufi orders. The "anarchist individualism" of the antinomians, Karamustafa maintains, is a "latent but potent current within Sufism."<sup>36</sup>

Danish-born Patricia Crone is Professor of Islamic History at Princeton University in New Jersey. She is author of *God's Rule* and "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists."<sup>37</sup> In both studies she lays out the assertion that the only manifestations of anarchism within Islamic history can be traced to the Najdiyya Kharijites and certain members of the Mu'tazilites. She begins "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists" by writing:

The people with whom this paper is concerned were anarchists in the simple sense of believers in an-archy, "no government." They were not secularists, individualists, communists, social reformers, revolutionaries or terrorists, merely thinkers who held that Muslim society could function without what we would call the state.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, for Crone, anarchism is solely the belief in the dispensability of government. According to her, Western anarchist thought can be generally traced to the concept of returning to a utopian condition of innocence that pre-dated the emergence of the state. Islam, on the other hand, is founded on the basic ideas that God is the ruler of the universe, government has always existed, and the utopian goal is not a lack of government but rather an ideal form of government. In practical terms, human society should be governed by an imam, the first of whom was Muhammad. Statelessness, the condition of society before Islam, is regarded pejoratively as *jahiliyya*, a state of chaos and disorder. Hence, the institution of the

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<sup>34</sup> Karamustafa, 17.

<sup>35</sup> It can be noted here that Ocak states that there "are examples of militant Qalandaris from the lower classes who participated in revolts against established rule," which suggests that the dervish anarchists were not always or wholly unconcerned with political rule. See Ahmet Y. Ocak, "Sufi Milieux and Political Authority in Turkish History: A General Overview (Thirteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Sufism and Politics: The Power of Spirituality*, ed. Paul L. Heck (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), 181. Furthermore, Ocak's treatment of the subject, distinguishing between urban "conformist" Sufis and nomadic, rural "non-conformist" Sufis, offers an interesting contrast to Karamustafa's.

<sup>36</sup> Karamustafa, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Patricia Crone, "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists," *Past and Present*, no. 167 (2000).

<sup>38</sup> Crone, 3.

imamate, following Muhammad's example, was to keep the potential for *jahiliyya* in check by governing society righteously.

The problem by the ninth-century however was that imams demonstrated a particularly problematic tendency of turning into tyrants. The general response to this quandary was one of three options: replacement of the tyrants with righteous imams, acceptance of tyranny or rejection of the imam altogether. The first option was chosen by the majority of Mu'tazilites and Kharijites (as well as Shi'ites and a few Sunnis though she does not mention them here) who fought to replace decadent leadership with righteous leadership. The second option became the standard Sunni response to tyranny. Rather than divide the Muslim community through internal feuding, kings—even corrupt ones—should be tolerated but should not be regarded as divinely guided. The third response, which was to reject the imam altogether, was chosen by a minority amongst the Kharijites and Mu'tazilites. As the latter reasoned, "since imams kept turning into kings, the best solution was not to set them up in the first place."<sup>39</sup>

These Muslim anarchist groups did not however argue that the state was an inherently bad institution as such—only that it was no longer practical. Their point was that the imam was not to be regarded as a religious obligation in the same way as prayer and fasting. Government was a human convention and an option which could be freely chosen or not according to circumstance. In such a circumstance where government was either impractical or undesirable some Mu'tazilites argued that the whole community—including criminals—had to chip in by observing the law while others advocated mob rule ("people should take the law into their own hands").<sup>40</sup> Still others advocated a decentralised federalism in which power was vested in the hands of local leaders and patriarchs.

Whereas the Mu'tazilites were more philosophically based, the militant Najdiyya set up their argument somewhat differently. The Najdiyya were building upon a tradition within the Kharijites that righteous Muslims had an obligation to take to arms and replace corrupt leadership with righteous leadership. As the Kharijite history of placing their faith in the power of the sword invariably saw them losing more ground than they gained, the Najdiyya came up with the practical idea that if they no longer believed in the idea that the imam was necessary then they would no longer be obligated to fight (and die) to establish it. Furthermore, the Najdiyya argued that a righteous imam had to be unanimously sanctioned by all Muslims and that this consensus (*ijma*) had never occurred. They were still open to the concept of replaceable chiefs who would serve the community but they were strictly opposed to the idea of an imam who would dictate over them. As Crone writes of the Najdiyya:

All believers were entitled to their own opinions on law and doctrine on the basis of *ijtihad*, independent reasoning, for all of them were equally authoritative... Najdite Islam was a do-it-yourself religion. Politically *and* intellectually a Najdite would have no master apart from God.<sup>41</sup>

Within their own group then, the Najdiyya were anarchist and egalitarian. At the same time, they regarded only themselves to be true Muslims. Outsiders were, in principle, fair game for enslavement or extermination should they choose to rebel.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the groups that Crone described fell well within the fold of the Muslim community. She makes no attempt to argue for their right to be classified as Muslims. That much is taken for granted. Her argument then is based on the premise that these two groups qualify as anarchist and she demonstrates it through their ideological and theological stances—not through any examination of their actual form of organisation or behaviour.

Peter Lamborn Wilson (also known as Hakim Bey) is an independent researcher who self-identifies as both Muslim (non-practicing) and anarchist though he does not confine himself to either of these two

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<sup>39</sup> Crone, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Crone, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Crone, 25–26.

<sup>42</sup> Crone, 26.

categories. He spent some years living and working in Iran under the reign of the Shah and returned to the U. S. after the revolution. During the 1980s he authored the seminal work *Scandal: Essays in Islamic Heresy* and followed it up with *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam*.<sup>43</sup> Through these works and other writings he has propagated for both his own brand of anarchism (including but not restricted to individualist anarchism) as well as heretical religiosity (including but not restricted to Islam). Although he lies outside of the realm of officially sanctioned academic research, he has nevertheless made a significant impact on the study, development, and practice of Islamic anarchism. Karamustafa, for example, cites *Scandal* in his own work and Michael Muhammad Knight (discussed below) owes the spread of his Taqwacore concept to Wilson's anarchist publishing company Autonomedia.

It is not possible to do justice here to Wilson's vision(s) of Islamic anarchism in that he offers a number of variants throughout a great deal of writing (which significantly exceeds the amount of consideration that any of the other researchers have given the subject).<sup>44</sup> In general, Wilson's diverse range of anarchistic elements within Islam includes Qalandars, Ismailis (especially the Assassins), the socialist Ali Shariati, Kheyr (or the Green Man whom Wilson associates with militant environmentalism), Khaldun's Bedouins, Sufis (such as Ibn al-Arabi, al-Hallaj and Rumi), Moammar Qaddafi's Third Universal Theory, and his own Moorish Orthodox Church (originally a white beatnik outgrowth of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple). In *Scandal* he devotes an entire chapter to "Imaginal Yoga and Sacred Pedophilia," an interest that is reflected by his own membership and activism within the North American Man-Boy Association (N. A. M. B. L. A. ).<sup>45</sup>

Wilson's work is easy to read but difficult to follow. He seamlessly blends scholarly research with manifesto in a quest for "poetic facts."<sup>46</sup> It would seem that historical research is being used as a vehicle for his manifesto. On one hand, Wilson speaks of a need for the individual to be bound by an ethical and spiritual stance:

The antinomian may commit crimes in the eyes of society or the Law but only out of a personal ethics which reaches unimaginably higher than any moral code. Antinomian ethics does this precisely because it is Imaginal, "made up" by the individual, personal, and central... Without a "spiritual dimension," the sexual revolution can only betray itself into libertinage and other distortions.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, he argues that the individual alone has the right to determine the validity of those ethics. Ideally, no other authority above the individual ought to be recognised. Drawing inspiration from his interpretation of the abrogation of the Law (Qiyamat) during the Assassin reign at Alamut (approx. 1100–1250), he writes:

In a sense, anyone can be the Imam; in a sense, everyone already *is* the Imam... the idea of the Imam-of-one's-own-being implies the idea of self-rule, autarky: each human being a potential king, and human relations carried out as a mutuality of "free lords." ... To liberate everyday life ... begins with the individual and spirals outward in love to embrace others... "radical" (post-Qiyamat) Ismailism restores "sovereignty" to the individual, who thus becomes his/her own "authority." Spirituality is not a master/slave relation—it is not an "Oriental despotism." Not any more. Not now. Maybe it never was. Who cares? Here and now—we need something different.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993); Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Scandal: Essays in Islamic Heresy* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Crone might be the closest in terms of quantity but her focus has been much narrower.

<sup>45</sup> Hakim Bey, "untitled letter," *The Spark*, 1 no. 5 (1984); Hakim Bey, "My Political Beliefs," NAMBLA Bulletin, (1986): 14; Robert P. Helms, "Pedophilia and American Anarchism," *Indybay* (2005), [www.indybay.org](http://www.indybay.org) (accessed March 24, 2006)

<sup>46</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (City Lights: San Francisco, 1993): 58.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, 70, 72.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson, 64, 74, 75, 103, 107 (emphasis Wilson's).

In other words, he personally sees a need for some sort of ethical boundaries but he regards that it be up to each individual to determine where and how those boundaries are to be set up. Interestingly, he also paints a picture of Assassin reign at Alamut as consisting of an “economic communism” which is reminiscent of contemporary syndicalism and concludes that the Assassins constituted “a curious blend of individualist anarchism, Bakuninism, and antinomian mysticism.”<sup>49</sup>

While his approach to Islam is open-ended, his broad definition of anarchism fits in well with that of Karamustafa. One distinction between Wilson’s and Karamustafa’s variations are that while Karamustafa’s dervishes are rejecting society as a necessary means to acquire a certain spiritual status, Wilson’s own tact is to advocate autonomous space that excludes society in order for individuals to “impose our absolute will, our *royaume. L’etat, c’est moi*.”<sup>50</sup> Whether the goal be personal transformation, spiritual insight, or spiritually rationalised hedonism, is irrelevant in Wilson’s Islamic anarchism. The “anarcho-monarchism” that Wilson describes and advocates is not just about rejecting society, it is also about establishing the individual as the highest form of authority.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, Karamustafa’s dervishes tend to be bound by the quasi-tariqahs (the lines of discipleship under the authority of elders) that they have formed with their community of believers. They adhere to a uniform dress code, ritualised behaviour, and allegiance (even obedience) to a spiritual master. Though such approaches are lauded by Wilson, such restrictions are not necessary (or even desirable) in his own extended individualist conception of anarchism. Rather than initiation through a living master, Wilson advocates self-initiation through dreams which he associates with the Oveissi Order in Iran.<sup>52</sup>

Many of these groups that Wilson describes are on the margins of both anarchism and/or Islam and yet Wilson does not make an attempt to argue for their legitimacy in either sense. For him, heresy and the margins of legitimacy are perfectly respectable options. Indeed, this mirrors his political stance that anarchism can remain on the margins of society within temporary (or permanent) autonomous zones and need not aspire to completely overthrow or replace the state.

Harold Barclay made his contribution to the study of Islamic anarchism through his article “Islam, Muslim Societies, and Anarchy” published in *Anarchist Studies*.<sup>53</sup> As an anarchist and anthropologist (but not a Muslim), his central concern is charting what might be regarded as anarchist elements within Islam in general. He begins by distinguishing between “anarchism” as a social-political theory largely developed within nineteenth-century Europe which rejects “all forms of domination, whether it be the state, government, the church or family structure” and “anarchy” as the “condition in which a society is stateless.”<sup>54</sup> It could be noted here that Barclay defines “anarchy” and “anarchism” quite differently. While “anarchism” is opposed to “all forms of domination” (a narrow definition that could exclude various strains of anarchist thought), “anarchy,” as Barclay defines it, refers to any society which is stateless (a broad definition which could include societies that employ various forms of domination).

In his article he lays out a short summary of Crone’s work, mentions Sufi antinomianism briefly, devotes a longer section to Arab Bedouin and Berber anarchic societies (whose anti-state approach was documented by Ibn Khaldun), and ends the article with a critical view of Qaddafi’s Third Universal Theory. Barclay’s presentation of the Mu’tazilites and the Najdiyya amounts to a concise and uncritical summary of Crone’s work and includes older research as well (i.e. Salem, Levy, etc). Like Crone, Barclay denies that the Sufi antinomians are anarchist because “they were all indifferent to the state rather than opposed to it” and likens them to Nietzsche because they are exclusively concerned with personal as opposed to political transformation.<sup>55</sup> He devotes most of his attention, unsurprisingly perhaps, to

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, 74. It can be noted that Wilson does not footnote his references regarding the Assassins in either *Sacred Drift* or *Scandal*.

<sup>50</sup> Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Autonomedia, 2003): 66.

<sup>51</sup> Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Harold Barclay, “Islam, Muslim Societies, and Anarchy,” *Anarchist Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>54</sup> Barclay, 105.

<sup>55</sup> Barclay, 108.

Bedouin and Berber societies.<sup>56</sup> Citing his own previously published study and the work of fellow (social) anthropologists Ernest Gellner and Pierre Bourdieu, he describes some of the key elements that characterise anarchy within these Muslim societies: 1) they do not have a state; 2) they do not have a police force; 3) they tend to use elders or councils of elders for their leadership; 4) they are organised according to segmentary lineage principles; 5) social order is maintained by respect for the leadership as opposed to the coercion of brute force; 6) mediation is typically applied in the event of disputes as opposed to judicial arbitration; and 7) they believe in the principle of solidarity that “an injury to one is an injury to all” which ultimately extends to all clans in the tribe but not to outsiders. These elements of anarchy, according to Barclay, do not find their origins in Islam but have been perpetuated alongside Islam. When it comes to Moammar Qaddafi, Barclay assesses his Third Universal Theory as a “decentralized syndicalist type of arrangement” but regards the theory as irrelevant due to Barclay’s perception of Qaddafi’s reign as profoundly authoritarian.<sup>57</sup>

In his conclusion of “Islam, Muslim Societies, and Anarchy” Barclay reveals his point which is not necessarily to argue for the genuinely anarchist character of any particular Muslim group or society but rather, by presenting a variety of anarchist and quasi-anarchist expressions, he questions the traditional view that Islam and anarchism are necessarily incompatible.

Barclay continued his contribution to the debate on Islamic anarchism by responding to an article that Wilson had written in the anarchist journal *Fifth Estate* entitled “Roses and Nightingales: Looking for Traditional Anarchism in 1970s Iran.”<sup>58</sup> In the Summer 2004 issue, the two lock horns over which Islamic groups should qualify as anarchist and which should not. Barclay critiques Sufis for being both hierarchical and often closely aligned with the aristocracy. He also criticises the Sufis and Shi’ites for their “obedience to a supreme leader,” and he refers to Crone’s claim that the Najdiyya were anarchists.<sup>59</sup> Wilson (who had not read any of Crone’s work) responds by referring to Karamustafa and pointing out the large diversity of stances and social organisation within Sufism and Shi’ism.<sup>60</sup>

According to Wilson, the dervishes and Ismailis may not be “card-carrying plumb-line anarchists [but] they may be our allies.” He concludes by stating:

Prof. Barclay feels that the rigid puritan Kharijites are more “anarchist” than the tolerant mystics—but political structure is not everything. The Lawless dervishes may still have a guru ... but they lead free lives (or so it appeared to me). The Kharijites may not have a guru but they live like Cromwellian dragons.

Wa salaam,  
Peter Lamborn Wilson  
New York.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Wilson’s priority is on the quality of life itself and he considers the freedom experienced by the individual to be of more value in determining a desirable anarchist goal than the technical presence or absence of a state or religious authority.

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<sup>56</sup> Before Barclay, Gellner used the term “anarchic” in 1991 when summarising Ibn Khaldun’s description of tribal society bound together by “local, mutual-protection self-administrative units.” See Ernest Gellner, “Islam and Marxism: Some Comparisons,” in *Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 28.

<sup>57</sup> Barclay, 115; Barclay’s swift dismissal of Qaddafi’s theory raises some interesting questions: What is the relationship between anarchistic theory and praxis? To what extent is any given theory being put into practice and to what extent is that question relevant for research? Does the imagining of an Islamic anarchism make it real (and hence worthy of study) even if it only exists on paper?

<sup>58</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, “Roses and Nightingales: Looking for Traditional Anarchism in 1970s Iran,” *Fifth Estate* 38, no. 4 (2003/2004): 43–47.

<sup>59</sup> Harold Barclay, “Letter to *Fifth Estate*: Sufism & Anarchy,” *Fifth Estate* 39, no. 2 (2004): 53.

<sup>60</sup> That Wilson had been unfamiliar with Crone’s work was acknowledged by him in a personal interview with the author in New Paltz, New York, 4 January 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson, “Reply to Letter to *Fifth Estate*: Sufism & Anarchy,” *Fifth Estate* 39, no. 2 (2004): 54.

To the above research, it can be helpful to add a taste of recent material that explicitly advocates some sort of Islamic anarchism (none of which has been treated by any of the major scholars who have hitherto dealt with anarchism in Islam). Of these, the most well-known is probably that of Michael Muhammad Knight who, with his book *The Taqwacores*, has created quite a stir both within Islamic circles and beyond.<sup>62</sup> The same year that his book was published there was a young American scholar by the name of ‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney who presented a paper at the B. R. I. S. M. E. S. (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies) conference in London entitled “Islam: A Libertarian Alternative?”<sup>63</sup> Although his career, along with his life, came to an all-too early end, he published a few pieces which relate to the subject at hand prior to his departure. While there is much online material that is also relevant to the subject of Islamic anarchism, two have been selected here to give an idea of the sort of range that such a synthesis can imply. The first is Michael “Salim” McCarron. He is a U. S. Navy veteran, convert to Shi’ite Islam and the author of one of the first explicitly Islamic anarchist manifestos entitled “Natural Islam.”<sup>64</sup> The second one, Heba Raouf Ezzat, has published work but her article on anarchism is so far only available online (in Arabic) as is the interview with her by Rosemary Bechler.<sup>65</sup> Ezzat is an Egyptian activist and political scientist who lectures at Cairo University. She has previously studied in Germany and has been inspired by European anarchist thought (though she does not identify herself as an anarchist).

Michael Muhammad Knight converted to Islam in the 1980s when he was fifteen years old. Public Enemy videos on M. T. V. and then the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* had been the original sources of inspiration for him. Eventually, this led him to live and study at the largest mosque in the world—the Faisal Masjid in Pakistan.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, he became frustrated with the narrow views and hypocrisy he found there and abandoned his orthodox Sunni religiosity. He went to college in the U. S.

and began listening to punk rock. Then, bidding farewell to Islam, he wrote an essay of apostasy entitled “Forget what is and is not Islam” and a novel called *The Taqwacores*.<sup>67</sup> The latter is a fictional account of a rag-tag bunch of Muslim punks living together in Buffalo, New York, and describes the sort of openness that he wished had existed in Islam. In the end, his story inspired real-life Muslims who identified with punk rock to rally together around the Taqwacore ethic. By 2007, Knight’s vision had become reality and the first national Taqwacore tour was organised with bands like The Kominas (Punjabi for “bastards”), Vote Hezbollah (a band name taken directly from Knight’s book), and Al-Thawra (Arabic for “revolution”). Furthermore, his book inspired Asra Nomani to organise the first woman-led prayer in the United States with Dr. Amina Wadud as imam.<sup>68</sup>

As a manifesto, *The Taqwacores* advocated a radically open Islam in which God is an immediate experience, the Koran loses relevance as a “tiny little book for tiny little men” and a female character crosses out a verse from the Koran that allows a man to beat his wife.<sup>69</sup> Here is a selection of concluding thoughts from the main protagonist:

Fuck the local imam, fuck the PhDs at al-Madina al-Munawwara ... give me the Islam of starry-night cornfields with wind rustling through my shirt and reckless *fisabilillah* make-out

<sup>62</sup> Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Abd al-Hakeem Carney, “Islam: A Libertarian Alternative?” *BRISMES conference* (July 4–5, 2004), [www.lmei.soas.ac.uk](http://www.lmei.soas.ac.uk) (accessed January 2, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Salim McCarron, “Natural Islam,” *Illegal Voices*, (December 23, 2004). [www.illegalvoices.org](http://www.illegalvoices.org) (accessed March 21, 2006). This manifesto is alternately titled “Toward an Anti-Authoritarian Islam.”

<sup>65</sup> Heba Raouf Ezzat, “Alfaudawie: Alfelsefe Aleti Zelemetha Altergeme,” *Islam Online* (July 29, 2001), [www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net) Layout (accessed October 8, 2008); Rosemary Bechler, “Islam and Democracy: An Interview with Heba Ezzat,” *Open Democracy* (May 11, 2005), [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) (accessed January 6, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Michael Muhammad Knight, *Blue-Eyed Devil: A Road Odyssey Through Islamic America* (New York: Autonomedia, 2006), 1.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Muhammad Knight, “Forget what is and is not Islam,” in *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003), 361–363.

<sup>68</sup> Knight, *Blue-Eyed Devil*, 206–209.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 105; Both of these parts were later censored from the British edition of the book.

sprees that won't lead to anything but hurt. Knee-deep in a creek is where I'll find my kitab. If Allah wants to say anything to me He'll do so on the faces of my brothers and sisters. If there's any Law that I need to follow, I'll find it out there in the world.<sup>70</sup>

After the rise of the Taqwacore scene in real life, Knight returned to the Muslim fold as a marginal Muslim and ultimately performed hajj in 2008. He described aspects of his life-journey as a Muslim seeker in *Blue-Eyed Devil* and devoted his next book entirely to the study of the Five Percenters, originally an offshoot of the Nation of Islam (N. O. I.).<sup>71</sup> Though still feeling indebted to Wilson for publishing *The Taqwacores*, Knight has disavowed his former mentor due to Wilson's advocacy of paedophilia/pederasty. While standing up for an Islam that embraces all sorts of heresies, Knight has felt compelled to draw boundaries of his own.<sup>72</sup>

'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, a convert to Shi'ite Islam, deals with the question of boundaries from a more academic perspective. In "Analysing Political Islam: The Need for a New Taxonomy" he makes a case for developing a new set of terms that could more adequately approach the realm of Islamic politics. The standard set of terms such as "Islamic fundamentalism" or "Islamism," he contends, are too broad and/or misleading because they could often be just as easily applied to libertarian as well as authoritarian Muslims. According to Carney, even the term "Salafism," which is more precise, and hence preferable to "Islamic fundamentalism," would have to be amended in order to distinguish between apolitical and political or *jihadi* Salafis.<sup>73</sup> In general, however, Carney's personal concern tends to revolve around an opposition to what he refers to as "authoritarian closures of interpretation" in which "a lay person blindly follows a religious scholar."<sup>74</sup> The alternative is the "basic Islamic commitment to obeying God and God alone" which Carney says Islam shares in common with Christian anarchism.<sup>75</sup> He finds inspiration and support for these views in the writings of the famous poet and philosopher Muḥīy ad-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, the mystic Mullā Sadra, the Sudanese dissident Mahmoud Ta Ha, and the conception of the "hidden Imam" within Twelver Shi'ism. Elsewhere Carney treats what he terms the "desacralisation of power in Islam" and argues that "the modern conception of the State is basically alien to classical Islamic political concerns."<sup>76</sup> The ideas that he had begun to pursue in his unpublished presentation in 2004 are quite clear in the online abstract:

Islamic Libertarianism ... does not assume that the creation of a righteous or just society relies upon state power, but rather on the abolition of such power in most contexts.<sup>77</sup>

Had his research continued it could certainly have grown into one of the more developed expressions of Islamic anarchism.

Then there is the text written by Michael "Salim" McCarron which advocates a green socialist-anarchist stance in alignment with Shi'ite Islamic teaching. The majority of this three-thousand word

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<sup>70</sup> Knight, 252.

<sup>71</sup> See Michael Muhammad Knight, *Blue-Eyed Devil: A Road Odyssey through Islamic America* (New York Autonomedia, 2006); Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007). Although slightly beyond the range of this study, it may be interesting to note that, while they do not identify as either Muslim or anarchist, the Five Percenters have developed a sort of anarcho-gnosis in which Islam stands for "I-Self-Lord-And-Master," authority is highly decentralised, members gather in leaderless parliaments to discuss ideas and share insights, and, as Knight notes, they "would respond to anarchism's ethos of 'no gods, no masters' with *I God, I Master*." Knight, "The Five Percenters," 232.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Muhammad Knight, email to author, 18 January 2008.

<sup>73</sup> 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, "Analysing Political Islam: The Need for a New Taxonomy," *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Yearbook* (2003), [www.core-hamburg.de](http://www.core-hamburg.de) (accessed January 20, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, "Twilight of the Idols? Pluralism and Mystical Praxis in Islam," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008): 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Carney, "Twilight of the Idols?," 4

<sup>76</sup> 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, "The Desacralisation of Power in Islam," *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 203; 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney, "Islam: A Libertarian Alternative?" *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) conference* (July 4-5, 2004), [www.lmei.soas.ac.uk](http://www.lmei.soas.ac.uk) (accessed January 2, 2009).

<sup>77</sup> Carney, "Islam: A Libertarian Alternative?"



manifesto is devoted to a critique of consumerism, capitalism and the United States government as well as the means by which those forces can be counteracted (direct action and autonomy). About a quarter of the manifesto is devoted to Islam. He declares that Islam has proven to be the best inspirational source for his own resistance to the “culture of destruction” and adds that Islam offers

communal consultation ( *shura*), stewardship of the Creator’s creation ( *istikhlaf*), equality (‘ *adl*), non-aggression ( *salam*), mutually beneficial economics ( *mudarabat*), sharing and giving ( *sadaqa wa zakat*).<sup>78</sup>

Like Carney, McCarron cites Mullá Sadra, a Shi’ite philosopher, as one of his key influences. In accordance with Sadra’s teaching, McCarron believes that reasoning should be balanced with inspiration “which is a transcendent source.”<sup>79</sup> Hence, McCarron’s understanding of Islam is based in “gnosis ( *ma’rifat*) [and] not just *fiqh* (jurisprudence).”<sup>80</sup> This leads him to conclude that guidance from the “hidden imam is open to all” and that

we are all equal and our affairs should be governed by communal consultation ( *shura*), there can be no hierarchy of the “righteous” no need for a Guardian Council as it exists in Iran.<sup>81</sup>

He then ties this in to a non-anthropocentric concept of stewardship which, according to McCarron, means to align oneself with the natural order of life and oppose mass industrialisation, oppression, and states of aggressive warfare ( *dar al-harab*).<sup>82</sup> McCarron also acknowledges the presence of progressive Muslim thought which may not be explicitly anarchist but supports common struggles such as feminism, queer rights, and deep ecology. He then links to, amongst others, the website for Progressive Muslims and an article on Ezzat’s *Islam Online*.

Finally, there is the example of Heba Raouf Ezzat. In 2001, she wrote the article “Anarchism: A Word Unjustly Maligned in Translation” for *Islam Online*, a popular information site about Islam that she co-founded. She has described herself as an “Islamist Woman Social Democrat with Anarchist Passion” and in a book produced by the British Council she, together with Ahmed Mohammed Abdalla, lays out her vision of an Islamic secularism.<sup>83</sup> Though she is herself a Sunni Islamist, she is critical of the way that some Islamists and other Muslims have adopted authoritarian positions. In an interview with Rosemary Bechler, she states:

Many intellectuals tried to Islamicise the model of the nation-state. From my point of view, this is in fact an anti-Islamic direction to take. It is a model which disempowers the people, which tries to monopolise the public domain and which always reduces civil society to dependence on the state in one way or another... What we mean by “Islamic secularism” is not that Islam is subject to secular restructuring, but that through Islam, we can arrive at a form of secularism which suits us. We can decide where the power of the state should be minimal, where the power of the people should be maximised, where law enters, and where morality rather than law decides.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> McCarron, “Natural Islam.”

<sup>79</sup> McCarron, “Natural Islam.”

<sup>80</sup> McCarron, “Natural Islam.”

<sup>81</sup> McCarron, “Natural Islam.”

<sup>82</sup> It was in light of these feelings that he tried to illegally cross the border into Canada. This landed him in jail and it was there that he wrote his manifesto.

<sup>83</sup> Heba Raouf Ezzat, email to author, 11 April 2008.

<sup>84</sup> Rosemary Bechler, “Islam and democracy: an interview with Heba Ezzat,” *Open Democracy* (May 11, 2005). [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) (accessed January 6, 2008). For more on civil society within Islam see Masoud Kamali, “Civil Society and Islam: A Sociological Perspective,” in *Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 95–118.

Her point is that the rise of global civil society enables us to think in new ways about how we conceive the nation-state, how we structure society, and what role religion ought to play in that process. Ezzat contends that religious community acts as an empowering buffer zone between the state and individuals. Ultimately, it is the *umma*, the community of the faithful,—not the state—that is for her the central political term within Islam. It is in that context that she envisions an “interactive *fatwa*, ” “grassroots civil *ijtihad*,” and “civil *jihad*.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, structures of local governance are interwoven with ritual practices that promote justice and equality. Salvation is not merely an individual endeavour, according to Ezzat, but is explicitly collective as well. Overall, Ezzat’s thinking is an independent development that makes no reference to the work or thought of any of the other writers discussed here.

## Comparative Analysis

The most thorough and scholastic works completed in the study of anarchism in Islam so far are that of Ahmed Karamustafa and Patricia Crone. Karamustafa portrays an Islamic anarchism which bases itself on a profound rejection of society as a whole and is characterised by an individualist emphasis on personal transformation. Writing as a scholar and a Muslim, his concern is primarily about how these groups are seen in a Muslim and a scholarly context and not how they are viewed by anarchists. Crone, on the other hand, concerns herself exclusively with two otherwise quite orthodox Muslim groups. As she notes, the Najdiyya and anarchist Mu’tazilites were not interested in communism, revolution, or social reform but only sought to resolve the dilemma of political and religious leadership of the Muslim community. We can also see how the Muslim concept of *ijma* (consensus) helped incite the Najdiyya’s call for anarchism. Writing as a scholar and from a secular European perspective, she seems primarily concerned with how these groups are seen by academia and does not seem to be writing for either a primarily Muslim or anarchist audience. All of these groups, from the heretical dervishes to the puritanical Najdiyya, fall into Gemie’s quest for alternative conceptions of anarchism. While the differences between them abound, the most notable commonality between them is that as far as their anarchistic elements go, they are fairly uni-dimensional and undeveloped. Whether it be the Qalandars rejecting society as a whole or the Mu’tazilites rejecting the imamate specifically, there is hardly any degree of anarchistic theory beyond those areas. There is no clear articulated expression as to how an anarchist society ought to be organised, attained or maintained nor is there a developed concept of anti-statism. Instead, the more developed side of these groups’ thought and lifestyle remains on the side of Islam (whether heretical or orthodox). Another more minor commonality that these groups shared was their temporality: while strains of their thought and practice have resurfaced throughout the centuries, the original groups faded away with no continual legacy or tradition to carry on their anarchistic creeds.

When it comes to Wilson, we are treated to not one but several versions of Islamic anarchism (including some of which he himself is a part of). Though he presents a number of alternative visions, he notably rejects the version offered by Crone. Whereas both the Wilson and dervish variants of Islamic anarchism involved a large degree of antinomianism including some degree of pederasty or paedophilia, Wilson’s version exceeds that of the dervishes by liberating the individual from any communal regulation or external authority whatsoever. Writing as an heretical/non-practicing Muslim, independent researcher, and popular anarchist ideologue, he is primarily concerned with inspiring a largely anarchist readership. Hence, the reliability of Wilson’s research may have suffered in his quest for “poetic facts.”

Barclay, in his summary of the study of Islam and anarchism, aligns himself with Crone’s position and also raises the idea that Muslim societies based on tribal structures and segmentary lineage may well be regarded as anarchic. Writing as a scholar and anarchist for an anarchist audience, his primary goal is to argue that there may indeed be signs of anarchism within Islamic history and society. Wilson’s writings (such as his complex and colourful depiction of the Assassins) generally fall into the category of Gemie’s quest for alternative conceptions of anarchism and potentially the category of anarchist practice

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<sup>85</sup> *Ijtihad* means roughly “re-interpretation of God’s word” while *fatwa* refers to a legal opinion or judgment.

as well. Barclay's contribution, on the other hand, is the first to fill the criteria for an anthropological anarchism according to Gemie's model.

Then there are the more explicit advocacy-oriented contributions. Knight's vision is one of multiple heresies and quasi-orthodoxies living under the same roof and together manifesting an Islam where individualists are bound together in a radically intentional pluralism. Writing primarily as a seeker for whoever will read it—Muslims and subcultural punks in particular—his book had the unintended consequence of manifesting that which he was writing about. Like the dervishes, Knight's emphasis is on Islam and the individual's contact with God. Earthly authority is in general disregarded as opposed to conceptually dismantled. Carney's assertion is more explicitly anarchist in its claim that state power is incongruent with an Islamic quest for a just society. Directing himself primarily to academics and Muslims, Carney makes a case for re-conceptualising the way we approach "political Islam." For him the relationship to God is personal and therefore liberty must be collective. While his stance may have been shared by fellow Shi'ites, he does not give any indication of being associated with a larger Islamic anarchist community. McCarron, on the other hand, presents a green/anti-consumerist vision of Islamic anarchism rooted in grassroots activism and utilises key Islamic concepts such as *shura*, *salam*, and (like Carney) the specifically Shi'ite concept of the "hidden Imam" in order to produce an innovative synthesis which includes the religious as well as the political. Although he is writing as an individual Muslim and anarchist, his political thought is collectivist and directed toward an activist audience. While McCarron's text innovatively bridges—or synthesises—Islamic and Western green/socialist/anarchist concepts, Knight and Carney employ their inherently Western minds to the development of libertarian tendencies already inherent within Islam. Though their strategies are quite similar, their results are less so. Knight's vision takes him down a path that is rooted in antinomian mysticism and heresy (in line with Karamustafa's dervishes and Wilson) while Carney's theological and philosophical discourse is built in a steady scholastic manner more akin to Crone and focuses more on the state, liberty, and structural power in the history of Islamic thought. Since neither Knight, Carney nor McCarron come from the "Third World," Gemie's model would seem ill-suited to categorising their views.

Ezzat, however, seems to at least partially fulfil Gemie's quest for a "Third world" anarchism in her articulation of how an ideal Islamic society would manifest. While not explicitly anarchist herself, her vision uniquely blends inspiration from European anarchists with a social-democratic interpretation of Islamist concepts in an era of global civil society. Unlike the heretical and individualist-oriented anarchism of Wilson and Karamustafa's dervishes, she advocates a distinctly *umma*-oriented version of Sunni Islamic social democracy with anarchistic elements. She is writing as an academic and Muslim activist for a Muslim and predominantly non-anarchist European and Middle Eastern audience.

## A Tentative New Model for the Study of Islamic Anarchism

Now in light of the above material, we can return to what this might tell us about the model provided by Sharif Gemie. Its most useful distinction seems to be that of drawing a line between anthropological anarchisms and alternative conceptions of anarchism. Here, however, it would seem that Barclay provides a helpful tip in his own distinction between "anarchism" and "anarchy." Hence, Gemie's model could be revised to speak of anthropological "anarchies" as opposed to "anarchisms." Gemie's model also helps distinguish between Islamic anarchism and those whom he refers to as "imitations of Euro-American anarchism," that is, secular anarchist groups in the Muslim world who base themselves on classical European anarchist arguments and worldviews. Beyond that, Gemie's model can tell us little about Islamic anarchism as such (nor was it his intent to do so). The category of "alternative conceptions" is so broad so as to be nearly all-inclusive in this area and the category of "anarchist practice" is only of limited relevance here and all-too hinged on how that term is defined. Even the act of defining it may lean closer to anarchist polemics than anarchist studies. Finally, there are cases that arise in which

Gemie's model becomes impotent when the anarchisms that are articulated can hardly be termed "Third World" (i.e. Knight, Carney, etc).

Alternative models are required. It is not possible right now to do justice to the richness and complexity of the material but a crude tool might be crafted in order to at least begin digging. In the tentative model that follows, I suggest distinguishing between three different vantage points: studies of anarchist theory (wherein Islamic anarchism appears in contrast to any other religious anarchism such as Taoist or Christian anarchism), studies in the anarchic traits of tribal Muslim societies (corresponding to Gemie's anthropological anarchism and Barclay's conception of tribal "anarchy"), and finally, studies of the anarchical structure of Islam (not covered here but discussed elsewhere in the work of Mandaville, Volpi, Turner and others).<sup>86</sup> Within each category further distinctions can be made based on qualitative developments. A general charting of them might appear like this:

Type 1. Studies of Islamic anarchist theory.

- a. Organic Islamic anarchism (including the work of Crone and Karamustafa).
- b. Postmodern Islamic anarchism (including Wilson, Knight, McCarron, etc).

Type 2. Studies in the anarchic traits of tribal Muslim societies.

- a. Premodern Muslim anarchy (Barclay's Berbers and Bedouins).
- b. Postmodern Muslim anarchy (not yet manifest or studied).

Type 3. Studies of the anarchical structure of Islam.

- a. Anarchical Islam (Caliphate period).
- b. Hyper-anarchical Islam (Post-caliphate period).

Regarding type 1, "organic" is meant to refer to any religious anarchism that arises independent of influence from classical anarchist theory and this would include all religious anarchism that preceded the eighteenth century whether European or otherwise. "Postmodern" is meant to refer to that point (historically and culturally) at which the two worlds meet and are capable of producing a synthesis. Either of these subtypes could potentially draw further distinctions between, for example, esoteric and literalist or individualist and communist variations of Islamic anarchism. What all of these variants share in common is that Islam as a conceptual framework is the base from which an anarchist theory is developed. While Carney is correct in observing that both Muslim and Christian anarchists refer to God as the sole authority, there are differences as well. Firstly, as Crone points out, the two traditions base themselves on different utopian premises. Secondly, it is not uncommon for Christian anarchists to situate themselves within a larger tradition of Christian nonviolence (See Christoyannopoulos).<sup>87</sup> While Christian anarchists, such as Leo Tolstoy or Jacques Ellul, may develop a critique of the state as violent, Islamic anarchists rarely, if ever, apply a theory of nonviolence as an argument against the state. Nonviolent activism does appear within Islam but either the nonviolent activists are not anarchist or researchers in Islamic anarchism simply do not regard them as such.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> It might be argued that a fourth category appears through those studies which attempt to draw parallels between anarchist terrorism and Islamic terrorism, but this perspective, based primarily on similarities of strategy between certain factions within each movement, remains unconvincing in its ability to speak of intrinsic commonalities between Islam and anarchism as such.

<sup>87</sup> Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, "Turning the Other Cheek to Terrorism: Reflections on the Contemporary Significance of Leo Tolstoy's Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount," *Politics and Religion* 1, no. 1 (2008): 27–54; Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos, "Christian Anarchism: A Revolutionary Reading of the Bible," in *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, ed. Nathan Jun and Shane Wahl (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 135–152.

<sup>88</sup> For an example of nonviolent activism within Islam see Robert C. Johansen, "Radical Islam and Nonviolence: A Case Study of Religious Empowerment and Constraint Among Pashtuns," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (1997): 53–71. This article addresses the story of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. An ally of Ghandi, he does not seem to have advocated anarchism, nor have any of the scholars of Islamic anarchism covered him.

In regard to studies in the anarchic traits of tribal Muslim societies (type 2), there is already a question of synthesis inherent in the material—that of the potential synthesis between tribal culture and Islamic religion. Therefore, the term “organic,” in this case, might be replaced by “premodern” to better characterise the point of distinction. A “postmodern” tribal anarchy in Islam, wherein anarchist theory and Muslim faith meets tribal culture, may not even yet exist but it has the potential to do so.<sup>89</sup>

As for the final category (type 3), the study of Islam as anarchical has not been covered here but it appears nonetheless to be a related area of study that is clearly distinct from the other two types.

This tentative model is far from developed and, even so, is only a starting point from which one might begin to examine the junctures between Islam and anarchism. In any case, what all these expressions do reveal is that there exist a set of concepts which within the structural and conceptual framework of Islam can lend themselves to anarchistic interpretations. A basic theme is that of devoting allegiance to none other than God (Karamustafa’s dervishes, Latif, and Carney). We have also seen the following ideas espoused: *shura*, the idea that leadership has to consult with the community about decision-making; *jihad* as a call for social justice; the concept of *umma* as a form of civil society; *ijma* which refers to the need for consensus in the community; and finally the idea of *ijtihad* which enables all traditional concepts to be reinterpreted in a modern light.

These ideas demonstrate that concepts do exist within the heart of Islam that can lend themselves to anarchistic interpretations (and have done so).

We can also see how research on Islamic anarchism can generally be divided into several camps depending on how anarchism and Islam are defined. The researchers and the goals in their writing are as diverse as the results of their studies. We have seen individualist-anarchist heretical Muslims as well as strictly anti-statist orthodox Muslims and even socialist-anarchist manifestos within the Muslim fold. None of these can tell us what Islamic anarchism *is* but all of them tell us how an Islamic anarchism might be imagined—even if the imagining borders on the realm of wishful thinking and fantasy. We have seen in the case of Knight how even a fantasy can manifest in reality.

Yet the study of an Islamic anarchism is not merely about imagining potential options for how things could be, it is also about engendering a genuine historical understanding of human relations and social organisation as close to the facts as we can come. When Wilson describes the Assassin community in relation to syndicalism, individualist anarchism, and Bakuninism, one can only wonder the degree to which he is reflecting his own personal inclinations. Furthermore, one could also ask how applicable the Western conception of individualist versus collectivist anarchism is in an Islamic context. Are we really understanding what Ezzat means by *umma* or do we take a mental short-cut and merely translate it to mean “community” or “civil society”? As Carney suggests, our taxonomy of Islamic politics in general is in need of revising.

Even the terms “anarchism” and “anarchy” in and of themselves may unduly taint our abilities to conceive the political and social realities and conceptual frameworks of cultures far apart from our own such as the Berbers, the Qalandars, or the Najdiyya. Imagining history can easily be overrun by conscious or unconscious projections rather than an open and uninhibited sense of discovery. How does terminology, the cultural location of the terminology (as well as the researcher) and the potential emotional charge that is often tied to such terminology affect the researcher’s ability to grasp that which has taken place in distantly foreign times and situations? Might the very term “anarchism” obfuscate rather than clarify our understanding of groups or individuals who have not historically self-identified as anarchist or even been exposed to it as we tend to conceive it? Might Western political concepts in general hinder us from grasping even modern innovative proposals such as Ezzat’s conception of an Islamic secularism and a minarchic- *umma*? Is “anarchism” even a useful term or would researchers be better served by using more precise terms? For example, one might refer to the dispersal of authority

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<sup>89</sup> One example of such potential that comes to mind is when Somali emigrants seem to have encountered Western anarcho-capitalists on an Internet forum about Somalia, a scenario which involves both Islam as a religion, anarchism as a theory and the cultural reference point of tribal anarchy. See Project for the New Anarchist Century, *Somalia Board*, anti-state.com index.php?board=23 (accessed April 9, 2008).

(“polycentric” or the “pluralization of authority”—the latter having been applied by Mandaville), the minimalisation of authority (“minarchy”—the preferred term by the anarcho-capitalists at Minaret of Freedom), the expansion of individual freedom (“libertarian” as applied by Carney), opposition to all forms of tyranny (“anti-authoritarian”—one of the terms used by McCarron) or opposition to the state as such (“antistatist”). What “language” and concepts are ultimately going to draw the boundaries for our scholastic imagination and which ones will maximally expand our potential? Will our definitions be very restrictive (Crone) or highly inclusive (Wilson)? As long as there is a broad plurality in the definitions of anarchism and Islam then it could be maintained that research on Islam and anarchism ought to embrace that plurality. The alternative could derail into internal disputes within Islamologist and/or anarchist scholarship about the “real” meaning of those words. It may be that, to paraphrase and modify Crone’s axiom, “If precise definitions keep leading to unconstructive scholarly conflict, the best solution may be to not create them.” More general working definitions seem better suited to sorting out the array of material in this new field. Precise definitions can follow in the wake of advanced study but need not lead to a partisan quest for the “true” meaning of any given term. Rather, the challenges that the material provides can be used to question the limits of our cultural references and inevitably limited sense of imagination.

This chapter has reviewed the main threads of the brief history of English-based research on anarchism within Islam and attempted to apply Sharif Gemie’s model for categorising various types of “Third World” anarchisms. From the more academic-oriented work of Patricia Crone, Ahmet Karamustafa, and Harold Barclay to the more activist and advocacy-oriented work of Peter Lamborn Wilson, Michael Muhammad Knight, ‘Abd al-Hakeem Carney, Michael “Salim” McCarron, and Heba Raouf Ezzat, a great diversity was seen which ranged from extreme anarcho-individualism and contemporary heresy to religiously conservative and reluctant anarchists of the ninth century. Gemie’s model for approaching “Third World anarchism,” together with insights garnered from Barclay, helped lead to the tentative proposal of a new model. It was concluded that sufficient material exists to fruitfully investigate the degree and manner in which anarchist, anti-authoritarian, or libertarian elements manifest within the Islamic community. Ultimately, the attempt to imagine an Islamic anarchism has unfurled a host of questions with implications that stretch far beyond the boundaries of the subject at hand. At the very least, we may want to question the authority of our own conclusions even before they have been drawn. At the most, the next step in research can provide us with new questions to grapple with and hopefully somewhat sturdier ground to stand on in order to face them.

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