



Essays in
Anarchism
and Religion

— Vol. III —

Alexandre
Christoyannopoulos &
Matthew S. Adams (eds.)



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Essays in Anarchism and Religion Volume III

*Edited by Alexandre Christoyannopoulos &
Matthew S. Adams*



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Anarchism, Religion, and the Religiousness of Political Ideologies

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos & Matthew S. Adams

Loughborough University, UK

Borders are often messy, contested spaces. This is true not just of physical borders, but intellectual ones too: the spaces between traditions, ideas, and concepts are often disputed territories. The border between ‘religion’ and ‘political ideology’ is no different. At first sight, the central focus of each seems different: religions appear to deal with the divine, whereas political ideologies are ostensibly concerned with the all-too-human world of political and economic reality. But on closer inspection this confident distinction appears more vulnerable: both terms signify systems of thought and associated practices; religions do not always refer to God or gods (and the assumption that religions deal with the divine is narrow, rather monotheistic, and quite Eurocentric); nearly all religions take positions on political and economic questions; and political ideologies can be preached with religious fervour, can elevate particular people to the status of ‘prophets’, and often come with their own revered symbols and memorabilia. At a minimum, therefore, we might say that ‘religion’ and ‘political ideology’ are locked in a territorial dispute, their shared boundary vulnerable to marauding bands from either side.

Definitions do not help tidy up the distinction. We noted how diverse the definitions of ‘religion’ are in our introduction to Volume II.¹ But there is no single definition of ‘ideology’ either, with

We are very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers’ suggestions to improve this introduction, many of which we have taken on board.

¹ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams, “Anarchism and Religion: Exploring Definitions,” in *Essays in Anarchism and Religion*:

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millions of politics students being offered at least four different standard stories from which to choose: for many Marxists, ideology refers to a distortion of reality, a false narrative which is controlled by the ruling classes and which distracts the exploited from recognising the fact of their exploitation; for many liberals, ideology denotes a closed (even totalitarian) system of thought which provides a means of ensuring compliance; for conservatives, ideologies are dangerous simplifications of an unavoidably complex reality, which lead to ill-conceived policies; and for many social scientists, the term describes something more analytical than polemical, a framework of thought which explains current conditions, envisions a set of alternatives, and proposes a particular route to get there.² Where ideology was once the provenance of the narrowly political – that is, it was the subject of critique from expressly political (we might say, ideological) positions and interpreted essentially as a means to advance special interests – this diverse field now focuses more squarely on the internal logic of ideological systems of thought, how ideologies emerge in particular historical contexts as reflections of intellectual and practical developments, and how they adapt with time to remain useful in changing historical circumstances.³

Yet religion provides examples of every one of these meanings of ‘ideology’: deluded and distracting distortions of reality; closed systems of thought that facilitate compliance; simplifications of reality which lead to ill-advised choices; or indeed narratives of the current order, visions of alternative futures, and preferred paths to their realisation. Religions can, therefore, sometimes be

Volume II, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams, Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018).

² Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (London: Palgrave, 2017); Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

³ The literature here is vast, but the most famous and important representative is Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2008). For an application of Freeden’s technique to anarchism, consider: Benjamin Franks, Nathan Jun, and Leonard Williams, eds., *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

labelled ‘ideological’. But it also works the other way round too: political ideologies such as socialism or feminism or fascism can be ‘religious’ in the sociological sense of the word, providing communities with unified systems of beliefs and practices, for example, or, in the anthropological sense, providing a system of symbols that help make sense of the world and motivate action within it.

In short: the terms ‘religion’ and ‘ideology’ are difficult to decisively separate and then keep apart. In the collection of essays of which this is the third volume, we are interested in one specific political ideology: anarchism. The limited ambition of this introduction, therefore, building on the discussions of anarchism and religion in the introductions to the previous two volumes, is to ponder the extent to which *anarchism* can be considered ‘religious’ or be said to display ‘religious’ characteristics.⁴

Anarchism as ‘religion’?

The definition of ‘religion’ is contested. To repeat our comments in Volume II:

some employ the term broadly to include all the spiritualities and practices which can be considered ‘religious’, whereas others insist on the label applying more narrowly to more institutionalised and often Western-centric practices and beliefs, and do so precisely in order to differentiate such examples of religiosity from non-Western and less institutionalised spiritualities and rituals.⁵ Some definitions hinge on the object of worship (God or gods), others on ritual practices, others still on the state of mind which opens itself to it.⁶ Some insist on religion being a private matter, sometimes

⁴ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams, “Anarchism and Religion: Mapping an Increasingly Fruitful Landscape,” in *Essays in Anarchism and Religion: Volume I*, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew S. Adams, Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2017); “Anarchism and Religion.”

⁵ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2013).

⁶ John Bowker, “Religion,” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xviii-xiv; John Hinnells, ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*,

with an explicit determination to keep it independent from politics.⁷ Others argue that religion cannot but inevitably be political, and that its confinement to the ‘private’ sphere is actually the result of a political project.⁸ Then there is the category of ‘civil religion’ to describe politics that looks like ‘religion’.⁹

In the discussion that followed, we also acknowledged some of the cultural biases which predispose people towards different kinds of definition of ‘religion’, emphasising, for example, beliefs, or ritual practices, or moral guidelines. And we noted that

2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 414–16; Moojan Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), pp. 26–28, and chap. 3.

⁷ Jean Baubérot and Micheline Milo, *Laïcités Sans Frontières* (Paris: Seuil, 2011); Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Erica Michelle Lagalisse, “‘Marginalizing Magdalena’: Intersections of Gender and the Secular in Anarchoindigenist Solidarity Activism,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 3 (2011); Tariq Modood, “Moderate Secularism, Religion as Identity, and Respect for Religion,” *The Political Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2010); Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008).

⁸ Steve Bruce, *Politics and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); William T. Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State,” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (1995); Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Anthony T. Fiscella, “‘Religious’ Radicalism,” in *Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics*, ed. Uri Gordon and Ruth Kinna (London: Routledge, 2019); Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Jeffrey Haynes, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009); Nikki R. Keddie, “Secularism and Its Discontents,” *Dædalus* 132, no. 3 (2003); Steven Kettell, “Do We Need a ‘Political Science of Religion’?,” *Political Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (2016); Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹ Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980); John A. Coleman, “Civil Religion,” *Sociology of Religion* 31, no. 2 (1970); Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. George Staunton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); John Markoff and Daniel Regan, “The Rise and Fall of Civil Religion: Comparative Perspectives,” *Sociological Analysis* 42, no. 4 (1981).

scholarly definitions also tend to reflect the academic discipline, and therefore common disciplinary assumptions, of their authors.

‘Anarchism’ is not, of course, an ideological practice managed by an organisation that resembles mainstream Christian churches. The object of worship is not a god, nor is anarchism, for most anarchists, a state of mind open to the divine. Indeed many anarchists have been firm critics of religion (especially Christianity), just as there are many determined religious critics of anarchism.¹⁰ Anarchism is also not a private matter. Nor does it gel a whole polity’s civil society (at least not yet). Besides, the term itself is contested, and there are many varieties of ‘anarchism’ that make it, superficially at least, resistant to easy assimilation. It would be misleading therefore to claim that ‘anarchism’ can be straightforwardly classified as a ‘religion’.

Nonetheless, ‘anarchism’ does display the characteristics of ‘religion’, especially once we appreciate that Christianity, even with its many variants, is only one particular kind of religion. As we noted in Volume II, Ninian Smart identifies the following

characteristics [...] found in all ‘religion’: practical and ritual (the religious performances and celebrations that punctuate days,

¹⁰ A sample of anarchist criticisms of religion (mainly Christianity) is presented in Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Lara Apps, “Anarchism and Religion,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); “Anarchism and Religion,” in *Brill’s Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy*, ed. Nathan Jun (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Another example is Aaron S. Tamaret, *Ha-Emuna Ha-Tehora Ve-Ha-Dat Ha-Hamonit* (Odessa: Halperin, 1912). Examples of religious (Christian and Jewish) criticisms of anarchism include: Thomas Campbell, “Anarchy,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01452a.htm>; Abraham I. Kook, *Igrot Ha-Raya*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1962), 174–75, 229–30; Reinhold Niebuhr, “Catholicism and Anarchism in Spain,” *Radical Religion* 2, no. 2 (1937). If one however broadens the search to religious scholars and theologians who criticise ‘lawlessness’, political ‘anarchy’ and the like, and who advocate political order, hierarchies and state-like formations – in other words if one looks beyond religious criticisms focused *specifically* on anarchist theories and practices – then the religious literature critical of ‘anarchism’ is vast.

months and years); experiential and emotional (Paul's or Buddha's conversions, religious music and art, etc.); narrative or mythic (the story of our origins); doctrinal and philosophical (theology, dogma, metaphysics, etc.); ethical and legal (how we are to live our lives); social and institutional (the community of adherents and its social function); and material (the physical buildings and sacred places).¹¹

Again, however, looking at anarchism with such characteristics in mind illustrates the permeability of any border wall between anarchism and religion.

The *doctrinal and philosophical* dimension of anarchism, for example, encompasses a variety of trends, but anarchists do unite in denouncing structures of oppression and injustice, especially the state. Most of them are just as united and passionate in their denunciation of capitalism, racism, sexism and other coercive inequalities too. Most are atheists or at least anticlerical. Although there is of course lively debate on a number of topics (violence, diet, religion, etc.), there is therefore a 'doctrinal and philosophical' core to anarchism, subscription to which is treated as a prerequisite for the legitimate application of the label. Moreover, internal debates often involve references to core, 'doctrinal' or defining anarchist values. As for the underlying 'philosophical' and metaphysical grounding of these values, even though anarchism has a tendency to heterodoxy that accommodates a diversity of angles ('classical' and rationalistic, post-structuralist, or indeed even religious), and even though there can be vehement debate between proponents of each, there is a broad understanding about which trends are authorised under the label (classical and post-structuralist, for example) and which are not, with religious ones often treated with considerable suspicion, and 'anarcho-capitalists' with firm disdain. Either way, even allowing for some diversity, there is a 'doctrinal and philosophical' core to anarchism.

This anarchist 'doctrine' also includes a *narrative or mythic* dimension, with a particular origin story. At one level, for most, this involves a materialistic and scientific understanding of the origins

¹¹ Ninan Smart, *The World's Religions*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 12–22.

of life, though here again religious anarchists provide notable exceptions – which is *not* to say they all reject science altogether. Anarchists also tend to offer a shared historical narrative: that is, all offer some variant of the spread of capitalist exploitation working in parallel or tandem with the rise of the nation state. The contours of this story are often shaped by an individuals' stance regarding other important themes, say the role of colonialism, gender inequalities, or racism. That narrative then helps explain the current human predicament, identifies historic transformations and heroic moments, and provides a collective memory for the movement. The writing of anarchist intellectual histories is a component of this identity-building. For a thinker like Kropotkin, historical example was a useful tool in demonstrating the practicability of anarchist ideas in the face of scepticism, but a particular history of anarchism – tracing its emergence as an intellectual force that reflected the broader development of social scientific thinking – also underpinned his own political identity. As with all narratives this was a constructed one (that is not to say it is necessarily false), but it was integral in burnishing a distinctively anarchist identity weighted with intellectual pedigree.¹²

Anarchism might not generate institutions in the typical sense of top-down hierarchies like the state or the private corporation, but there is an important *social and institutional* dimension nonetheless. For one, the list of 'institutions' founded and run by anarchists is considerable, and includes, among others, syndicalist organisations, housing communes, producer cooperatives, solidarity networks, and publishing collectives. These 'institutions' all provide essential social functions for anarchist communities: to meet, assist, debate, learn and of course organise and resist. What does tend to mark out these anarchist organisations from typical 'institutions' is their anarchist organisational ethos: radically participative, inclusive, bottom-up and renegotiable. Yet they are, nonetheless, 'institutions'.

¹² Matthew S. Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 77–88.

If *legal* is a problematic term to apply to anarchists, *ethical* is not. All variants of anarchism preach particular ways of living our lives, or rather at least recommend some over others. Indeed, prefiguration – i.e. trying to embody in one’s conduct the principles that one preaches – is an important consideration for most anarchists. Moreover, certain kinds of behaviour are considered unacceptable in anarchist settings, as evidenced for instance in the articulation of safe space policies. Besides, even if ‘legal’ is a term which problematically evokes the state, many anarchist organisations do write down collectively-agreed rules, adherence to which is expected for continued participation, and constitutiona-
 lising has always been, despite the usual assumptions about anarchism, a key anarchist practice.¹³ There is therefore an ‘ethical and legal’ dimension to anarchism.

One cannot point, of course, to ‘religious’ performances and celebrations among anarchists in the (narrow and Eurocentric) sense of regular worship of the divine. Yet a *practical and ritual* element can still be identified. The prefigurative performance of one’s principles acts as a confirmation of one’s commitment, not least during formal meetings. Particular historical moments are also often celebrated: the International Workers’ Day is an important date on the calendar; and anarchists have actively commemorated specific events, such as the Paris Commune, or the anarchist revolution in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War. The holiday – May Day in particular – is sacred and must be protected from encroaching neoliberal demons. Rallies and demonstrations – both generally and those marking particular historical events – are sites of anarchist performance. In a similar manner, the anarchist clandestine cell and secret society that were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century sensational fiction reflected the value of ritual in the context of official oppression. We might say, therefore, drawing on Benedict Anderson’s phrase, that anarchism was something of an ‘imagined community’, its symbols and practices offering the comforting rituals of fellow-feeling

¹³ April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 56–59; Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard, “Anarchism and Non-Domination,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 24, no. 3 (2019).

and recognition in times of political stress.¹⁴ In short, various performances and celebrations punctuate anarchist timelines and thus provide anarchism with a practical and ritual dimension.

The *material* facet is there too: social centres, squats, bookshops, soup-kitchens and suchlike happen in specific locations, sometimes in the face of *de facto* and *de jure* persecution. Sometimes, such as, for example, with the immigrant anarchist communities in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, the ritual gathering in the beer hall or meeting room became practically and emotionally foundational for the local anarchist scene.¹⁵ Over time, some of these anarchist spaces become revered and can even become sites of pilgrimage. Anarchists might not gather in churches and treat sites like the Temple Mount as holy therefore, but an anarchist geography does nonetheless map buildings and places, ascribe higher status to some sites over others, and inform anarchist commemorations. Also notable are the material sites of ‘evil’ such as the prison, the border, the royal or presidential palace, the shopping mall and so on.

There is also an *experiential and emotional* dimension to anarchism. Not unlike Paul or Buddha, some famous anarchists did ‘convert’ after particular tribulations. Experiences of injustice are keenly felt, as are experience of empowerment. Indeed, demonstrations can conjure up powerful emotions. And many examples could be listed of anarchist art and music, including revolutionary anthems, protest banners, street art, punk music and aesthetics,¹⁶ or even the instantly-recognisable A-in-an-O symbol that can illicit emotional responses and inform the group-feeling.

In short: anarchism displays many of the same characteristics as religion that Smart identifies. There may not be gods in the

¹⁴ Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism*, 182–87.

¹⁵ Consider the chapters by Tom Goyens, Kenyon Zimmer, Marcella Bencivenni and Christopher J. Castañeda in Tom Goyens, ed. *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from Schwab’s Saloon to Occupy Wall Street* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

¹⁶ Jim Donaghey, “Punk and Anarchism: Uk, Poland, Indonesia” (Loughborough University, 2016); Francis Stewart, *Punk Rock Is My Religion: Straight Edge Punk and ‘Religious’ Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

traditional sense (except of course for *religious* anarchists), and anarchists may be more iconoclastic than other political traditions, yet particular heroic comrades are celebrated, nonetheless. And even though they are rarely anthropomorphised, principles such as freedom, equality or non-domination can be, in a sense, ‘worshipped’. Just as religions do, anarchism presents its adherents with a historical narrative, a doctrinal core, various institutionalised settings, a set of ethical expectations, concrete material spaces, particular rituals, and strong emotions.

There are other ways of making a similar argument. For example, the literature on ‘civil’ or ‘political’ religion precisely argues that certain political ideologies and practices resemble ‘religious’ equivalents and indeed perform functions historically performed by religion (especially mainstream Christianity).¹⁷ Fairly obvious examples (because of their totalising tendencies) include some types of nationalism, fascism, and state communism, but other ideologies also arguably display at least some characteristics of ‘civil religion’. In the case of anarchism, to echo some of what has already been evoked above, these characteristics of ‘civil religion’ might include: an awareness of the sacrifices required for the cause, and a willingness to make them (almost as a public duty); respectful commemoration of courageous martyrs; collective rituals and performances punctuating anarchist calendars; the cultivation of particular spaces for important gatherings and other activities; use of symbols to signal belonging as well as to proselytise; and a strong sense of community, comradeship and belonging. At the same time, no variant of anarchism has yet held together, as the dominant ideology, a coherent and sovereign body politic resembling a state (Republican Spain was ideologically diverse and unstable, Makhnovist Ukraine did not survive its founding guerrilla war, and Rojava’s ideology blends what anarchism informs it with obvious ethno-nationalist undercurrents). Nor does anarchism impose itself and punish deviance in the way more classic ‘civil religions’ have, although it can certainly imply expectations, and perhaps even assume that civil-

¹⁷ Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*; Coleman, “Civil Religion.”; Gentile, *Politics as Religion*; Markoff and Regan, “The Rise and Fall of Civil Religion: Comparative Perspectives.”

ly-minded anarchists would perform particular duties.¹⁸ There is also no biblical imagery, nor any evocation of theological vocabulary (except in religious anarchism). The extent to which the label of ‘civil religion’ applies to anarchism is therefore disputable, even if some characteristics are nevertheless present.

Yet another alternative framework from the sociology of religion that could be used to illustrate the ways in which anarchism is akin to religion comes from the literature on ‘implicit religion’, according to which religion consists in ‘commitment(s)’, ‘integrating foci’, and ‘intensive concerns with extensive effects’.¹⁹ It is not difficult to contemplate ways in which anarchism meets such defining criteria: anarchism grows from sincere commitment (both conscious and subconscious); it provides a content around which adherents find common purpose and integrate into groups (small to large scale); and it articulates intensive concerns which its adherents feel and express across the various sites of their existence. Anarchism, or some instances of it anyway, could possibly therefore be considered an ‘implicit religion’. Similar explorations could be articulated using Tillich’s description of religion as ‘ultimate concern’ or Luckmann’s notion of ‘invisible religion’. Either way, the argument remains that in more ways than one, anarchism (just like many other political ideologies) displays characteristics of ‘religion’.

It might also be helpful here to briefly recall the expanding scholarship that has questioned the very assumption that the ‘secular’ can be distinguished from the ‘religious’. Talal Asad’s genealogical critique of these categories for example justifies caution when affirming rigid distinctions between the two, especially given how these categories are rooted in violent imperialist projects.²⁰ The

¹⁸ Matthew S. Adams, “Utopian Civic Virtue: Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Anarchism’s Republican Inheritance”, *Political Research Exchange* (2019), 1–27.

¹⁹ Edward Bailey, *Implicit Religion: An Introduction* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998); “Implicit Religion,” ed. Peter B. Clarke, *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588961.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199588961-e-045>; Stewart, *Punk Rock Is My Religion*.

²⁰ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); *Genealogies of Religion:*

process of ‘secularisation’ has in part been a vehicle with which the modern Westphalian state established its sovereign power by subjugating ‘religious’ competitors.²¹ It is also interesting that political ideologies as a phenomenon only emerge as this modern Westphalian state affirms itself, in a sense filling a vacuum or performing various functions previously covered by ‘religion’. Perhaps, then, common to both ‘religion’ and ‘political ideologies’ (including anarchism) are a range of existential and social concerns, social functions, and moral, ritual and emotional drives that can be observed in all human societies (ostensibly ‘religious’ or not). And perhaps all observers need to remain alert to the political interests that can be served by the labelling of social phenomena as ‘religion’, ‘anarchism’ or ‘ideology’.

What, then, does a depiction of anarchism as akin to religion achieve? Our intention is not to flatten out all differences: even if anarchism displays characteristics one finds in ‘religion’, ‘political ideology’ probably remains a more apposite term to label this system of thought and its associated practices, at least in the sense that it is less likely to generate sometimes unhelpful confusion. What we do hope to have shown, though, is that what is distinct about ‘religion’ is not easily defined and captured; that the characteristics of religion (especially when looking beyond conventional Christianity) are similar to those of the beliefs and practices of an ideology such as anarchism; and that caution and nuance are therefore desirable when categorising phenomena as ‘ideological’ or ‘religious’.

Either way, dismissing beliefs and practices simply because they are classed as either ‘religious’ or ‘ideological’ is both lazy and simplistic. Far more interesting and rewarding is engaging with their content. And indeed, such effort usually leads to inevitable nuancing and deeper reflection. With this collection of essays on anarchism and religion (including Volumes I and II), we hope to have demonstrated the merits of closer engagement with the very

Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). See also Christoyannopoulos and Fiscella, “‘Religious’ Radicalism.”

²¹ Cavanaugh, “A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House.”; Christoyannopoulos and Fiscella, “‘Religious’ Radicalism.”

diverse lines of argument and analyses that can be articulated about anarchism, religion, and their interaction. A closer reading of the various authors and themes covered in these volumes demonstrates that ‘anarchism’ and ‘religion’ are not as inevitably mutually exclusive as can at first seem. That anarchism (just as other political ideologies) can be interpreted as in some ways akin to religion further justifies the nuancing of intellectual boundaries.

The essays in this volume

Taken together, the three volumes of our project include most of the original contributions to the 2012 Anarchist Studies Network conference at Loughborough University, where this project first emerged, as well as several further essays that have been added to the project. We hope that this will not be the last volume of the sort, the first three having illustrated the vibrancy and multi-faceted nature the discussions around anarchism and religion.

The above conceptual and theoretical discussion does not concern exclusively the essays in *this* volume, nor are they essential to approach the content of these essays – they rather speak to the broader topic of ‘anarchism and religion’ which englobes all three volumes. Moreover, the selection of essays in this particular volume, just as in the previous two, is the accidental product of circumstance: the essays that have been part of the project since 2012 came to be ready for publication roughly in the order in which they appear across the three volumes. Nevertheless, there is in this third volume some degree of informal narrative continuity, with most chapters introducing a theme that is in some way taken up by the next. The last two chapters also do happen to speak more directly to the conceptual discussion above.²²

In this present volume, five essays focus on a particular individual (Heyn, Tolstoy, Read, Guérin and Buber) and thus offer case studies of authors standing with one foot in anarchism

²² We are particularly grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to clarify these points.

and the other (to some degree at least) in religion. One essay focuses on the affinities between mysticism and anarchism, and a final one on the vast territory covered by the label ‘spiritual anarchism’. As has been the case with the broader project emanating from the 2012 conference, Christianity is heavily represented here, as are Western white males. We hope to redress these imbalances in a potential fourth volume focused exclusively on interrogating these issues. Rectifying centuries-old biases is a challenging task for a small team working on already heavily-biased material, but we remain open to considering projects that aim to redress this. Meanwhile, this third volume is once again dominated by white Christianity.

Non-Christian perspectives nevertheless feature in two essays in this volume. In the first chapter, *Hayyim Rothman* inscribes Abraham Heyn’s anti-authoritarian, anti-militarist and universal ethos into the Jewish tradition. He does this by outlining three themes in Heyn’s Jewish anarcho-pacifism: the notion that the essence of Judaism consists in a conviction of the absolute sanctity of human life; the implication for an anarcho-pacifist vision of society; and the prefigurative revolutionary method that follows, with its emphasis on moral transformation. This therefore provides a second essay on Jewish voices within the three volumes to date.

Pacifism figures too in the second chapter, as *Alexandre Christoyannopoulos* presents a condensed version of his recently published monograph on Leo Tolstoy’s political thought.²³ The chapter examines Tolstoy’s pacifism, anarchism, anticlericalism and activism, each time considering Tolstoy’s main claims first, then some of the criticisms of his views, and then assessing the ongoing relevance of these arguments.

Where Tolstoy is unproblematically described as a religious anarchist, *Matthew S. Adams*’ chapter explores a thinker who would have rejected this label: the art critic and anarchist intellectual Herbert Read. Nevertheless, Adams argues that consi-

²³ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy’s Political Thought: Christian Anarcho-Pacifist Iconoclasm Then and Now*, Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

dering Read's theoretical edifice in relation to the spiritual can be illuminating. Developed through a comparison with the work of H.G. Wells, Adams shows how Read saw some sort of spiritual union as a crucial part of a successful society, and that this spiritual dimension would inform an artistic flourishing, Read's measure of the successful diffusion of freedom.

The relevance of thinking about anarchism's relation to conceptions of spiritual union is explored further in the fourth chapter. Daniel Guérin's contribution to anarchism is well established, but less well-known is the extent to which his political commitments might have been sometimes motivated by religious or spiritual ideas. In the fourth chapter, *David Berry* examines precisely these influences, and in particular considers Guérin's discovery of Tolstoy, his friendship with novelist François Mauriac, and his struggle with the reactionary stance of the Catholic church. Berry also reflects on the role, for Guérin, of redemption through a Gandhian form of love or fraternity, seeing this as a kind of secular religion.

Where Read and Guérin are both thinkers not typically viewed in terms of the religious and spiritual, Martin Buber, like Tolstoy, wore these influences proudly. In chapter five, *Sarah Scott* reconstructs Buber's conception of grace to show its importance for unifying his religious orientation and anarchist tendencies. She explains that previous accounts of Buber's notion of grace were incomplete, because he reinterprets Augustinian grace as not just from God but also from our relations with other creatures. This paves the way for an anarchist politics by side-stepping Augustine's dependence on hierarchy and submission.

Departing from the study of individual thinkers, in the sixth chapter, *Stefan Roszbach* considers affinities between mysticism (in theology) and anarchism (in political theory). Drawing from Plato, Rousseau and Landauer, he argues that both mysticism and anarchism involve a 'stepping out' from the mainstream and a rejection of what he calls 'externalising practices'.

The final chapter opens the discussion to a far wider range of 'religious' and 'spiritual' perspectives. More specifically, *Anthony Fiscella* critically examines how and when 'spiritual anarchism' has been applied as a label, and how it *could* be applied. In

the process, he provides an extensive overview of both existing literature and forgotten stories, and comments on the colonial legacies that tend to afflict scholarly work on the topic.

As with Volumes I and II, we believe that this volume presents a striking variety of angles on anarchism and religion that points to both the health of the emerging field, and the deep complexities that characterise considerations of both the religious and anarchist political thought. We hope that readers will agree, and find these essays stimulating and challenging.

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and
Matthew S. Adams, January 2020

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Abraham Heyn's Jewish Anarcho-Pacifism

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Abraham Judah Heyn (1880–1957) was an orthodox rabbi of prestigious hasidic (habad) lineage, who served several communities throughout Europe and Palestine/Israel. Responding to the intensification of antisemitic brutality in Eastern Europe around the turn of the twentieth century, he promoted a hermeneutic of resistance, interpreting Jewish tradition as the foil of the state and of state-sanctioned violence — indeed, all violence. In this essay, three central themes developed in his writings — hitherto almost entirely neglected — are examined in detail. One, the notion that the essence of Judaism consists in a conviction as to the absolute sanctity of human life. Two, the implications this has for an anarcho-pacifist vision for human society reminiscent of Tolstoy's but articulated in a distinctively Jewish manner. Three, the nature of a true and morally sound revolution as determined by the essence of Judaism and the sort of community that, according to Heyn, it is designed to promote. More broadly, this essay aims to intervene in contemporary theo-politics by recovering for (orthodox) Jewish tradition an anti-authoritarian, anti-militarist, and universalist ethos, and by inserting Judaism and Jewish thought — in distinction from Jewish people — into the revolutionary tradition that has largely ignored them.

I. Introduction

The Babylonian Talmud that R. Meir once accompanied his wayward master, Elisha b. Avuya, on the Sabbath in order to learn

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from him and that upon reaching the Sabbath-limit,¹ Elisha b. Avuya went on while R. Meir turned back.² Commenting on this episode, Isaac Deutscher once celebrated the former as an example of those radical and brave ‘non-Jewish Jews’ like Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Gustav Landauer,³ who passed beyond Judaism because it has become too small for them. Deutscher likewise despised men like R. Meir who may have been inclined to leave but, he says, behaved like the debased Uriel da Costa: unable to bear the consequences, they returned.⁴

Though perhaps articulated in less abusive terms, Deutscher’s governing assumption — that left-radicalism goes hand in hand with secularism — prevails both in the popular imagination and in the scholarly literature. Though this prejudice has been recently challenged by publications like *Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives* and *Essays in Anarchism and Religion*, the vast

¹ I.e. two thousand cubits in all directions from the place where a person makes his abode for the day of rest, beyond which it is forbidden to go.

² *Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah* 15a. Elisha b. Avuya is a notorious and fascinating figure in rabbinic tradition. A student of the great R. Akiva and the teacher of the equally great R. Meir, he experienced some sort of spiritual crisis that drove him to apostasy. In spite of this, R. Meir continued to study Torah with his teacher, contending that one ought “look not at the container, but at its contents (*Avot* 4:27).” See Goshen-Gottstein, A. *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha Ben Abuya Eleazar Ben Arach*. (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2000).

³ There is a fair amount of research on Landauer and his links with the Jewish tradition, but among the most significant recent publications is Mendes-Flohr, P., Mali, A, and Delf Von Wolzogen, H., eds. *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew*. (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014).

⁴ Deutscher, I. “The Non-Jewish Jew.” In *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*. (New York: Verso, 2017). Uriel da Costa was an elder contemporary of (and influence on) Spinoza. A member of the Portuguese ex-marrano community in Amsterdam, he was put under ban several times for publicly rejecting post-biblical rabbinic tradition. As he reports in the autobiographical portions of *Exemplar humanae vitae*, his reconciliation with the community was made contingent upon his public humiliation — which included lashes and being trampled upon by members of the congregation. These experiences left da Costa a broken man who ultimately took his own life. See Goldish, M. “Perspectives on Uriel Da Costa’s “Example of a Human Life.”” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 42/43 (2010): 1–23. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bc.edu/stable/24388990>.

majority of contributors to the effort have drawn on the various traditions of Christian anarchism. To a lesser degree, anarchist trends in Buddhist, Taoist, and Islamic thought have, in these publications and elsewhere, also been addressed. Where Judaism and Jewish thought are concerned, however, the scholarship is surprisingly sparse.

While there is ample research dedicated to the involvement of ethnic Jews in the international anarchist movement,⁵ a distinction is to be made between anarchists who happen to be (non-Jewish) Jews and Jews who understand their anarchism through the lens of their Judaism. Along these lines, the field is largely limited to the writings of two figures: Martin Buber⁶ and

⁵ Avruch, P. *The Russian Anarchists*. (Stirling: AK Press, 2006): 204; Avruch, P. *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*. (West Virginia: AK Press, 2005); Fishman, W.J. *East End Jewish Radicals: 1875-1914*. (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2004); Gidley, B. P. *Citizenship and Belonging: East London Jewish Radicals 1903-1918*. (Ph.d., U. of London, 2003); Knepper, Paul. "The Other Invisible Hand: Jews and Anarchists in London before the First World War." *Jewish History* 22, no. 3 (2008): 295-315; Moya, J.C. "The Positive Side of Stereotypes: Jewish Anarchists in Early-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires." *Jewish History* 18, no. 1 (2004): 19-48; Schapiro, Leonard. "The Role of the Jews in the Russian Revolutionary Movement." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 40, no. 94 (1961): 148-67; Shone, S.J. *American Anarchism*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Shor, Francis. "Cultural Identity and Americanization: The Life History of a Jewish Anarchist." *Biography* 9, no. 4 (1986): 324-46; Shpayer-Makov, Haia. "Anarchism in British Public Opinion 1880-1914." *Victorian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1988): 487-516; Shpayer-Makov, Haia. "The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 373-90; Zimmer, K. *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America*. (Champaign: U. of Illinois Press, 2015). One might also point to studies of prominent figures like Bernard Lazare, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman.

⁶ Cannon, Patrick. "Martin Buber & Leo Tolstoy: Two Examples of Spiritual Anarchism." *Philosophy Now* 116 (2016): 16-18; Di Cesare, D.E. "Martin Buber and the Anarchic Utopia of Community." *Naharaim-Zeitschrift für deutsch-jüdische Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* 4, no. 2 (2011): 183-203; Doubrawa, E. "The Politics of the I-Thou: Martin Buber, the Anarchist." *Gestalt Journal* 23, no. 1 (2001): 19-38; Kohanski, A.S. "Martin Buber's Restructuring of Society into a State of Anocracy."

Gershom Scholem.⁷ Some work has also been done on the nexus of anarchism and Jewish nationalism, a line of research that includes also some examination of the early kibbutz movement.⁸

Jewish Social Studies (1972): 42–57; Mendes-Flohr, P. “Prophetic Politics and Meta-Sociology: Martin Buber and German Social Thought.” *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 30, no. 60.1 (1985): 67–82; Schaefer, Y. Between Political Theology and Theopolitics: Martin Buber’s Kingship of God. *Modern Judaism* 37, no.2, (2017): 231–255; Schwarzschild, S.S. “A Critique of Martin Buber’s Political Philosophy: An Affectionate Reappraisal.” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 31, no. 1 (1986): 355–388; Vogt, S. “The Postcolonial Buber: Orientalism, Subalternity, and Identity Politics in Martin Buber’s Political Thought.” *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 161–186; Wolf, S. “Le vrai lieu de sa realisation est la communaute: L’amitie intellectuelle entre Landauer et Buber.” In *Juifs et Anarchistes: Histoire d’une recontre*, Edited by Bertolo, A. (Paris: Editions de l’Eclat, 2001). See also Brody, S.H. *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics*. (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 2018). This text places Buber more squarely into the context of religio-political anarchism.

⁷ Biale, D. “Gershom Scholem and Anarchism as a Jewish Philosophy.” *Judaism* 32, no. 1 (1983): 70; Bonanni, M.C. “Gershom Scholem: Uno Spirito Anarchico Religioso?” *La Rassegna Mensile Di Israel* 77, no. 1/2 (2011): 97–116; Jacobson, E. “Gershom Scholem’s Theological Politics.” In *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*. (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2003), 52–84; Löwy, M., Scholem, G., and Richardson, M. “Messianism in the Early Work of Gershom Scholem.” *New German Critique*, no. 83 (2001): 177–91; Silberstein, L.J. “Modes of Discourse in Modern Judaism: The Buber-Scholem Debate Reconsidered.” *Soundings* (1988): 657–681.

⁸ Berman, M. “Statism and Anti-Statism: Reflections on Israel’s Legitimacy Crisis.” *Tikkun* 27, No. 3 (2012): 31–68; Bowes, A.M. “The Experiment That Did Not Fail: Image and Reality in the Israeli Kibbutz.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 1 (1990): 85–103; Boulouque, S. 2004. “The Anarchists, Zionism, and the Birth of the State of Israel.” *Social Anarchism* 36: 15; Butler, J. “Palestine, State Politics and the Anarchist Impasse.” In *The Anarchist Turn*, edited by Blumenfeld J., Bottici C., and Critchley S., 203–23. (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Eiglad, E. “Anti-Zionism and the Anarchist Tradition.” In *Deciphering the New Antisemitism*, edited by Rosenfeld, A.H., 206–41. (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 2015); Gordon, U. “HomeLand: Anarchy and Joint Struggle in Palestine/Israel.” In *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics From Practice to Theory*, 139–62. (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2008); Grauer, M. “Anarcho-Nationalism: Anarchist Attitudes towards Jewish Nationalism and Zionism.” *Modern Judaism* 14, no. 1 (1994): 1–19; Horrox, J. A. *Living Revolution: Anarchism in the Kibbutz Movement*. (Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK Press, 2009); Maor, Z. “Moderation from Right

That being said, with the exception of but a handful of studies, the religious dimensions of Jewish anarchism have been largely neglected⁹ — especially where, as Moshe Goncharok has pointed out, the anarchism or anarchist tendencies of the religiously *observant* are concerned.¹⁰

Thus, we return to the figure of R. Meir, whom I regard in a far different light than Deutscher. In R. Meir, I see someone who carries the periphery back to the center, destabilizing and enriching it. I see an example of one who insists that the teachings of an Elisha b. Avuya have a legitimate place in the *beyt midrash*, the traditional study-hall — indeed, one who forces God himself to accept these teachings!¹¹ There have been many such figures in the history of modern Jewish thought — obscure as they may

to Left: The Hidden Roots of Brit Shalom.” *Jewish Social Studies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 79–108; Oved, Y. “L’Anarchisme dans le mouvement des kibboutz.” In *Juifs et Anarchistes: Histoire d’une rencontre*. Edited by Bertolo, A. (Paris: Editions de l’Eclat, 2001); Tamas, G.M. “Ethnarchy and Ethno-Anarchism.” *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996): 147–90; Zipperstein, S.J. *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha’am and the Origins of Zionism*. (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1993). See also Lowy, M. *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe, a Study of Elective Affinity*, translated by Heany, H. (New York: Verso, 2017).

⁹ See Agursky, M. 1984. “Universalist Trends in Jewish Religious Thought: Some Russian Perspectives.” *Immanuel* 18 (1984); Berti, F. Torah e libertà. *A/Rivista Anarchica* 40, no. 352 (2010); Biagini, Furio. *Torah and Freedom: A Study of the Correspondence Between Judaism and Anarchism*. (Lecce: Icaro, 2008); Chatterjee, M. “The Redemptive Role of Labor. In *Studies in Modern Jewish and Hindu Thought*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997): 23–48; Löwy, M., and Larrier, R.B. “Jewish Messianism and Libertarian Utopia in Central Europe (1900–1933).” *New German Critique*, no. 20 (1980): 105–15; Luz, Ehud. “Utopia and Return: On the Structure of Utopian Thinking and Its Relation to Jewish-Christian Tradition.” *The Journal of Religion* 73, no. 3 (1993): 357–77; Shapira, A. *Anarkhizm Yehudi-Dati*. (Ariel: Hotsayt Universitat Ariel, 2015). See also Magid, S. *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism and Messianism in Izbica and Radzin Hasidism*. (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 2003); this text, however, focuses on antinomianism, which is to be distinguished from anarchism.

¹⁰ Goncharok, M. “On the Question of the Relationship Between Certain Aspects of Judaism and Anarchism.” *Journal for the Study of Jewish History, Demography and Economy, Literature, Language and Ethnography* 6, no. 1 (2011): 8–22.

¹¹ *Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah* 15b.

have become — and it is one of them, R. Abraham Judah Heyn (1888–1957), whose work I intend to examine here.

Owing to Heyn's extreme obscurity, a brief word as to his biography is in order. He was born to the chief rabbi of the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, R. David Tsvi Heyn, a great-grandson of the celebrated *Tsemah Tsedek*, the third Grand Rabbi of the Habad hasidic sect who also traced his lineage to the distinguished Hen-Gracian family, which traces its roots to 11th century Barcelona.¹² Thus was Abraham Judah immersed in hasidic life from his youth onward. After obtaining private ordination, Heyn went on to assume several rabbinic posts throughout Eastern and Western Europe before ultimately emigrating to Palestine by 1935.¹³

He entered the public sphere in reaction to the infamous Beilis trial of 1913 during which the defendant faced fictitious murder charges based on the blood libel (an antisemitic canard which asserts that Jews consume Christian blood for ritual purposes). He composed an essay explaining in detail not only the absurdity of such accusations from the standpoint of Jewish law, which proscribes even the consumption of animal blood, but more importantly, uses this prohibition to articulate a theology of non-violence that framed his thinking for the remainder of his life.

After immigrating to Palestine, Heyn served in a rabbinical capacity in several Jewish communities throughout the country, but finally settled in Jerusalem. There, he headed the *Beyt Midrash ha-Rambam* (an institution dedicated to Maimonides' legacy of free Jewish thought),¹⁴ served as director of the Center for Religious Culture¹⁵ and, after 1948, within the Department of

¹² Laine, E. "Kontres Teshuot Heyn: Helek Rishon." *Sefer She'elot u-Teshuvot Avney Heyn*. (New York: Kehot, 2013): 259–319; Heyn, A. 1931. *Lenahameyni*. (Tel Aviv: Self published): 70–71.

¹³ Belzer, S., and Zislensky, A.Y. eds. *Shaarey Tsiyon*. Nisan-Sivan 5695: 35.

¹⁴ "Be-Mosdot Yerushalayim u-be-Argonia." *Ha-Hed*. Vol. 12(8). April 1937. Pp. 19–20; Soker, Y. "Be-Beyt Midrash ha-Rambam." *Ha-Hed*. Vol. 12(9). May 1937. Pp. 16–17.

¹⁵ (Zohar, H. "Mosad ha-Rav Kook: Reyshito u-Meyasdav, Terumato le-Heker Erets Yisrael ve-ha-Tsiyonut ha-Datit." *Sinai: Ma'amarim u-Mehakrim be-Torah u-be-Mada'ey ha-Yahadut*. Tammuz-Elul 132 (5763): 132.

Cultural Education.¹⁶ Heyn's main teachings appear in a posthumously published three-volume collection of essays entitled *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut: Pirke Hagut u-Mahshava* (In the Kingdom of Judaism: Meditations and Thoughts), echoing Tolstoy's *In the Kingdom of God*.¹⁷ In it, his unique anarcho-pacifist interpretation of Jewish tradition is articulated through thematic essays as well as Sabbath and holiday sermons.

Here is not the place to elaborate at length on the context in which a hasidic rabbi came to appeal to Tolstoy's late Christian writings. In brief however, Tolstoyan ideas were very much part of the atmosphere in Heyn's generation of Eastern European Jewish intellectuals. Zionists like A.D. Gordon adopted his back-to-the-earth ethos, and his effort to supply a timely account of theological ideas was regarded by many Jewish traditionalists as external confirmation of their own efforts to demonstrate the continuing relevance of religion. This is to say nothing of the fact that his philosophy of non-violence served as a resource for Jews striving to respond to the increasingly intense pogroms that frequently broke out as the 19th century came to a close and the 20th began.

In this essay, I shall examine in depth three central themes developed in Heyn's writings, which have been almost entirely neglected: one, the notion that the essence of Judaism consists in a conviction as to the absolute sanctity of human life, two, the implications this has for an anarcho-pacifist vision for human society reminiscent of Tolstoy's but articulated in a distinctively Jewish manner,¹⁸ and

¹⁶ "Ha-Memshala Kibla le-Yadeha et Mahleket ha-Tarbut me-Yesodo shel ha-Va'ad ha-Leumi." *Ha-Tsofe* 01/17/1949: 4.

¹⁷ Heyn, A. *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut: Pirke Hagut u-Mahshava*. Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1958); Heyn, A. *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut: Pirke Hagut u-Mahshava*. Vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963); Heyn, A. *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut: Pirke Hagut u-Mahshava*. Vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1970).

¹⁸ There is something to be said here on Tolstoy's relationship to Jews and Judaism. Though it is indeed the case that he denounced Russian persecution of Jewish people, his anti-Judaism is palpable in much (though not all) of his later writing. See Eigland, E. "Anti-Zionism and the Anarchist Tradition." In *Deciphering the New Antisemitism*, edited by Rosenfeld, A.H. (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 2015), 206–41. In this respect, thought it would be false to accuse him of anti-semitism, it would be equally false to represent his relationship to Jews and Judaism as

three, the nature of a true and morally sound revolution as determined by the essence of Judaism and the sort of community that, according to Heyn, it is designed to promote.

First, I will discuss Rabbi Heyn's view as to the essential character of Judaism — namely, the absolute sanctity of human life — and two related principles that Heyn derives from it: the inadmissibility of justifying means by their ends on the one hand, and of regarding the individual as the subordinate of the collective on the other. I shall then show how the essence of Judaism and its derivative principles — so far as Heyn understands them — leads him to a Jewish formulation of religious anarchism. This, I explain, is primarily based on Heyn's claim to the effect that the idea of the absolute sanctity of human life meaningfully intersects with traditional theological notions of human freedom. Earlier Jewish philosophers and theologians tended to restrict discussion of human freedom to the problem of providence — i.e. to the negation of freedom and moral responsibility that providence may entail. In contrast, Heyn uses the traditional terminology but extends its scope to include political and social questions falling within the scope of the relationship between the individual and the group of which he or she is a part. Finally, I address the question of revolution, finding that Heyn recommends revolution of the heart as a means of revolutionizing society at large. This does not mean that he adopts a passive or quietistic view. Rather, it is his conviction that a revolution conducted in a manner consistent with its goals, a Jewish revolution grounded in opposition to force and violence as such constitutes a position of strength because it undermines the moral foundation of the enemy.

In conclusion I find, in Abraham Judah Heyn's thought, a robust example of religiously-inspired radicalism. In this manner, I highlight the sort of exception that Deutsch failed to recognize and show that for the modern Jewish radical, Elisha b. Avuya is not the hero of the story; rather, it is R. Meir who brings home the

uncomplicated and without blemish. As with most European thought, the Jewish intellectual must proceed with generosity, attending to the message while bracketing the occasional jab at his person and his tradition. See Krauskopf, J. *My Visit to Tolstoy: Five Discourses*. (Philadelphia: Temple Keneset Yisrael, 1911).

teachings of Elisha b. Avuya, radicalizes the *beyt midrash* and, in doing so, enriches it rather than destroying it.

II. The absolute sanctity of human life as the essence of Judaism

Let us begin by considering an essay entitled, like one of Tolstoy's lesser-read works, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," in which Heyn presents the basic features of his thought. While this prohibition, he says, is universally acknowledged in principle, it has at least three senses. These are the "thou shalt not kill" of: (a) the "Romans," i.e. "the doctrine of the majority, the state, the society (*hevra*), and the public (*tsibur*)," (b) the "[anarcho-]individualists (*ba'aley ha-anokhiyut*),¹⁹

¹⁹ Here, I translate *ba'aley ha-anokhiyut* as "anarcho-individualism" as opposed simply to "individualism" for several reasons. First of all — as my memory recalls — he refers to Stirner a handful of times throughout the three volumes of his major work. Although Stirner is not mentioned here, this would suggest that Heyn was at least aware of the general substance of Stirner's thought. More importantly (as we shall see below), Heyn's account of the *ba'aley anokhiyut* implies that any and all moral constraints to individual liberty are — according to this worldview — absurd. This does not at all resemble political individualism, which insists on the right of each individual to act as he or she wishes, just *as long he or she does not infringe on the same liberty of another*. Even a more radical individualist like Thoreau, who opposed civil government, will still say "if I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself;" see Cafaro, P. *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue*. (Athens: U. of Georgia Press, 2004), 65–70. In contrast, an anarcho-individualist like Stirner, will assert that "morality is incompatible with egoism, because the former does not allow validity to *me*, but only to the Man in me (Stirner, M. *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*. Translated by Byington, S.T. Edited by Martin, J.J. (Mineola: Dover, 2005), 179)." and that "I recognize only the right that I impart (ibid. 297)." Though such claims are not necessarily tantamount to nihilism (Leopold, D. "Max Stirner", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/max-stirner/>>)," the value distinctions they allow are focused solely on the person making them and imply no duties at all vis-a-vis the other. For instance, Stirner asserts that he loves men and that he has, for them a "fellow feeling" by dint of which he suffers when they suffer. It is for this reason and this reason alone that he can "kill them, not torture them (Stirner, M. 2005, 291)." From this, we see that if Stirner felt no such "fellow feeling," he

and (c) of “man as such.”²⁰ Let us first discern how Heyn conceives the three elements of this typology of prohibition, and then consider what he adds to it.

For Heyn, the foundation of the statist, or Roman, approach to the prohibition is the doctrine of “sacrificing the particular for the sake of the general.” All supporters of this view, he says, regard “the universal” as “the end of creation” and “the particular as the instrument thereof.” They disagree only “as to what constitutes the universal;” for some, it may be a religious community, for others the state or even humanity at large. In essence, however, “all have the same idol and it is called the whole; all worship at the same altar and it is called the good of the whole.” According to this doctrine, Heyn continues, murder is not sinful in itself; rather, it is condemned only insofar as threatens the whole.²¹ Therefore, when the whole itself demands bloodshed, the prohibition is lifted; “slaughter is sanctified” because “the being of the one is nothing more than a footstool for the life and prosperity of the many,”²² because man is regarded as nothing “but a tool of the community... a small nail in the structure of the great universal... the sacrifice of which logic dictates the necessity of” when that serves the general interest.²³

In contrast to Roman statism, anarcho-individualism maintains that “there is no whole, no mass, no gathering, no collective, no community constituting a higher purpose” more sacred than the individual, who is “a world unto himself.” As such, the latter cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the former; “if the individual is everything (*ha-kol*) and his destruction is the destruction of everything, for the sake of what could he be sacrificed?” In this sense, the prohibition of murder becomes something of an absolute.²⁴ Yet, Heyn contends, if there is indeed nothing other than

would recognize no obligation to avoid killing *or* torturing others. As such, Heyn’s account of the *ba’aley anokhiyut* more closely resembles Stirner’s anarcho-individualism than “individualism” more broadly construed.

²⁰ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 73.

²¹ *Ibid.* 74–76.

²² *Ibid.* 77.

²³ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 335.

²⁴ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 77.

the individual (*efes zulado*),²⁵ there is nothing to keep him or her in check and the very notion of prohibition is rendered absurd.²⁶ If anarcho-individualism can explain the inadmissibility of self-sacrifice, it is at pains to establish moral grounds barring the perpetration of violence.

Appealing to Kropotkin — whom he calls “*the* righteous man (*tsadik*) of the new world” and “a pure and crystalline soul”²⁷ — Heyn entertains the prospect of replacing prohibitions on violence with “wise counsel” to the effect that the perpetration of violence invites its suffering.²⁸ He does not so much object to this counsel as identify its boundary. In the case of one who must choose to slay or be slain,²⁹ he avers, it supplies no barrier; “when two existences collide, yours takes precedence.”³⁰ This is the limit: anarcho-individualism regards the individual as an absolute, but cannot supply the ground for unqualified prohibition of his destruction.

The sense of ‘thou shalt not kill’ of man as such is a “variety of [anarcho-]individualism,” but a “holier” one which escapes this difficulty. To the aforementioned existential collision, it responds with a challenge: “perhaps his blood is redder!”³¹ In other words, it is based on conviction as to the “absolute holiness of human life and the absolute sinfulness of uprooting it.”³² This conviction as to the irreducible holiness of human life, Heyn maintains, constitutes “the essence of Jewish religion.”³³ It is not simply that Judaism prohibits killing. Rather, “Judaism *is* the teaching of the negation of blood[shed];”³⁴ this is not “a thing inscribed on the tablets [of the law], but the tablets themselves.”³⁵

²⁵ Here, Heyn draws on the traditional language of the *Aleynu* prayer “Our King is true and there is nothing other than him (*efes zulado*),” thus indicating that the individual treats himself like a god.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 78.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 78–79.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 78.

²⁹ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 74a.

³⁰ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 80.

³¹ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 74a.

³² Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 81.

³³ Heyn, 1970. *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 187.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 201.

³⁵ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 81.

As Heyn develops it, the theoretical foundation of this position lies in a distinction between “the one (*ehad*)” and “the unique (*yahid*)”³⁶ — between, that is, quantitative and qualitative determinations of value. Quantitative value, he explains, is “the expression of a relation external to the object that bears it;” it pertains to “things which are means and not ends in themselves,” to *objects of utility*. In this sense, it is recognized in “the relation of an owner to his property” or to things that may enter his possession. Appealing to the ancient *ius abutendi*, Heyn holds that we have the right to destroy that which we own; an ox, for example, is slaughterable because oxen can be viewed as human property. *This ox* can be killed because *any ox* can be killed; oxen are not treated as subjects but as utile objects.

“No man,” Heyn states, “was created for the sake of another, nor for the service of some necessity external to his own requirements for life.” Man, he continues, “is not a means, but an end; the whole of his being is his alone and he exists only for himself.”³⁷ As such, human life “is in no respect the acquisition of another” it cannot be treated as property. If so, it “is not *one*, but... *unique*,” its value is strictly qualitative. In making this claim, Heyn appeals to a biblical census-taboo expressed in a rabbinic prohibition against directly counting people.³⁸ His gloss on the prohibition is that it has a moral message, that it expresses the singularity of each individual. As he

³⁶ It may be noted that Heyn borrows this distinction from Maimonides’ account of God’s unity as it appears in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, I.57. This appropriation is made all the more interesting by the fact that Heyn reverses Maimonides’ intent. For Maimonides God alone is unique because God alone is not the product of intelligent design — i.e. something existing for some rational end. However, as he goes on to explain, this does not mean that man (or anything else for that matter) has an ultimate purpose; “it was not a final cause,” Maimonides contends, “that determined the existence of all things, but only His will (Guide for the Perplexed 3.13).”

³⁷ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. I, 7

³⁸ *Babylonian Talmud*, *Berakhot* 62b; *Yoma* 22b. See Liver, J. “The Half-shekel offering in biblical and post-biblical literature.” *Harvard Theological Review* 56, no. 3 (1963): 173–198; Milgrom, J. “A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17: 11.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90, no. 2 (1971): 149–156; Neufeld, E. “The sins of the census.” *Judaism* 43, no. 2 (1994): 196.

goes on to articulate it, “from the standpoint of the self, it is all the same whether it dies alone or the whole world dies with it... He says ‘my death means [for me] an end to everything’” or, to express the same idea in the language of the rabbis: “when a single life is destroyed, it is as if a whole world is destroyed.”³⁹ Human life is an

³⁹ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 9, 39–42; cf. *ibid.* 213–14. See also *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 37a. So as to discern how striking is Heyn's use of this concept, cf. Ascherman, A. “Does Judaism Teach Universal Human Rights?” In *Abraham's Children: Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict*, edited by James, K.J., 81–101. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2012); Regev, U. “Justice and Power: A Jewish Perspective.” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 40, no. 1 (2007): 148–64; Dorfman, A., and Messinger, R. “Toward a Jewish Argument for the Responsibility to protect.” In *Responsibility to Protect*, 61–75. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. In these articles, the principle is largely incorporated into a classically liberal doctrine of human rights; it is not expanded into a general critique of the state.

It may also be noted here that by formulating this proposition in universal terms, Heyn takes an implicit position in a longstanding textual dispute with significant theological implications. According to some versions, the source text reads “whoever destroys a soul is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life of Israel, it is considered as if he saved an entire world (*Mishna, Sanhedrin* 4:5; *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 37a; *Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin* 4:9).” Here, the universal “a single soul” appears. However, a parallel text appears in *Avot de Rabi Natan*, in which the passage reads “a single Jewish” soul. Most printed versions of the Talmud follow the latter reading, though the scholarly consensus is that the former is correct (Urbach, E.E. “Whoever Preserves a Single Life...: The Evolution of a Textual Variant, the Vagaries of Censorship and the Printing Business.” *Tarbiz* 40. (1971): 268–284; cf. Jaffee, M.S. “Rabbinic Oral Tradition in Late Byzantine Galilee: Christian Empire and Late Rabbinic Resistance.” In *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity*. Edited by Draper, J.A., 176–79. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

Due to this interpolation — in addition to other rabbinic and mystical sources — major trends of modern kabbalistic and hasidic thought have adopted a profoundly ethnocentric view of human life. This is especially pronounced in the Habad tradition from which Heyn emerged. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the movement's founder, writes (basing himself on Hayyim Vital's *Ets Hayim*) that “the souls of the nations of the world, however, emanate from” those aspects of the which contain no good whatever (*Likutey Amarim Tanya*, ch. 1). Later Habad theologians, Yoel Kahn for instance, interpreted this in a most radical sense, positing that the

“absolute essence”⁴⁰ — this is what Heyn intends by the irreducible holiness of human life as the core principle of Judaism: an individual is not one among many, but *one and only* or *non-numerable*.

Now, from his conviction as to the uniqueness of human life, Heyn derives two intersecting principles, both based on the supposition that uniqueness, or non-numerability of the individual implies that his or her value is *non-relative*. The first of these principles is that each person constitutes an end unto himself that that under no circumstances do ends justify means.⁴¹ Heyn reasons here that to treat people as means to other ends is to regard them as objects of relative quantitative value as opposed to subjects with the absolute value due a subject. Thus he writes that:

The justification of the means considered in themselves is a fundamental principle of Judaism, its primary substance. This is one of its most revolutionary contributions to world culture.

Jewish people are literally a distinct and superior species of human (Kahn, Y. *Mahutam shel Yisrael be-Mishnat ha-Hasidut*. New York: Hekhal Menahem, 2002; cf. Balk, H. “The Soul of a Jew and the Soul of a Non-Jew: An Inconvenient Truth and the Search for an Alternative.” *Hakira*, Vol. 16 (2013): 47–76). While Habad theology is not without other profoundly redeeming qualities, this particular train of thought is clearly problematic, especially when it is politicized by men like R. Yitzchak Ginsburgh, whose Jewish-supremacism translates into a justification for anti-Arab violence and Israeli imperialism (Satherley, T. “‘The Simple Jew’: The ‘Price Tag’ Phenomenon, Vigilantism, and Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh’s Political Kabbalah.” *Melilah*, Vol. 10 (2013): 57–91). Thus, Heyn’s departure from this element of his tradition is radical in the extreme. That being said, he did not directly indicate this divergence.

⁴⁰ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 5.

⁴¹ The Kantian background of this claim is palpable. For more on the link between Kantianism and Anarchism, see May, T.G. “Kant the liberal, Kant the anarchist: Rawls and Lyotard on Kantian Justice.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (1990): 525–538; May, T.G. “Kant via Rancière: From Ethics to Anarchism.” *How Not to Be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from the Critical Left*, edited by. Klausen, J.C. and Martel, J. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011): 65–82. See also Wolff, R.P. *In Defense of Anarchism*. (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1970); Pritchard, M.S. “Wolff’s Anarchism.” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 7, no. 4 (1973): 296–302; Sterba, J.P. “The Decline of Wolff’s Anarchism.” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 11, no. 3 (1977): 213–217; Riley, P. “On the Kantian Foundations of Robert Paul Wolff’s Anarchism.” *Nomos* 19 (1978): 294–319.

The tool which the hands operate, must itself be perfect... any blemish, no matter how small, invalidates it... the whole idea of absolutely despising a transgression performed by way of a good deed,⁴² that whole system, is the novel contribution of Judaism... [which] represents the opposite extreme of the idea that the ends justify the means.⁴³

One must, he indicates, *always* use “*kosher* tools.” Drawing an analogy to the hand-lathing ritual, he says that the vessel must be whole and unblemished; if not “the hands remain impure; indeed, they create, via the water and the blemished cup, more impurity, thus nourishing the external [evil] forces.”⁴⁴ If, that is, the means are bad, their result will be bad; means must accord with their end and in this sense constitute ends in themselves.⁴⁵

⁴² Here, Heyn appeals to the notion of a “precept fulfilled through a transgression (*mitsva ha-ba’a ba-avera*),” which normative Jewish law invalidates. See *Babylonian Talmud, Sukkot* 30a, 31b, 32b. Unlike other Jewish anarchists, most notably, Gershom Scholem, Heyn’s anarchism is by no means antinomian in character. For more on the link between Jewish anti-nomianism and Jewish anarchism, see especially Scholem, G. “Redemption Through Sin.” In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, translated by Halkin, H. 78–141. (New York: Schocken, 1971); Jacobson, E. “Gershom Scholem entre anarchisme et tradition juive.” In *Juifs et Anarchistes: Histoire d’une rencontre*, edited by Bertolo, A., 53–73. (Paris: Editions de l’Éclat, 2001); Jacobson, E. “Gershom Scholem’s Theological Politics.” In *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, 52–84. (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2003). See also Elijor, R. “Jacob Frank and His Book The Sayings of the Lord: Religious Anarchism as a Restoration of Myth and Metaphor.” *The Sabbatian Movement and Its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbatianism and Frankism, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 16, no. 1 (2001). In this respect, Heyn’s anarchism is the cousin of Landauer’s and Buber’s (see notes 3 and 6 above), both of whom also placed extreme emphasis on the consonance of ends and means.

⁴³ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 318.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 193. See also *Mishna*, tractate *Yadayim*. Cf. Maimonides’ introduction to and commentary on the first two chapters of this tractate.

⁴⁵ As Uri Gordon has generously pointed out, means-ends unity is a central anarchist principle, and one that appears prominently in recent discussions of prefigurative politics. See Leach, D.K. “Prefigurative Politics.” *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Edited by D.A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, & D. McAdam. (Hoboken:

The second is that if people are not one, but unique, and so unaccountable, it follows that they cannot be treated as one among many. The whole, Heyn contends, “is nothing more than a collection of individuals” regarded from an external standpoint⁴⁶ whereas, in reality, there is no “majority, no congregation, no collective, no society,”⁴⁷ no “nation, country, congregation, party, [or] institution,”⁴⁸ no “higher purpose”⁴⁹ than the individual.⁵⁰ People, he says, “are not like drops of water that can be stirred together so that, in the end, they become a single entity.”⁵¹ Each person is a world unto himself. Here, Heyn simply draws a natural conclusion from his rejection of the ends-means dichotomy. If each individual is an absolute, then he really is a world unto himself; his vital interests and those of a social or political collective cannot be weighed against one another — the individual stands always apart from and above the collective.

In sum, we find that that “the absolute and unconditional prohibition of killing”⁵² implies the holiness of human life. Namely — in classical Kantian terms — that a person is a subject with irreducible *qualitative* value and not an object of relative quantitative value. In Maimonidean terms: a person is not just one, but unique. From this, Heyn infers, first, the non-admissibility of an ends-means dichotomy where people are concerned — it would imply that the end is more valuable than the human material sacrificed to achieve it. Since the individual can-

Blackwell 2013); Franks, B. “Prefiguration.” *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, 28–43. (New York: Routledge, 2018). See also Gordon, U. “Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise.” *Political Studies*, vol. 66, no. 2 (2017): 521–537; Swain, D. “Not Not but Not yet: Present and Future in Prefigurative Politics.” *Political Studies*, (2017): .003232171774123.

⁴⁶ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 77.

⁴⁸ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 96–97.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 77.

⁵⁰ Cf. “Have you ever seen an independent creature called the general? It is nothing more than a collection of particulars, each of which lives unto itself, and two instances of life in a single body I have never seen (Ibid. 8).”

⁵¹ Ibid. 143; Vol. 1, 78, 159.

⁵² Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 201.

not serve as a means or a tool for others, he is not subordinate to them but stands apart. As Heyn understands it, the alternative is a dangerous fiction that “plows the whole world with salt.”⁵³ This complex of convictions, according to Heyn, constitute the essence of Judaism.

III. Heyn's conviction as to the sanctity of life as the moral foundation of an anarchist vision for human community

Let us now proceed to consider how Heyn's conception of the prohibition of murder implies anarchism broadly construed. Traces of his view can already be discerned in his approach to the question of numerability. So he understood it, that is numerable which lends itself to being *owned*. A proprietor counts his property and assesses its value in relation to other sorts and quantities of property. As property, the numerable can be treated as a relative use value, it can be reduced to and deployed according to the desire of the proprietor.

The term which Heyn uses is *ba'alut*. Though it implies ownership, it is better translated as *mastership*. That is numerable, quantifiable, usable, which is under the *dominion* of something else, which is *subordinate* to it. In this sense, the economic relation of property transforms into a political relation of sovereignty. As instances of absolute sanctity, human individuals cannot be treated in this way. If they are not subject to numeration, valuation, possession, and so on, they are also not subject to dominion; the human being cannot be the subordinate of another man or other men. “It is clear to me,” Heyn says, that the idea of “sacrificing the individual for the sake of the collective originates from a prior doctrine: that of dividing the inhabitants of the world into masters and slaves.”⁵⁴ For the master, his “men were nothing more than objects. The master could kill them at will in the same way that he might shatter his tools or slaughter his animal... The real utility or the capricious enjoyment of the master determined the being

⁵³ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 295.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 69–70.

of the slaves. They were his men, not humans but carriers of determinate value.”⁵⁵

Interestingly, in several places Heyn appeals to an incident recorded in Kropotkin’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*⁵⁶ to exemplify this relationship between ownership, dominion, and sacrifice on the one hand and, on the other, their rejection as the moral foundation of “the great city of ideal anarchism.”⁵⁷ So Heyn reports it, enamored with his father’s reputation for valor, Kropotkin inquired as to the details of an especially impressive exploit for which the elder had earned a medal of honor; he was said to have saved a family from a fire. Were you “singd by the fire?” Kropotkin the younger asked. “Little lamb,” his father answered, do “you think *I myself* went into the fire? I sent Frohl, my servant!” Then, responding to his son’s incredulity, he explained that the servant was “my soul, the acquisition of my money.” On the basis of this anecdote, Heyn articulates a “general principle” to the effect that it is because a master-slave relation obtained between the elder Kropotkin and Frohl that the latter could treat the former like merchandise, applying to him the distinction between one and many.⁵⁸ Though, he adds furthermore, “the forms of slavery have changed” over time and abject servitude has perhaps come to an end, “the foundation remains.” Namely, “external authority [that] hovers above” in the form of our “subordination to kings, to flags, parties, states” and even democratically elected parliaments, which dupe men into believing they have sent themselves to slaughter. In all such cases, there is a master who does the sending and slaves who “are sent because they are under his authority and not their own.”⁵⁹ This fundamental insight, Heyn contends, was

⁵⁵ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 209.

⁵⁶ The incident is mentioned in Chapter 1, section 3 of this text.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 209.

⁵⁸ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 69–70. Cf. Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 209. The story is repeated there, but in a slightly altered form.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 210. Cf. “Between generation and generation, group and group, man and man, there is no difference but the form of the master. Sometimes, it is in the form of a Roman crown, sometimes it is in the form of a Spartan helmet, sometimes [it is in the form of] a nihilistic clown who negates himself and others alike, a noble individual isolated in a closed room or a disorderly mob, a party or a society at large. What all of them have in

“the first reed plunged into” Kropotkin’s “upright heart” on which “the great city of ideal anarchism”⁶⁰ — which entails “a total negation of servitude and authority of one man over another” that in turn negates “the idea of sacrificing the one for the many at its very source”⁶¹ — was eventually built. Let us now see how he arrives at a similar result by appeal to traditional Jewish sources and ideas.

As Heyn understands it, man is a fundamentally social creature. “The life of the individual,” he says, “cannot be complete, healthy, and full without the life of the community.” This is true not only in respect of his basic survival needs, but also his spiritual needs. Appealing to language once used to describe the nature of God, Heyn writes that it is “the nature of the good to do good;”⁶² that is, it is constituted in its expression. Likewise, he explains, “life is expressed only through activity... [it] is nothing more than the expression of life, the ‘revelation of the concealed,’ the ‘making actual what was potential.’” Therefore, it “is not felt without other people,” without “brotherhood and connection” such that the “soul lives only insofar as it is gathered together [with others], in a community.” In this respect, “communal life is the glory of the individual”⁶³ — it is the necessary condition for the expression of his being and, to that extent, constitutes means of his liberty.

Still, it is precisely that: a means. The community in and by which man lives does not exist for its own sake. “Like the air which men breath” it may be, but they do not do so for the sake of

common is that all function as masters. One master replaces another, but the slave remains in his position (Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 2, 246).”

⁶⁰ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 209. Cf. *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 56b — Heyn appeals to teaching of R. Judah, who said in Samuel’s name that “when Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter, Gabriel descended and planted a reed in the sea, and it gathered a bank around it, on which the great city of Rome was built.” Based on Heyn’s reading of Rome, we might say that the doctrine of sacrificing the one for the sake of the many began its development. In the same way, but in the opposite direction, Kropotkin’s father planted the seed which grew into the negation of this doctrine.

⁶¹ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 69–70.

⁶² See *Hakham Tsvi*, Responsum 18. Cf. *Shomer Emunim*, ch. 2.

⁶³ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 86–87.

the air. On the contrary, “once breathing stops, it is all the same” whether there is air or not; in the same way, the “whole world was created for no other reason than to serve the needs of the individual.”⁶⁴ Heyn arrives at this conclusion by radicalizing the notion that “whoever destroys a single life is as if he destroyed an entire world.”⁶⁵ As he understands it, this teaching is based on a commitment to the “negation of servitude.” Neither slave nor master, every man, he says: “is the sole master of himself. Therefore, there are no two lives which belong to one of them. Each one is unique and it is therefore everything... there is only the individual.” However sacred the community, he continues, it derives its value from the individual; therefore, it “has no claim over the sovereign authority of the individual.”⁶⁶

If so, then while it may be that the life and being of the individual — and to that extent, his liberty — is realized only in community, the latter is not entitled to maintain itself by compelling the former. Rather, the individual must be free to actualize the potentiality of his being in a thoroughly unfettered manner. “Independence and selfhood,” says Heyn, “are the inner being of freedom, its depth and innermost chamber.” It is achieved through “the absolute negation of slavery, liberation from the foreign yoke, from dominion of another, from any sort of foreignness and otherness.” In speaking of foreignness and otherness, he does not intend national or ethnic others; rather, he intends everything that that “blemishes,” “harms,” or “diminishes” one’s “inner freedom and independence.” Thus, he writes:

⁶⁴ Ibid. 86.

⁶⁵ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 37a. As I indicated earlier, Heyn adopts the universalist — and, according to scholarly consensus, the correct — reading of this maxim. Standard editions of the Babylonian Talmud, however, follow the text of *Avot de-Rabi Natan*, which reads “a single life Jewish life.” It is, however, unclear whether Heyn has universalized a maxim which he understands, in the source text, to be ethnocentric in character or whether he appeals to older (and more universal) versions of the text that appear in quotation in many theological and legal texts (e.g. Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah*; see *Hilkhot Sanhedrin ve-ha-Onashim ha-Mesurim la-Heml* 12:3, which reads “a single soul” and *not* “a single Jewish soul.”

⁶⁶ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 42–43.

When inner, spiritual, freedom is cuffed... the lighter, the more kind, soft, and pleasant the authority resting upon you, the more it shackles your liberty, your sole lordship over yourself, the more it entangles you in its pleasant visitations, the more it entraps you. It pounces on you and penetrates your innermost being, your hidden depths. Silk threads more tightly confine the body than Egyptian rope and stalks of linen. The heart is more tightly squeezed by clouds than by iron traps and walls of bronze.⁶⁷

Any external compulsion, hard or soft (especially soft), any imposition from without constitutes a violation, for Heyn, of the absolute uniqueness and alterity of the self which must be released from every shackle if it is to express or manifest itself thoroughly.

Thus, commenting on Jeremiah 31:33 — which reads “no longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, to say know the Lord, for they will all know me” — does he remark that any form of social hierarchy violates the liberating moral doctrine of Israel. It is not, he says:

Just that one man will no longer enjoy a material advantage over another, that advantage which is essentially the result of violence. Even the *spiritual* advantage of one man over another will be negated... Every difference, every human inequality be it spiritual or material, necessarily divides men into classes. But the Jewish ideal is absolute equality — not just equality before the law, but moral, intellectual, and spiritual equality, an absolute equalization of value... Man is not one [among many], but unique. Everything depends on this. Each individual is the absolute and sole master of his ‘I.’ No ‘I’ bends to the authority of another ‘I’... every individual is his own master.⁶⁸

What is striking about this passage is that Heyn is utterly insensitive to the historical register of the verse. Jeremiah was clearly speaking of the messianic era; for Heyn, however, that each man *will become* his own master becomes a demand that each man must *now be* his own master and that none shall have his will

⁶⁷ Heyn, *Be-Malkbut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 76–77.

⁶⁸ Heyn, *Be-Malkbut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 38–39.

bent before that of another.⁶⁹ Thus does he explain elsewhere that this constitutes the basic message of the Exodus from Egypt. Judaism, he says, “is fundamentally hostile to all the ropes and chains of the state. The Holy One, Blessed be He said to Israel: My children, this is what I thought [when I liberation you from Egypt], that you should be free from government; like a beast free in the wilderness without any fear of men, so I thought that you should be beset with no fear of governments.”⁷⁰ This is the very seed of that vine which God “transplanted from Egypt” and which “took deep root (Psalms 80:9–10)” in the heart of the Jewish life in *this* world.⁷¹

Thus, the relation between the sanctity and uniqueness of human life on the one hand and, on the other, the imperative of unmitigated freedom comes to constitute the very core of Jewish religion. The force of this conclusion, Heyn emphasizes by proposing a novel and extremely radical re-interpretation of the principles of *behirah hofshit*, freedom of choice. To explicate it, it is first necessary to turn to a talmudic homily involving the Sinatic revelation. Commenting on the verse “and they stood at the foot of (lit. “under”) the mount (Exodus 19:17).” it is taught that R. Avdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said “this teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] basin, and said to them, ‘If you accept the Torah, it is well; if

⁶⁹ This is not to say that even from this standpoint there are no moral boundaries. Elsewhere, Heyn denounces “the pathological arrogance of a certain people] which extends even to the point of denying the very existence of others. It is not just that she is the wheat and others are the chaff... [according to her] even ascribing to others the value of chaff is too much, while for her even the status of first fruits is too meagre. She is everything and the rest are nothing. Evidently, a group like this recognizes not the naked being of another, of anything external to itself. This opened eye sees not the other; it really doesn’t see anything other than itself as more than an irritating buzz, as worthless chaos... This is the central point whence extend lines of blood and iron, the aggressive tendency to oppress, to seize, to dispossess whatever impedes the expression and emphasis of its being (Vol .3, 239–40).”

⁷⁰ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 87.

⁷¹ Interestingly, the verse cited by Heyn concludes “You drove out the nations [of Cana’an], and planted it.” Heyn excludes this phrase and fails to address the exclusion.

not, there shall be your grave,” to which R. Aha b. Jacob replied that “this furnishes a substantial caveat (*mude’a raba*) to [the obligation to fulfill] the Torah.”⁷²

Without digressing into the long history of interpretation bearing on this strange passage, let us simply comment as follows. R. Avdimi suggests that the law was accepted under compulsion, while R. Aha b. Jacob points out that were this the case, the legitimacy of the law would, in some respect, be undermined. Heyn elaborates on R. Aha b. Jacob’s challenge.⁷³ For Judaism, he maintains:

Freedom of choice is a necessary and not merely a contingent existence... Judaism is literally inconceivable without the principle of free choice. This principle is nothing other than the immediate consequence of absolute justice. This attribute constitutes the whole hidden depth of Judaism... [Its meaning is] the sole and unlimited right of every essence with no stipulation, no limit, no boundary imposed on it from without. For this right is not a gift or kindness from without, it comes only from itself. Since it does not come from any other domain, no other authority has attachment to or control over it. This... attribute of freedom, of absolute justice, is an outgrowth of the right of existence... [and] its singularity. The negation of all lordship, mastery, authority, and claims over the I — in this way, nothing external to it has the ability to rule over the freedom of this I if its right to itself is exclusive. The negation of external authority is a consequence of the right of being itself which cannot be challenged.

The foundation of free choice according to Judaism is the absolute justice which is the sole right that man has regarding his essential being... The negation of external authority over your I leads to the negation of lordship, mastery, compulsion, and blemish on your exclusive right. It is the foundation of freedom of

⁷² *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88a.*

⁷³ Actually, Heyn responds to this difficulty from two angles. In addition to the tack discussed above, he suggests that the image of the hovering mountain does not so much describe a case external compulsion as much as it conveys an inward sense of responsibility to ancestral tradition (This is based on the claim that the forefathers observed the Torah before it was bestowed at Sinai. See *Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 28b*). Here, we observe another example of the sort of beholdenness which the individual bears toward the community; it has its own force, but operates from within as a personal sense of loyalty.

choice according to Judaism. Consequently, the measure of freedom in Judaism and in the Torah of Israel is truly unlimited... No authority external to the individual can compel him and rule over his freedom. Only he himself is able to compel himself. This ability comes only from the unlimited freedom of man. Likewise, the individual is unable to compel anyone other than himself. He can compel only himself. The right to compel an essence arises from the unlimited freedom which man has with respect to himself; he is allowed to do with himself what he wishes. If you erase this point, the point of being, its holiness and its right, from our faith... then you render its substance a forgery... our special substance is the idea of 'beating' swords [into plowshares], the pulverization of the gods of power, compulsion, and the altars of man.⁷⁴

Here, I have quoted at length because the passage in question is incredibly powerful. Whereas earlier interpreters of the Jewish tradition — Maimonides, for example — understood the concept of *behira hofshit* to be the foundation of Jewish religion in the sense that it implies the negation of metaphysical determinism and makes possible (or at least sensible) the notions of commandment, and justifies the doctrine of reward and punishment, Heyn gives it an altogether new sense.⁷⁵ While he concurs that Judaism

⁷⁴ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 261–72.

⁷⁵ See, for example, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 5: 3–4. Here, Maimonides identifies freedom as a necessary presupposition of the idea of commandment. See also *Guide for the Perplexed*, book three, chapter seventeen, where the doctrine of reward and punishment is included as well. The striking departure from traditional theological postures here can be discerned by reviewing what came before. As for the general crux of the problem, see Samuelson, N. "The Problem of Future Contingents in Medieval Jewish Philosophy." *Studies in Medieval Culture* 6 (1976): 71–82. For a selection of particular responses on the part of some major representatives of medieval Jewish philosophy, see Altmann, A. "The Religion of the Thinkers: Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Bahya, and Maimonides." In *Religion in a Religious Age: Proceedings of Regional Conferences Held at The University of California, Los Angeles and Brandeis University in April 1973*. Edited by Goitein, S.D. (New York: Ktav, 1974); Weiss, S. *Joseph Albo on Free Choice: Exegetical Innovation in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2017); Ventura, M. "Belief in Providence According to Gersonides." In *Minha l'Avraham: Hommage a Abraham, recueil litteraire en l'honneur de Abraham Elmaleh*. (Jerusalem: Comite du Jubile, 1959): 12–21.

is literally inconceivable without this doctrine, he deploys the traditional terminology to make a radically untraditional claim; the principle of *behira hofshit* is uprooted from its largely metaphysical context and transplanted into the field of politics. If it once described the sort of creature that one must be if he or she is to be held responsible for his or her obedience to or neglect of the law, it now comes to describe not how things are, but how they ought to be, the sort of relation that must obtain between a person and his or her socio-political environment. Namely, that compulsion of any sort is incompatible with the absolute sanctity of human existence.

Thus, just as the sanctity of human life implies, for Heyn, an absolute refusal to distinguish between lawful and unlawful killing, reducing both to one and the same prohibition, at a deeper level he likewise refuses the distinction between just and unjust governments. Sovereignty, “dominion, considered in itself, the expression of rule over others, the authority of one man over another,” he says, “are equivalent to the sin of the fall of man.”⁷⁶ They represent a violation of the very core of the ethical and political message of Judaism, for “the kingdom of Judaism within us”⁷⁷ — sovereignty lies within or not at all.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 319.

⁷⁷ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 241.

⁷⁸ Here, it is worth noting Heyn's explicit appeal to Samuel's condemnation of the people (1 Samuel, chapter eight) for having demanded a king (that is, a centralized system of governance). Some things, he writes, “were said lovingly and gracefully, supernal beauty and truth desire them. Other things, even commandments, were said in anger to begin with so that it is the will of heaven that they never come to pass. The chapter dealing with the monarchy constitutes a whole chapter in the Torah containing explicit and detailed laws and rules. Yet, the first prophet, of whom it is said that he is to be measured against Moses and Aaron together, announced aloud “you have done evil in the eyes of God in seeking a king (1 Samuel 8:6).” Thus did R. Nehorai, who is always the author of unattributed Mishnaic rulings (i.e. R. Meir) said that all the laws pertaining to kings were commandments given in anger. The sages of homiletic teachings further elaborated as to the suffering, as it were, of the God of freedom and the destruction of slavery, where the chapter concerning kings is concerned. I said that you should be free of kings in the city and likewise in the wilderness, yet you seek a king?! (Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 200–01). Cf. “You have done evil in the eyes of God in seeking

IV. A revolution of the heart: Heyn's approach to radical change

We have observed that Heyn's belief as to the absolute sanctity of human life leads him to reject violence in all its forms, and that this rejection carries with it a refusal to admit the legitimacy of: (a) distinctions between the one and the many, (b) the sacrifice of the one for the many together, (c) the justification of means by ends, and (d) relations of mastery which give rise to all three. This leads us, in turn, to the following question: by what means is this

a king' — the whole chapter on the laws of kings is called a command issued in fury. Thus do we find in the *aggadic* teachings that 'I said that you should be free of dominion like a wild ox in the wilderness, but you [sought out a king]' (ibid. 319)." See also Abarbanel, introduction to 1 Samuel, chapter 8.

I have previously written on the subject of Abarbanel's anarchist tendencies. Others, however, read him as a republican. See, for instance, Cohen Skalli, C. "Abravanel's Commentary on the Former Prophets: Portraits, Self-Portraits, and Models of Leadership." *Jewish History*. Vol. 23, no. 3 (2009): 255–280; Baer, Y. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1966): 256–57; Melamed, A. "Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's Politics: A Drama of Errors." *Jewish Political Studies Review*. Vol. 5, no. 3–4 (1993): 55–75; Mittleman, A. "'Mishpat ha-Melukha' and the Jewish Political Tradition in the Thought of R. Shimon Federbush." *Jewish Political Studies Review*. Vol. 10, no. 3–4 (1998): 67–86; Korn, M. "Court Tales, Kingship and Commentary: Joseph and Daniel in the Eyes of Isaac Abarbanel." MA Thesis. Baltimore Hebrew University, 2003; Novak, D. "Kingship and Secularity." In *The Jewish Social Contract*. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2005): 124–156; Rader-Marcus, J. and Saperstein, M. "Don Isaac Abravanel on Monarchy and Republics 1483–1508." In *The Jews in Christian Europe: A Source Book*. (Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press, 2015). Cf. alternate readings which regard Abarbanel as an advocate of the aristocracy:

Strauss L. "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching." In *Philosophie und Gesetz: Frühe Schriften*, edited by Meier H., 195–231. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1997); Baer, Y. "Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relationship to Problems of History and State." *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–259; Borowitz, E.B. "Judaism and the Secular State." *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 48 no. 1 (1968): 22–34; Ravitzky, A. "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought: Nissim Gerona vs. Isaac Abravanel." In *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction Between Judaism and Other Cultures*, edited by Landman, L., 67–90. New York: Yeshiva U. Press, 1990; Melamed, A. *Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

vision to be realized? If indeed the rule of one man over another is, together with all the violence that entails, to be regarded as an affront to the divine image of man, it would seem that revolution is called for. Yet, revolution in its conventional form, as type of military uprising, evidently runs counter to Heyn's moral philosophy. What then is to be done? Heyn invites revolution as a necessary response to violence and injustice but holds, like Tolstoy,⁷⁹ that it must be conducted in a manner consistent with its goals. A legitimate Jewish revolution must be carried out in a manner consistent with the nonviolent essence of Judaism.

In the first place, Heyn believes that the ability and impetus to bring about radical change depends on existential freedom; one must be in touch with oneself. This is accomplished above all by cultivating a youthful state of mind, a sort of innocence. Because "hands have not yet touched his mind or his heart," because "his inner eye has not yet been erased or crushed by constant oppression and by serving others," because "his soul has not yet been seduced" by "society and its false doctrines," it is "only the child [who] sees with his own eyes, hears with his own ears, thinks his own thoughts." Thus are youth — and, indeed, the young at heart who are also fit to "break every barrier, breach every veil of concealment, every covering and hard shell that has clung to his soul from without"⁸⁰ — "able to question and be astonished

⁷⁹ Medzhibovskaya, I. Tolstoy's Response to Terror and Revolutionary Violence. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 3 (2008): 505–531; see also Brock, P. "Russian Sectarian Pacifism: The Tolstoyans." In *Pacifism in Europe to 1914*, 442–70. (Princeton University Press, 1972); Stanoyevich, M.S. "Tolstoy's Theory of Social Reform. I." *American Journal of Sociology* 31, no. 5 (1926): 577–600.

⁸⁰ Here, Heyn adopts the idiom of Lurianic kabbalah. This tradition explained the origin of evil by appeal to a primordial crisis known as the "shattering of vessels (*shevirat ha-kelim*).” By a combination of self-restriction (*tsimtsum*) passage by way of intermediary entities known as "vessels (*kelim*)," God's being, or light, is said ultimately to reach our world. Initially, however, the proportions were poorly calibrated: too much light, too little vessel. In consequence, the vessels "shattered." In their shattered form, they become known as "husks (*kelipot*)" that conceal "sparks (*nitsotsot*)," or traces, of divine being. This concealment of divine being accounts for the possibility of evil. The human task is, by obeying God's will, to liberate the divine sparks from their concealment

at the” proverbial “nakedness of the King,” the violence and injustice of the rule of one man over another.⁸¹ Unsullied by those heteronomous forces that impose upon it some artificial shape, or which direct its development from without, the youthful soul sees clearly.

Having achieved clarity of vision, the youthful soul is called upon to be transformed by what it sees. This process of inner transformation, is what Heyn calls a “revolution of the heart.” Such an upheaval, he says, was fomented by Abraham our forefather, who “left [it] to us as an inheritance for the generations.” It is to be carried out “not with swords and spears, with bombs and mines, nor with any secret weapon,” not by force. These, he avers, “are not our tools; they are the tools of Esau and not of Jacob.”⁸² Moreover, they are “already rusty,” for “swords have

in the husks, thus restoring God to himself. On this subject, the literature is vast. Tishby’s study, however, is an excellent example (Tishby, I. *The Doctrine of Evil in Lurianic Kabbalah*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1942). See also Jacobs, L. “The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism.” *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, edited by Green, A., 99–126. (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

While the Lurianic doctrine itself is more universal in character, it was, as Scholem points out, personalized. What, he says, is novel about hasidism is not its mystical doctrine, but its mystical ethics (Scholem, G. “Hasidism: The Latest Phase.” *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 325–50. (New York: Schocken, 1995). For instance, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Habad hasidism, speaks of the inwardness of the heart — which is, according to his understanding, synonymous with the divine presence (*shekhina*) — as something that can accumulate “husks” that are peeled away by self-sacrifice by acts of kindness and charity, thus restoring the individual to his or her true self and, at the same time the being of God to itself (*Likutey Amarim Tanya. Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, 4). It is this personalized form to which Heyn appeals.

⁸¹ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 2, 246–47.

⁸² Building from Isaac’s “blessing” for Esau, “you shall live by your sword (Genesis 27:40),” Jewish texts from the Talmud to late hasidic writings have developed an image of Jacob’s brother as the antithesis of the Jewish ideal: a violent, coarse man unconcerned with matters of the spirit. According to rabbinic tradition, Esau is also the progenitor of Rome — and ultimately to Christendom — thus extending his personal reputation to the state apparatus as such: it is violent and oppressive, it ignores or destroys what is most holy. See Cohen, G.D. “Esau as symbol in early medieval thought.” *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, edited

never brought salvation, nor have they altered the character of the living.” On the contrary, “the sword is a thing that naturally swings around,” cutting down the servant today and the master tomorrow such that none are safe so long as “the blood of any man is made cheap” and the world’s supply of corpses and cripples, paupers and madmen, is continually replenished.

According to Heyn, it is upon us to bring forth “new lights” rather than depending on “old vessels.”⁸³ What is this new light, and how is it to be shed? A preliminary answer can be gleaned from the following proposal. In place of the old “me or you,” Heyn suggests, we must introduce “a new and revolutionary ‘me and you.’” Appealing to the Tolstoyan faith⁸⁴ in the brotherhood of humanity as “the secret of redemption,” individual and collective alike, he maintains that “we need only to make this idea into a fashion, to hand it over to the trend-setters of the world, the designers of spirit, to make this wonder penetrate.” Like Tolstoy, Heyn appeals to the court of public opinion; it is his hopeful conviction that “the world is tired of the ‘blessing’ of the sword” and

by Altmann, A., 19–48 Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1967; Elazar, D.J. “Jacob and Esau and the Emergence of the Jewish People.” *Judaism* 43 no. 3 (1994): 294–301; Wolfson, E. *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*. (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2006): Ch. 1–2.

⁸³ Heyn, Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut. Vol. 1, 202–03. As for the distinction between lights and vessels, see note 76 above. As for the notion of a “new” light, this is an important theme in Habad hasidism especially. Broadly speaking, it relates to the manner in which divine light, or being is, in response to specific events or actions (the blowing of the shofar on Rosh ha-Shana, for instance), conveyed unto the created worlds. See, for example, Shneur Zalman of Liadi’s commentary on the verse “Forever are the eyes of the L-rd your G-d upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (Deuteronomy 11:12)” in *Likutey Amarim Tanya. Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, 14. Heyn, of course, translates the new revelation of divine being into a new mode of social and political being among men.

⁸⁴ See Donskov, A. and Woodsworth, J. eds. *Lev Tolstoy and the Concept of Brotherhood: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of Ottawa, 22–24 February 1996*. (Ottawa: Legas, 1996); Berman, A. *Siblings in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: The Path to Universal Brotherhood*. (Chicago: Northwestern U. Press, 2015).

its fruits,⁸⁵ and that awakened to the “me and you,”⁸⁶ the fact that we have “all one Father” who “created us,” we will naturally ask “why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother (Malachi 2:10)?” Building on this conviction, Heyn represents the Abrahamic revolution — indeed, the “essential being of Judaism” — as an endeavor to realize brotherhood among nations by way of a “culture of the heart and, what is more, the enheartening of the mind.” To support this, he points out that:

Abraham, our forefather... is the one who... is called “father of the multitude of nations (Genesis 48:19)” and... ‘the one who made all the inhabitants of the world into brothers.’⁸⁷ On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the days of days, we likewise pray “make all of them [the nations] a single bundle (*agudah ahah*).” Likewise it is written “I will pour a pure language upon the nations (Zephania 3:9)” — that is our mission and the teaching of our mission. Real Judaism announces the revolution of the heart; that is, the notion that the world is built up with kindness and not with brutality. Judaism sees the secret of redemption in absolute equality.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 271.

⁸⁶ It may be that Heyn has Buber’s I-Thou relation in mind. However, at no point does he refer directly to his contemporary.

⁸⁷ *Midrash Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha*.

⁸⁸ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 1, 274. The degree to which Heyn’s use of this biblical reference departs from that of his contemporaries in the orthodox rabbinical camp can be discerned by reference to the following sources. To begin with, consider *Midrash Tanhuma, parashat Nitsavim*; here, the “multitude” is interpreted as the collective body of the Jewish people alone. Cf. Mittleman, A.L. *The Politics of the Torah: The Jewish Political Tradition and the Founding of Agudat Yisrael*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) 19, 77, 171; Mittleman, A.L. “Fundamentalism and Political Development: The Case of Agudat Yisrael.” In *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion, Ideology, and the Crisis of Modernity*, edited by Silberstein, L.J. (New York: NYU Press, 1993) 231; Morgenstern, M. *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem: Isaac Breuer and the History of the Succession Dispute in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*. (Boston: Brill, 2002) 52. In these sources, we see that this exclusivist interpretation of the reference served an ideological role for a fundamentalist political action movement. That being said, there is also a long history of more universalist deployments of the same reference; see, for instance, Idel, M. “Particularism and universalism in Kabbalah, 1480–1650.” In *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by Ruderman, D.B., 324–344. (New York: NYU Press, 1992).

For Heyn, the revolution of the heart, nt involves the Abrahamic vision of a multitude of nations united under the kingdom of God that negates all human sovereignty. This, he indicates, is the special mission of the Jewish people: spreading the new light of true religion by dint of which old hearts become youthful, “dry bones hear the word of the Lord” and live, and the redemptive flame is ignited.

Building on this idea, Heyn focuses on the figuration of Abraham as the exemplar of the divine revolutionary in order to elaborate as to the manner in which this light is to be spread. Abraham, he says, reached out to others in a “fatherly” manner. By “fatherly,” I believe that Heyn understood not patronizing or paternalistic, but intimate and loving engagement — engagement aiming less to direct than to cultivate moral insight. Abraham’s revolution, Heyn writes, was:

Not conducted with blood and fire. The revolutionaries were led neither via punishments nor signs, neither by tyrant nor prince. ‘The world is not without its king,’ he said to the children of Ham, who said to him [after the battle of Siddim in Genesis, chapter 14] “you are our king.”⁸⁹

In the first place, we see that the Abrahamic revolution entailed proclamation of the kingdom of heaven, of the sovereignty of God. However, what is, for Heyn, crucial is not only the substance of Abraham’s teaching, but the manner in which it was delivered. Thus, he goes on to explain that Abraham’s:

Method of planting [seeds of change] and its modes was not through proofs; though logical demonstrations existed, he changed neither people nor the condition of the world through them. These were just his ‘ands’ and ‘thes’ (*gamin ve-etin*) [i.e. afterthoughts]. Moreover, even these flowed from the essential hidden spring [of his teaching]; they were not strictly rational and scientific.⁹⁰ ‘It is the nature of the good to do good’ — this is the fundamental and existential character of the absolute individual, the absolutely unique.

⁸⁹ See *Bereishit Rabba* 42:5.

⁹⁰ Concerning Heyn’s implication that the force of reason can also be regarded as a form of violence, or unwarranted authority over another, it is perhaps worth referring to Feyerabend, P. *Science in a Free Society*. (New York: Verso, 1982).

There is, in that nature, the unique key to the hidden wonder of the first inclination to create the worlds and to form man. The desire to do good that is in the nature of the good is what encouraged that One who is alone to create others, that which is other than himself. The desire to do good is, in essence, a desire for others. This is what penetrates others from the very beginning. The same goes for man. The more something has the supernal attribute of uniqueness... from the absolutely unique, the more it has the attribute of being good and doing good, the more it feels a thirst for others, a capacity to 'make souls'⁹¹

Here, so far as Heyn understood them, we observe two features of Abraham's method. One, that he was not so much concerned with convincing people, with serving as a teacher and — so we have already seen — to that extent a master. Rather, he appealed to the intuition of the heart and endeavored to ignite the fellow-feeling already there by demonstrating its origin in the source of all good.⁹² Two, he did so by drawing the link

⁹¹ Here, Heyn refers to Genesis 12:5, which speaks of "the souls that they [Abraham and Sarah] made in Haran." See Rashi's commentary on this verse, where it is explained that one who teaches another is considered as if he had made them.

⁹² As Uri Gordon has correctly pointed out, Heyn's account of Abraham's *modus operandi* is distinctly reminiscent of the hasidic ethos as represented by its founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov. Take, for instance, the following teaching: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)" — this is a reflection of the mitzvah, "You shall love the Lord, your God." When one loves another Jew, he loves the Holy One, blessed be He. For the soul of a Jew is a "portion of God Above," and when one loves a fellow Jew, he loves his innermost essence. Thus, he loves the Holy One, blessed be He, as well (Schneerson, M.M. *HaYom Yom*, translated by Kagan, Y.M. (New York: Kehot, 2005) 78). This love, is, as reported elsewhere, to be "without any differentiation of who or what he is (Schneerson, J.I. *Likkutei Dibburim*, translated by Kaploun, U. Vol. 3. New York: Kehot, 1982) 770). As for the strategic function this approach played in efforts to transform Jewish life, see for instance Schwartz, B.L. "The Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov: Head or Heart? The Debate over Spirituality." *Judaism's Great Debates: Timeless Controversies from Abraham to Herzl*. 57–63. (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska Press, 2012). See also Gellman, U., Rosman, M., and Sagiv, G. "Beginnings." *Hasidism: A New History*, edited by Biale, D, Assaf, D. Brown, B., Gellman, U., Heilman, S., Rosman, M., Sagiv, G., Wodzinsky, M., 43–53. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2017).

between his uniqueness, the absolute sacredness and inviolability of his own being which, we now see is not amoral, but quite the contrary. Since the soul derives its absolute character from the absoluteness of God, it shares in the divine nature, which is the desire to create or, in other words, an inward desire for the other. Here, a sense of mutual responsibility, of care, emerges not in spite of the soul's uniqueness, as the limit thereof, but because of it — for it is the nature of the good to do good (*teva ha-tov le-heytiv*). Actualizing this feature of his own being, Abraham inspired it in others. Moreover, so Heyn continues, he was able to reach this place precisely by cultivating the sort of independence and self-sufficiency discussed earlier:

The one who needs nobody is the one who everyone needs and who refines them. The perfect giver is the one who receives nothing by dint of his nature. The true benefactor is the one who needs good from nobody else in the world. This is the principle and substance of love which is not dependent on something.⁹³ Specifically this love, where one receives nothing from the beloved, is true love. The unique one who is never negated, which is not created on condition, has no condition of cessation. In other words... he who benefits not from that which is of others enjoys the others themselves;

Again, it is clear that Heyn is universalizing the more ethnocentric doctrine of “love of a fellow Jew (*ahavat Yisrael*).” However, this is not without parallel. See, for instance, some of the the comments of M.M. Schneerson, the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, on the personality of Abraham on the holiday of Lag ba-Omer, where he speaks of love and “unity in diversity” as pertaining not only to Jews, but also to humankind as a whole (Schneerson, M.M. “Lag BaOmer, 18th Day of Iyar, 5750.” *Sichos in English*. Vol. 44. (New York: Committee for Sichos in English, 1979).

⁹³ See *Mishnah, Avot* 5:16: “any love that is dependent on something, when the thing ceases, the love also ceases. But a love that is not dependent on anything never ceases.” See Danzig, G. “Greek Philosophy and the Mishnah: On the History of Love that Does Not Depend on a Thing.” In *When West Met East. The Encounter of Greece and Rome with the Jews, Egyptians, and Others. Studies Presented to Ranon Katzoff in Honor of his 75th Birthday*, edited by D. M. Schaps, U. Yiftach, D. Dueck, 23–50. (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2016); Kochin, M.S. “Friendship Beyond Reason.” Presented to the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Denver, March 27, 2003. <http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/government/gradpages/avramen/friendship%20beyond%20reason.pdf>.

he is pleased by their pleasure — or, what is more, from their essential existence.⁹⁴

Here, we see that, in Heyn's view, the link between the absolute character of God's nature and that of man insofar as it relates to the revolution of the heart has mainly to do with the attribute of unconditionality. It is not simply that God is inclined to do good because he is good; it is that, being unconditioned, both his own cause and an end unto himself, God behaves altruistically in his beneficence. He is self-sufficient; thus, the love he bestows is not "dependent on something," it is expressed without expectation or need of reciprocity. To the extent that the human soul is also absolute and sufficient unto itself, needing naught but its own freedom, it is likewise able to act altruistically. Thus, the Abrahamic revolution, so far as Heyn conceives it, entails a process of "making souls," of putting people in touch with the absoluteness and uniqueness that characterizes them as men, by virtue of which they are intrinsically good and naturally inclined toward altruistic behavior. This is the revolution of the heart Heyn envisions: a moral transformation on the part of each individual which renders superfluous the organized violence of the state.

This, so he maintains, constitutes a revolutionary program consistent with a prohibition against killing that is without conditions.⁹⁵ It is one in which ends cohere with their means and the individual is in no manner submerged in the collective or subordinated to its utility. It is a non-violent program of revolution but by no means a passive one. On the contrary, if it involves solidarity with the weak, it is by no means an "ethic of weaklings and slaves." Judaism, Heyn explains, is:

⁹⁴ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 46–48. Here, one might reflect on the relation between Heyn's view on sovereign generosity as articulated here and Nietzsche's opinion on the same. See Schoeman, M. "Generosity as a central virtue in Nietzsche's ethics." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2007): 41–5; White, R. "Nietzsche on generosity and the gift-giving virtue." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2016): 348–36.

⁹⁵ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. 3, 201.

A moral doctrine that consists entirely in a screed against the right of force (*zekhut shel ha-koah*). It finds its consistency in a total war against force and its right. It raises the weak, the pursued, and the oppressed on a standard. Whereas they are typically last, extraneous, it ensures them a place at the top of the gate... Those who established this relationship between the weak and the strong neither fashioned an ideology of weakness, nor a cult of degradation, submission, and bodily destruction.

The opposite is true. It is because freedom is priceless (*tesula be-faz*),⁹⁶ it is because the right of the individual is absolutely holy, it is because the sole right which the individual has over himself cannot be taken away (*eyna nitenet le-hilakah*), it is because the suffering of he who lacks all of these things is immeasurable, it is because the lot of the oppressed, the persecuted, and the despised is equivalent to death... that the Torah strives against force and its right. Force and its right are what has brought great troubles into the world. It is out of an ambition is to make everyone strong, to uproot weakness, that Judaism wrestles against the strong arm — this is the sole cause for the weakness of the weak...

Here, hostility to power does not constitute an eternal foundation in itself; there is no raising of weakness and the weak to the status of a cult. The opposite is true: power is highly valued. However, because of that it is impossible not to declare a holy war against the prime cause of weakness and the weak: the force of war and aggression. Because the whole Torah is based on the principle that 'what is hateful to you, do not to another,' weakness is utterly foreign to Judaism... When we are dealing with the lot of truth, with the trampling of justice and the disgrace of fairness (*mishpat*), then there is no limit to true greatness and power, the elevated spiritual power that Judaism discloses."⁹⁷

Here, we see that if, according to Heyn, Judaism opposes force and violence categorically, expressing special care for the weak, the oppressed, and the persecuted because they suffer from it most, this is not because Judaism celebrates weakness. It is not, as Nietzsche sometimes indicated, a cult of weakness.⁹⁸ On the

⁹⁶ This is a reference to Lamentations 4:2.

⁹⁷ Heyn, *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut*. Vol. I, 46.

⁹⁸ Consider, for example, Nietzsche's remarks on Jewish ethics in the *Genealogy of Morals*. On this subject, see Yovel, Y. "Nietzsche and

contrary, it aims at empowerment through true strength, which lies in the just doctrine of “what is hateful to you, do not to another,” the meaning of which is “love thy neighbor as thyself”⁹⁹ — love him, that is, as an instance of the divine absolute and treat him accordingly. This demand is its own sort of battle cry: it calls upon the truly strong to draw on that strength and to conduct a holy war against the violence of the strong arm.

V. Conclusion

Let us now summarize this extended analysis of a fascinating and deeply underappreciated Jewish thinker. We found that Heyn distinguishes three forms of the prohibition of killing. One, the “Roman” or statist mode which, on his account entails the subordination of the particular to the universal and justifies killing on that account. Two, the individualist, which he considers upright except insofar as it is unable to account for the moral necessity of refraining from spilling blood when one’s own life is at stake. Three, the Jewish (or that of man as such), which evades this difficulty by maintaining the absolute sanctity of human life.

As I demonstrated, the idea that human life is sacred involves three intersecting convictions. One, that each instance of life is not merely one among many, but unique. Two, that instances of human life are, therefore, not numerable. Three, that in consequence none can be sacrificed for any collective good, any good of the many. In this manner, we found that human life is altogether irreducible.

the Jews.” In *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*, edited by Acampora, C.D., 277–290. (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Santaniello, W. *Nietzsche, God, and the Jews: his critique of Judeo-Christianity in relation to the Nazi myth*. SUNY Press, 2012; Golomb, J. “Nietzsche on Jews and Judaism.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67, no. 2 (1985): 139–161; Eisen, A.M. “Nietzsche and the Jews reconsidered.” *Jewish social studies* 48, no. 1 (1986): 1–14.

⁹⁹ See *Sifra* 2:12 and *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 31a. Cf. Christoyannopoulos, A. “The Golden Rule on the Green Stick: Leo Tolstoy’s International Thought for a “Postsecular” Age.” In *Towards a Postsecular International Politics*, edited by Petito, F. and Mavelli, L., 81–102. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

We then saw that, according to Heyn, belief as to the sacredness involves three intersecting convictions. One, that each instance of life is not merely one among many, but unique. Two, that instances of human life are, therefore, not numerable. Three, that in consequence none can be sacrificed for any collective good, any good of the many. In this manner, we found that human life is altogether irreducible.

Our analysis of Heyn's position as to the moral illegitimacy of the state then arose from the problem of numerability. Appealing, in part, to the personal reflections of Peter Kropotkin, whom he held in high regard, Heyn explained that that is numerable which can become an object with respect to, can enter into the ownership of, something else. That is, those things which can be mastered by others. Insofar as humans are non-objectifiable, they also stand outside relations of mastery. The individual, so he argued, is necessarily and absolutely free. Jewish moral doctrine, he claimed, rejects inequality of any sort, including inequality of power; that is, inequality of sovereignty. Thus, Heyn finds that one of the very foundations of Judaism is the doctrine of free choice radically construed; each man constitutes his own master and coercion of any sort is prohibited. In this way, the state is precluded as a moral option.

Having accounted for Heyn's religious rejection of the state, we concluded by examining his views on revolution. So we discovered, Heyn holds that the means of revolution must be consistent with its ends. If the goal of revolution is a social condition free of violence and coercion of any kind, the same must be the case for the revolution that brings this about. Heyn calls for a revolution of the heart which involves putting others in touch with the absolute character of their being which, unconditioned, becomes the foundation for unconditioned — that is, essentially altruistic — behavior. Like Tolstoy, he believes that revolution is the product of moral transformation.

Where does this leave us? This study of Abraham Judah Heyn's thought ought to be regarded as a preliminary. There are further implications as to Heyn's understanding of the essence of Judaism. These include his analysis of punishment generally and capital punishment in particular, of economic inequality as a form

of violence (which enables him to articulate a Jewish doctrine of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his need”), of war as a moral problem, of the interpretation of Jewish law and, finally, of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel.¹⁰⁰

More generally, the work of Abraham Judah Heyn is but one example of efforts on the part of observant Jewish philosophers and theologians to achieve the sort of synthesis between political radicalism and the traditional *beyt midrash* that R. Meir achieved and the Elisha b. Avuyas of the world fail to discern. Studies of Heyn and others like him constitute a twofold intervention. On the one hand, they challenge a longstanding consensus that supposes an opposition between radical and traditional identities — especially where anarchism is concerned.¹⁰¹ Contemporary scholarship has only begun to uncover the ideological and religious fluidity that actually prevailed within Jewish communities well into the twentieth century.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ These, I have addressed in a much longer study that will appear in my (forthcoming) *No Kings but the Lord: Varieties of Religious Jewish Anarchism*. In brief, as I indicated earlier, Heyn worked for the Department of Cultural Education after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. While he does not directly address the apparent inconsistency of his *personal* engagement with the state apparatus and his own anarchism, he does — on several occasions in the third volume of *Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut* — address the question more generally. That is, how his ideas might square with the existence of a Jewish state. In my view, he is ultimately unsuccessful. However, in many respects his effort parallels Buber’s (see Buber, M. *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, edited by Mendes-Flohr, P. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2005) — his anarchism becomes an anarchist ethos within the framework of a moral critique of the policies and practices of the State of Israel (or a foundation for one) that falls short of rejecting its legitimacy.

¹⁰¹ Margolis, Rebecca E. “A Tempest in Three Teapots: Yom Kippur Balls in London, New York and Montreal. In *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*, edited by Richard Menkis and Norman Ravvin, 141–63.” (2004).

¹⁰² See my (forthcoming) “Dancing at Every Wedding: The Biography of Rabbi Yaakov Meir Zalkind, a Religious-Zionist, Pacifist, Anarcho-Communist.” See also Polland, Annie. ““May a Freethinker Help a Pious Man?”: The Shared World of the “Religious” and the “Secular” Among Eastern European Jewish Immigrants to America.” *American Jewish History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 375–407; Türk, Lilian, and Jesse Cohn. “Yiddish Radicalism, Jewish Religion: Controversies in the Fraye Arbeter Shtime.”

Highlighting this fluidity means more than simply setting the historical record straight. It also part of what it would mean to reverse the post-WWI narrowing of socio-political imagination.¹⁰³ As much as this is a matter of reviving the utopian mindset prepared to envision a qualitatively better society, it is — especially in an increasingly polarized public arena — equally a matter of challenging preconceived notions about *who* participates in the articulation of that vision.

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¹⁰³ Soldatenko, Gabriel. “Between Truth and Utopia: Philosophy in North America and the Narrowing of the Social-Political Imagination.” *Imagination: Cross-Cultural Philosophical Analyses* (2018): 203; Cooper, Julie E. “The turn to tradition in the study of Jewish politics.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 67–87.

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Tolstoy's Christian Anarcho-Pacifism: An Exposition

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In the last thirty years of his life, Leo Tolstoy wrote many books, essays and pamphlets expounding his maturing views on violence, the state, the church, and how to improve the human condition. Since then, these 'Christian anarchist' and pacifist views have often been dismissed as utopian or naive, and despite inspiring numerous activists, often forgotten or ignored. This chapter seeks to examine them in greater detail. Tolstoy's political thought is divided into four main themes: pacifism, anarchism, anticlericalism, and activist methods. For each theme, Tolstoy's main contentions are first summed up, then some of their criticisms are discussed, and then some reflections are offered on their ongoing relevance today. The chapter concludes that despite being an odd Christian, an odd pacifist, an odd anarchist and an odd activist, Tolstoy put forward: a compelling denunciation of violence which influenced numerous thinkers and activists; a condemnation of state violence and deception which can be extended to today's globalised political economy; a bitter critique of the church which can be extended to religious institutions of our time; and a method of activism through withdrawal which continues to generate debate and is increasingly adopted by a variety of activists today. In short: Tolstoy's Christian anarcho-pacifist political thought continues to deserve to be taken seriously.

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Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) produced two of the world’s most acclaimed works of fiction in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but at the time of his death was at least as famous for the radical religious and political views he propounded in the last thirty years of his life. These ‘Christian anarchist’ reflections are sometimes remembered today within pacifist and anarchist circles and in religious studies, but barely known by the general public outside these. This limited knowledge about Tolstoy’s Christian anarchist writings might have as much to do with their eccentric radicalism as with their drowning in the downpour of mass violence that submerged the world in the years that followed his death. However, Tolstoy’s thoughts, eccentric perhaps but also perceptive and stirring, continue to merit attention in a world in which the violence he abhorred, far from being eradicated, remains both present and threatening.

The aims of this chapter, after a brief contextualisation of Tolstoy’s vocabulary, are to both present and muse on the relevance of four central themes emerging from a study of Tolstoy’s thought. These are: his pacifism, his anarchism, his anticlericalism and his views on activist methods. Each core section is in three parts: first Tolstoy’s main claims on the matter, then a discussion of the criticisms made of these, and then some reflections on how relevant those arguments remain today. What the chapter offers, therefore, is both a hermeneutical reconstruction and a normative evaluation of some thematic consistencies in Tolstoy’s thought. My intention is to provide a taster as to why, even if eccentric in his Christianity, in his anarchism, indeed in his pacifism and in his anticlericalism, Tolstoy remains an engaging thinker when considering twenty-first century challenges.¹

¹ The chapter thus presents a much shorter version of the discussion articulated in Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy’s Political Thought: Christian Anarcho-Pacifist Iconoclasm Then and Now* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). In the book, the more exhaustive presentations of what Tolstoy said are illustrated with numerous quotations from his writings; the discussions of criticisms and contemporary relevance are developed in greater detail and with extensive references to relevant scholarship; and a fifth central theme, asceticism (including his views on sex and marriage, intoxicating luxuries and meat-eating, and art), is presented and discussed. The book also sets Tolstoy’s arguments in their historical and intellectual contexts. This chapter here summarises and presents in open access format several of the main arguments developed in the book.

Tolstoy's 'Christian' vocabulary

Before embarking on the main body of this chapter, however, a few words about Tolstoy's vocabulary and what led him to it are in order.² There is no space here to narrate in detail the biographical and intellectual trajectory that led Tolstoy to his Christian anarcho-pacifist conclusions, but in short: although several core arguments had been slowly germinating for decades, Tolstoy cemented his political views in the late 1870s, after an increasingly intense existential crisis which he eventually resolved through a renewed engagement with Christianity.³

However, the 'Christianity' to which Tolstoy thereby 'converted', and upon which his anarcho-pacifism would be based, was unconventional. Tolstoy was not interested in supernatural claims or even in Jesus' resurrection, but only in what he considered rational

² To reiterate what I said in *Tolstoy's Political Thought* (xiii) about language: "I ought to confess that my command of Russian is very limited. I have, however, sought help from Russian speakers and consulted the best sources I could when particular translated words needed closer investigation. This also explains why my references to Tolstoy's writings are not to the 'PSS' (*Полное собрание сочинений*) or Jubilee Edition version, but to the translations I read and studied. As a polyglot, I am aware that to translate is also partly already to interpret. But good translations can convey an author's original intention faithfully. The English translations I have used have in most cases been widely praised by specialists, indeed sometimes by Tolstoy himself. It might be that sometimes the original Russian reveals a slightly different nuance to what I have presented, but I have tried my best to avoid misrepresenting Tolstoy's views."

³ Tolstoy recounts his intensifying crisis in "A Confession," in *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish (London: Penguin, 1987). Good critical introductions to various aspects of Tolstoy's biographical and intellectual trajectory include: Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life* (London: Profile, 2010); E. B. Greenwood, *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* (London: Methuen, 1975); Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930); Inessa Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time: A Biography of a Long Conversion, 1845–1887* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008); Donna Tussing Orwin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Henri Troyat, *Léon Tolstoï* (Paris: Fayard, 1965); A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1988).

and helpful in the Bible, which essentially consisted in Jesus' ethical teaching and not much else. Anything that appeared irrational in the Bible and in the church's teaching, he discounted or explained away on rational terms. I have argued elsewhere that one could therefore classify Tolstoy as a 'deist': he reduced religion to morality, and from its cosmology could only keep what he deemed made rational sense.⁴

Tolstoy thus came to view a meaningful life as one which seeks to embody the kind of exemplary moral conduct preached and illustrated by Jesus. He would henceforth spend the remainder of his life expounding the political implications he derived from this ethical position. The political arguments he would elaborate would therefore frequently invoke Jesus and Christianity, but it is important to remember that what Tolstoy meant when he used such religious vocabulary was always filtered by his zealously rationalistic, moralising and deistic reading of those terms. Hence even if he did not mean what is conventionally understood by terms like 'God', 'resurrection', 'revelation', 'kingdom of God' and so on, he still used those words as if to deliberately appropriate and restore them to what he saw as their proper meaning. His embrace of traditional Christian vocabulary might also be partly tactical, donning the mantle of the prophet to entice his predominantly Christian readers to his political views.

The irony is that if his adoption of Christian vocabulary was an attempt to broaden his appeal and align a widespread worldview with his political agenda, precisely this religious content has since become a barrier to many readers. He meant to address all human beings, but his inclination to invoke Christian language can put off many potential converts to his *political* thought. Bearing in mind this caveat about Tolstoy's religious vocabulary helps unshackle Tolstoy's political thought from its apparent confinement to Christianity.⁵

⁴ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Leo Tolstoy's Anticlericalism and Its Contemporary Extensions: A Case against Churches and Clerics, Religious and Secular," *Religions* 7/5 (2016); Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, introduction.

⁵ A more thorough discussion of Tolstoy's treatment of traditional Christian terms can be found in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, introduction and chap. 3.

I – Pacifism

The pivotal theme in Tolstoy's Christian anarchist writings is his rejection of violence.⁶ Upon it rest his anarchism, his activist preferences and (indirectly) his anticlericalism.

Tolstoy's claims

The teaching of Jesus that influenced Tolstoy the most was his call, in the Sermon on the Mount, to “turn the other cheek” to whomever strikes you on the right cheek. Reflecting on this passage, on the many other sayings of Jesus on love and forgiveness, and on the violence that is plaguing human relations, Tolstoy came to the view that violence is always wrong, always a mistake, always counter-productive.⁷ Violence, for Tolstoy, always generates more violence, because those to whom violence is done will feel anger and resentment, will not see the justice of the violence

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- ⁶ On Tolstoy's pacifism, see for instance: Alexandre 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); Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), chap. 1; Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*; George Kennan, “A Visit to Count Tolstoi,” *The Century Magazine* 34/2 (1887); Colm McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism* (Amherst, New York: Cambria, 2009). In his own writings, Tolstoy returns to his pacifist arguments repeatedly, but perhaps the more helpful introductions are the following: Leo Tolstoy, “The Beginning of the End,” in *Tolstoy's Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Bergman, 1967); 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); Leo Tolstoy, “I Cannot Be Silent,” in *Recollections and Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Leo Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You: Christianity Not as a Mystical Doctrine but as New Understanding of Life,” in *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001); Tolstoy, “The Law of Love and the Law of Violence.”
- ⁷ For Tolstoy's exegesis, see in particular: Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe <“My Religion”>*, trans. Fyvie Mayo (London: C. W. Daniel, 1902); Leo Tolstoy, “The Gospel in Brief,” in *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

they suffered, and will therefore seek violent retaliation further down the line. Violence for Tolstoy only ever feeds a vicious cycle.

For Tolstoy, Jesus proposes a radically different, indeed revolutionary method to overcome this vicious cycle. That is, when violence or injustice is done against you, do not strike back, but respond with love, forgiveness and generosity. Only that way, Tolstoy interprets Jesus to have said, can the cycle of violence be broken.

Implicit in this response is the attempt to see, respect and address the human being in the person committing evil and violence – in other words a refusal to dehumanise that enemy. A loving and forgiving response is not what the violent enemy expects. Instead of treating that enemy with anger and disdain, a forgiving response treats them with unexpected magnanimity and respect, which in turn opens the possibility for reconciliation.

Tolstoy relates that teaching of Jesus with another theme which he returns to a number of times in the gospels: the counsel not to judge one another lest we be judged by that same measure, not to criticise our neighbour for a mote in their eye when there is a beam in ours, the related story of the adulteress about to be stoned, and so on. For Tolstoy, what Jesus means is that we are all imperfect and sinful ourselves, so we should refrain from judging others too quickly. This in turn makes it all the more important not to use violence in acting upon that potentially mistaken and hypocritical judgement.

Tolstoy's implicit hope is that a virtuous cycle of love and forgiveness can be superimposed on to the vicious cycle of violence and revenge. Both cycles are contagious and inspire responses in kind. With enough courageous forgivers, perhaps the cycle of violence can one day be overpowered and overcome.

What is also implicit in this Tolstoyan reading is that we should forego any attempt to teach morality top-down through the use (or threat) of coercion, but instead that we should seek to teach by example. Just as we learn to use coercive means to try to reach our ends in a world in which others do the same, the hope is that enough exemplars of patient love and forgiveness can just as mimetically inspire that same behaviour too.

Of course, that is not easy, and Tolstoy recognises that. Indeed it takes courage to respond lovingly to someone who commits

an injustice against you. The kneejerk reaction is to be angry and violent in return. More courageous is the attempt to rise above these feelings and respond with patience and hope, leaving yourself vulnerable yet resolute in the refusal to be driven by the understandable drive towards anger and retaliation. Responding to evil with love is an act of courage, not cowardice.

Criticisms

Is this teaching impossibly utopian? Certainly mainstream theology has laboured to argue that Jesus could not have meant this teaching literally, and that it is too difficult and unrealistic to follow in this life – as if there would be any need for it in paradise (or hell, for that matter).⁸ For Tolstoy, such replies are copouts which betray Jesus' teaching. He writes:

It may be affirmed that the constant fulfilment of this rule is difficult, and that not every man will find his happiness in obeying it. It may be said that it is foolish; that, as unbelievers pretend, Jesus was a visionary, an idealist, whose impracticable rules were only followed because of the stupidity of his disciples. But it is impossible not to admit that Jesus did say very clearly and definitely that which he intended to say: namely, that men should not resist evil; and that therefore he who accepts his teaching cannot resist.⁹

It might be foolish and difficult, but Jesus clearly calls his followers to respond to evil with love. Indeed, Jesus exemplified that teaching himself, right unto his very death. The essence of Jesus' teaching is about love and forgiveness, even if many of his official followers – despite otherwise venerating him as the Son of

⁸ Eric Mader, *Tolstoy's Gospel*, available from <http://www.necessaryprose.com/tolstoysgospel.htm> (accessed 16 September 2010); David Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels: A Critical Study* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 166–167; Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years*, Second ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911), 352–367; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, chap. 4; Daniel Rancour-Laferrriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God* (London: Transaction, 2007), 120–123; Alexander Root, *God and Man According to Tolstoy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” chap. 2.

⁹ Tolstoy, *What I Believe*, 18–19.

God, as the Christ, as God incarnate – have decided that he could not have really meant that.

Still, Jesus may have preached this, but that does not mean the teaching is sensible – especially to non-Christians. Here, though, Tolstoy's argument is that surely, we have seen enough tit-for-tat violence in history, surely violence has been shown to have been such a catastrophic failure in teaching morality or approximating justice, that perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves of this (admittedly high) ideal which Jesus advocated. It might be near impossible, but does that mean that no attempts at all should be made in trying to approach it? It might be utopian, but at least, the Tolstoyan argument goes, it sets an ideal to try to genuinely work towards. Besides, perhaps Tolstoy's pacifism can also be considered 'utopian' in the less dismissive sense articulated by Ruth Levitas: as an invitation to think differently and reconsider prevalent automatic assumptions about violence.¹⁰ Just because the maximalist programme might be unrealistic does not render ineligible any critiquing of the status quo and sympathising with some of the arguments gesturing towards a different direction.

There is, of course, a potentially more devastating criticism, and it usually comes in the form of a question. That is: what would you do, then, if a child was under attack? Or how do you deal with Hitler? Surely there is a limit to how far you can be loving and pacific? Where, then, should that line be drawn?¹¹

Tolstoy did consider this line of criticism. One response was to note that the choice is not necessarily a dichotomous one between violence and passivity. Other, more creative responses are possible

¹⁰ Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Second ed. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010); Mathias Thaler, "Peace as a Minor, Grounded Utopia: On Prefigurative and Testimonial Pacifism," *Perspectives on Politics* (2019).

¹¹ Iain Atack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 161; Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), 47–51; Dustin Ells Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence," *Perspectives on Politics* 11/2 (2013), 429; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, 116; Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God*, 119; Ronald Sampson, "Tolstoy on Power," *Journal of the Conflict Research Society* 1/2 (1977), 68; Ernest J. Simmons, *Tolstoy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1973), 174.

too. After all, Tolstoy's most famous follower was Gandhi (although Tolstoy was not Gandhi's only inspiration: the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism, Jainism, Thoreau and Ruskin were important too), and Gandhi demonstrated that what might start as an uncompromising Tolstoyan line on nonviolence could be translated into a political tactic to resist injustice.¹² Whether Tolstoy preached absolute *non-resistance*, something closer to Gandhian *nonviolent resistance*, or indeed something more ambivalent, will be considered below. What is relevant here is that the first element of an answer is to point out that there are options between passive capitulation and enraged retaliation – such as interposing one's body, trying to engage verbally, calmly and rationally with the assailant, and indeed reacting by metaphorically turning the other cheek in an effort to expose the injustice and surprise the attacker into thinking again about the intended action.

However, this will not suffice in every situation. Such creative replies may transform the situation if only in the longer run, but equally they might not. What then? Would the nonviolent Tolstoyan cowardly let the injustice unfold? Tolstoy tended to avoid a frontal answer to this question. When he did confront it, he sometimes stuck to his unflinching pacifism, and other times wobbled and conceded that in the most extreme cases an exception may be needed.¹³ He perhaps knew that he himself could probably not commit to turning his cheek in the worst and most challenging situations, but was wary of the thin edge of the wedge. Once the justness of violence is conceded in extreme situations, opportunists quickly emerge to expand the range of scenarios, and before long an aggressive act is justified as measured and appropriate when clearly, for Tolstoy, it is not.

¹² Martin Green, *Tolstoy and Gandhi, Men of Peace* (New York, NY: Basic, 1983); Martin Green, *The Origins of Nonviolence: Tolstoy and Gandhi in the Historical Setting* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986); A. L. Herman, "Satyagraha: A New Indian Word for Some Old Ways of Western Thinking," *Philosophy East and West* 19/2 (1969); Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Gandhi: Aux Sources De La Non-Violence* (Paris: Félin, 1998), part 3; Janko Lavrin, "Tolstoy and Gandhi," *Russian Review* 19/2 (1960); Tolstoy, "Gandhi Letters"; Tolstoy, "A Letter to a Hindu".

¹³ For a fuller exposition of this, see Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 38–42.

Moreover, for Tolstoy, it is also worth reflecting on what is enabled when conceding the argument about exceptional predators needing exceptional measures. Tolstoy writes:

I have never, except in discussions, encountered that fantastic brigand who before my eyes desired to kill or violate a child, but [...] I perpetually did and do see not one but millions of brigands using violence towards children and women and men and old people and all the labourers, in the name of a recognized right to do violence to their fellows.¹⁴

In other words, according to Tolstoy, those child-attackers and Hitlers may exist and might need to be anticipated, but we also need to remember that the violence which, out of fear of relatively infrequent evildoers, we authorise the arms of the state to inflict, is carried out on an industrial scale, and much more regularly. This defence does not quite respond to the question directly, but it is worth remembering the dangers of cold, industrial, state-driven violence and the risks of it being misused when we readily legitimise the existence of such an armed administrative giant on the back of fears of exceptionally horrible people. Still, it is difficult to deny that Tolstoy's answer is not entirely satisfactory, and perhaps his uncompromising rhetoric on nonviolence does need to be relaxed in genuinely extreme cases.

In any case, much as Tolstoy generally takes an uncompromising line on his ideals, he does at times recognise that compromise is often likely in practice. This might seem paradoxical, but for him it is precisely because people will fall short in practice that the ideal must remain absolute. He writes: "It's impossible to admit the slightest compromise over an idea. Compromise will inevitably come in practice, and therefore it's all the less possible to admit it in theory."¹⁵ For Tolstoy, "The whole point is in the constant effort to approach the ideal" – however stringent.¹⁶ Something

¹⁴ Tolstoy, "Introduction to a Short Biography of William Lloyd Garrison," 534.

¹⁵ Tolstoy, quoted in R. F. Christian, "Introduction," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 12.

¹⁶ Tolstoy, quoted in M. J. de K. Holman, "The Purleigh Colony: Tolstoyan Togetherness in the Late 1890s," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 218.

between non-resistance and nonviolence should therefore always be the aim, even if it cannot always be achieved in practice.

A separate difficulty with Tolstoy's criticism of violence is that he provides no clear definition of what he means by 'violence'. It seems quite clear from his writings that he is mostly referring to physical violence (as illustrated by the smiting of cheeks), or at least the compelling of someone to do as another decrees. But this could be seen as too narrow. What about psychological, structural or verbal violence, for instance? Indeed, is Tolstoy, in his passionate denunciations, not arguably violent sometimes?¹⁷ Possibly. But Tolstoy's primary concern is the physical violence that human beings inflict on their fellows. His arguments can often be extended to other forms of violence, and with his anarchism Tolstoy himself does extend it to some forms of structural violence in particular, but his primary wish was to reduce the injuries and suffering caused by tangible, physical violence.

Relevance today

As already noted, Tolstoy's writings on nonviolence influenced Gandhi – who in turn inspired many of the nonviolent activists of the twentieth century. They also encouraged numerous conscientious objectors to compulsory military conscription. Some commentators thus see Tolstoy as one of the significant (if often overlooked) ancestors of the pacifist movement, through which his thought therefore exerts an indirect influence today.¹⁸

There are also people nowadays who, like Tolstoy, see Jesus as an interesting moral teacher – people who are not necessarily comfortable with some of the doctrines of Christianity but who find in Jesus some worthy and thought-provoking ethical teachings.¹⁹ And even if the Christian community at large has not

¹⁷ Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 161–162; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, 195; Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, 672–673.

¹⁸ Attack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory*; Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Peter Brock, *The Roots of War Resistance: Pacifism from the Early Church to Tolstoy* (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1981).

¹⁹ Neil Carter, *Five Times When Jesus Sounded Like a Humanist* (Patheos), available from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/>

quite led the pacifist revolution one could have expected from those who ostensibly took up their cross and followed Jesus, some Christian communities and individuals have nevertheless made efforts in that direction. Then again, the Christian tradition is also responsible for originating Just War Theory – for Tolstoy, a blatant betrayal of the teaching of Jesus.

In any case, it remains important to unmask and denounce the violence that can be committed by today's powers, especially when committed in our name. Democratic states have not always been honest and fair in administering their power over their own citizenry or indeed abroad, yet that violence is committed in the name of their citizens. Perhaps too few such citizens speak out against some of the miscarriages of justice, abuses of power, violent repressions and other violent actions carried out in the name of order and stability. Tolstoy would rail against those, and expect Christians to do so too. This is all the more important given that the instruments of industrial violence are much more lethal today: not just have nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons been invented and used since Tolstoy's death, but the tentacles of surveillance reach further than ever before. When human institutions can wield such power, it seems crucial that we reflect on the violence they can inflict and whether it is truly necessary.

Furthermore, the view that ethical behaviour can be taught by legislation ultimately resting on coercion has not subsided. Yet do we really behave morally only because deviance from those morals will be punished, or do we behave morally because of the intrinsic validity of moral standards and because others have taught us their value by their example? More generally, a variety of studies in social psychology, criminology, pedagogy, and indeed political science and thought have tended to reinforce the case against any rushed resort to violence in attempting to resolve particular

2016/10/09/five-times-when-jesus-sounded-like-a-humanist/ (accessed 28 August 2018); Tom Krattenmaker, *Confessions of a Secular Jesus Follower: Finding Answers in Jesus for Those Who Don't Believe* (New York: Convergent, 2016); Peter Turner, *Zingcreed: A Christian-Atheist Polemic*, available from <https://zingcreed.wordpress.com/> (accessed 24 August 2018 2018); Ken Schei, *An Atheist for Jesus: A Personal Journey of Discovery*, Second ed. (San Diego: Synthesis, 2008).

problems.²⁰ Tolstoy, in a sense, expressed a concern that anticipated these waves of scholarship.

In short, Tolstoy's pacifist thought invites us to reconsider our assumptions on how to approximate justice and morality. Whether individually or collectively, we readily assume that coercion, retaliation and punishment are appropriate methods, yet these methods frequently fail to prevent further violence. Given the harm that our own violence can cause, we could arguably be more reflective and probing before resorting to violence.

II – Anarchism

There have been enough hints of this so far: Tolstoy was an anarchist. That is, he saw it as an inevitable extension of his faithful pacifism that the state and its allegedly legitimate monopoly over the use of violence had to be denounced and rejected.²¹

Tolstoy's claims

The state, as Weber would famously observe years after Tolstoy's death, can be defined as the monopoly over the (allegedly) legitimate use of violence over a particular territory.²² For Tolstoy, anarchism therefore follows logically from the teaching of Jesus:

²⁰ Extensive references to these are given in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 52–54.

²¹ On Tolstoy's anarchism, see for instance: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Leo Tolstoy on the State: A Detailed Picture of Tolstoy's Denunciation of State Violence and Deception," *Anarchist Studies* 16/1 (2008); Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 2; Paul Eltzbacher, "Tolstoy's Teaching," in *Anarchism* (Radford VA: Wilder, 2011); Terry Hopton, "Tolstoy, God and Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000); George Woodcock, "The Prophet," in *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). Tolstoy's own writings particularly focused on anarchism include: David Stephens, ed., *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (London: Phoenix, 1990); Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You"; Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers"; Leo Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," in *Essays from Tula*, trans. Free Age Press (London: Sheppard, 1948); Tolstoy, "On Anarchy".

²² Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

a consistent application of that teaching on violence cannot but threaten the state. In his own words: “Christianity in its true sense puts an end to the State. It was so understood from its very beginning, and for that Christ was crucified.”²³ According to Tolstoy, Jesus’ teaching was always implicitly subversive of structures resting on violence or the threat of it, which the authorities of his day understood and had to punish him publicly for.

Tolstoy is suspicious of the state, including when nominally democratic. Democratic or not, the state uses physical violence and the threat of it, does not love its enemies, and judges its citizens – all of which Tolstoy sees as clear contraventions of Jesus’ teaching and as ultimately irrational and unjust. Indeed, majority rule, for Tolstoy, does not guarantee the attainment of justice any better than other systems:

When among one hundred men, one rules over ninety-nine, it is unjust, it is a despotism; when ten rule over ninety, it is equally unjust, it is an oligarchy; but when fifty-one rule over forty-nine (and this is only theoretical, for in reality it is always ten or eleven of these fifty-one), it is entirely just, it is freedom! Could there be anything funnier, in its manifest absurdity, than such reasoning? And yet it is this very reasoning that serves as the basis for all reformers of the political structure.²⁴

Put differently: the tyranny of a majority is still tyranny. In majority rule, laws can still be imposed on an unwilling minority.

For Tolstoy, however, “[l]aws are rules, made by people who govern by means of organised violence for non-compliance with which the non-complier is subjected to blows, to loss of liberty, or even to being murdered.”²⁵ Laws are enforced through violence or the threat of it. Yet for him, there is no way of justifying someone’s violence as more legitimate than another’s. In typically syllogistic fashion, he says:

One of two things: either people are rational beings or they are irrational beings. If they are irrational beings, then they are all irrational, and then everything among them is decided by violence, and

²³ Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” 259.

²⁴ Tolstoy, “The Law of Love and the Law of Violence,” 165.

²⁵ Tolstoy, “The Slavery of Our Times,” 112.

there is no reason why certain people should, and others should not, have a right to use violence. In that case, governmental violence has no justification. But if men are rational beings, then their relations should be based on reason, and not on the violence of those who happen to have seized power. In that case, again, governmental violence has no justification.²⁶

For Tolstoy, it is simply wrong to inflict violence on other human beings, because they are as capable as us of thinking rationally and being reasoned with. Moral behaviour cannot be taught by coercion – although what coercion might inadvertently teach is that coercion is a way of getting others to do as you wish.

Moreover, Tolstoy argues that the state system is so arranged that it becomes easy to think that somebody else is responsible for state violence:

At the bottom of the social ladder soldiers with rifles, revolvers, and swords, torture and murder men and by those means compel them to become soldiers. And these soldiers are fully convinced that the responsibility for their deed is taken from them by the officers who order those actions. At the top of the ladder the Tsars, presidents, and ministers, decree these tortures and murders and conscriptions. And they are fully convinced that since they are either placed in authority by God, or the society they rule over demands such decrees from them, they cannot be held responsible.

Between these extremes are the intermediate folk who superintend the acts of violence and the murders and the conscriptions of the soldiers. And these, too, are fully convinced that they are relieved of all responsibility, partly because orders received by them from their superiors, and partly because such orders are expected from them by those on the lower steps of the ladder.²⁷

Because we are all mere cogs in a complex machine, we absolve ourselves from the less laudable ‘outputs’ of that machinery – if we even know about those at all. This is obviously dangerous in that the productive efforts of all the agents who constitute this structure can be harnessed towards goals which most of them

²⁶ Tolstoy, “The Slavery of Our Times,” 119, Tolstoy’s emphasis.

²⁷ Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” 351.

would not pursue themselves, but which they let be pursued by the broader structure and those who control it.

Ultimately, Tolstoy joins other thinkers in reckoning that the real purpose of the state's coercive apparatus is to protect the loot of the elite, both that stolen in wars of adventure abroad and that stolen from the fruits of labourers' labour. Indeed for Tolstoy, the capitalist system amounts to wage slavery for the many. As he puts it:

If the slave-owner of our time has not slave John, whom he can send to the cess-pool to clear out his excrements, he has five shillings of which hundreds of Johns are in such need that the slave-owner of our times may choose anyone out of hundreds of Johns and be a benefactor to him by giving him the preference, and allowing him, rather than another, to climb down into the cess-pool.²⁸

The system is arguably more perverse, because, to most Western audiences at least, the fact of enslavement is mostly hidden. Today's slave Johns might be in China or Brazil, and today's slave-owners might be anonymous investments funds, but this merely hides better from the average saver and producer the raw implications of their relationship. The employment contract might allegedly be signed between equal parties, but it is not equal, because those who own property can own slaves and those who do not, cannot. Again like other Marxists, socialists and anarchists, Tolstoy sees property distribution as the basis of an asymmetric and unjust system. For him, though, private property is not nefarious only because of the unequal economic relations it institutionalises, but also because it generates greed, covetousness and a concomitant moral depravity – and this, among both the haves and the have-nots.

In the end, Tolstoy argued, the state works like a protection racket:

Governments, justifying their existence on the ground that they ensure a certain kind of safety to their subjects, are like the Calabrian robber-chief who collected a regular tax from all who wished to travel in safety along the highways.²⁹

²⁸ Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 95.

²⁹ Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 124–125.

Each state justifies the maintenance of its army as a necessary defence against ill-intentioned foreigners, but “that is what all governments say of one another,” so that in the end, “[t]he power of the State, far from saving us from attacks by our neighbours, is on the contrary itself the cause of the danger of such attacks.”³⁰

Tolstoy therefore despises the state because it is an institution which is violent, unjust and protects the interests of a narrow elite against those of the very masses that constitute it. Tolstoy's pacifism, along with his analysis of the political economy and the mechanics of collective actions, leads him to his anarchism.

Yet the state is also only ‘what we make of it’: it is constituted by its agents. In democratic states in particular, the violence committed by the state is violence we commit against one another through it – the state commits it in our name.

Tolstoy reckons we could do much better. It is evident from his corpus – not just the Christian anarchist parts – that he held much respect and admiration for the rural life of contemporary Russian peasants. For him, small communities organised around agricultural labour were far better politically and morally than modern industrial society.³¹ One senses traces of Rousseau – whom he deeply admired – in Tolstoy's nostalgic eulogy for the smaller communities which have been increasingly swallowed by the onward march of industrial progress and political consolidation. Either way, Tolstoy advocates modes of communal life independent from the state.

Criticisms

One criticism that can be made of Tolstoy's anarchism, as for many of his views, is that it is too rigid in its black-and-white logic, too simplistic, too categorical. Tolstoy can indeed be a little disingenuous in his illustrations and comparisons, and perhaps he is wrong in rejecting every possible state just because it can

³⁰ Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” 199.

³¹ This partly explains his attraction to dissenting Christian sects like the Doukhobors: Matthew S. Adams and Luke Kelly, “George Woodcock and the Doukhobors: Peasant Radicalism, Anarchism and the Canadian State,” *Intellectual History Review* 28/3 (2018).

sometimes be violent. Then again, what he says about state violence does seem to hold when the state is indeed violent, and every state – democratic or not – has shown itself capable of adopting such violence. Hence Tolstoy might be too quick to condemn the state, but his observations about state violence might still hold true when the state does adopt such violence – which might be more often than we like to remember.

Nevertheless, some might say, the state today is not just police and prisons and armies – at its best it is also health care and education and social and economic safety nets. Are these public goods not worth preserving? Tolstoy died before a lot of those emerged – would he not revise his rejection of the state now? Perhaps. Yet it is also worth remembering that ever since the rise of uninhibited ‘neoliberal capitalism’ in the 1980s, that facet of the state is being actively eroded (and this, in those instances where it was quite developed in the first place), whereas its machinery of surveillance, repression and war is decisively spreading its tentacles. Not all that the state does is bad from a caring and loving perspective, yet its core business remains law-making along with its apparatus of coercion and violence. States that fail to perform that protective role are seen as failing in their core mission. Whatever else the state does, it can only start operating if it does monopolise the officially legitimate mechanisms of violence.

Another line of criticism typically levied against anarchists consists in commenting that (representative) democracy, however imperfect, is still the best system we know. Churchill’s words are often quoted: “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time”.³² Perhaps. Yet is this not a rather damning condemnation of human creativity and humanity’s collective potential? If representative democracies plagued with voter disenfranchisement, fuelled by partisan funding and whipped by the media into a celebrity-spectacle is the best we can really do, then so be it. Yet some think democracy can be more than such a façade, that it can be more direct and participative, more ambitious and more accoun-

³² Winston Churchill, *Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations* (London: Ebury, 2008), 574.

table. More deeply democratic forms of government like these have been experimented with in smaller-scale towns and movements and various organisations. Could some such experiments not be improved and expanded? Is representative democracy as practiced in the West today really satisfactory enough to stop aiming for better? Tolstoy would encourage us to think otherwise, to be more ambitious and aspiring.

And yet, some have put it to Tolstoy, surely the state is needed to deal with criminals, with foreign aggression, and to regulate human interaction?³³ Perhaps. But does this really prevent criminality and aggression – does it really act as the deterrent it is proclaimed to be? Does it even come close to eradicating these problems in the long run? Human interactions do not necessarily require the threat of violence to follow certain agreed customs, and criminality and injustice are not that particularly successfully prevented by the state and its dedicated apparatus. Indeed various experiments in restorative justice have provided plenty of arguments for more creative approaches to dealing with criminality and aggression than the model which projects some sort of allegedly caring and wise, but strict and often authoritarian, parent.

Relevance today

Today's 'state' does, it is true, look very different to that of Tolstoy's day. It is bigger, more far-reaching, and can administer violence even more lethally and clinically, and it has depersonalised and institutionalised the functions of government even further. The agents of the state arguably have even less sight today of the eventual impact of the policies they contribute to as mere cogs of an extensive machine. In short: the state has evolved and looks very different today than in Tolstoy's Russia, yet its coercive machinery is stronger than ever.

Furthermore, the apparatus of oppression equivalent today to what Tolstoy criticises as the 'state' is broader and more complicated

³³ Tolstoy, "The Slavery of Our Times," 112, 118; Tolstoy, "The Law of Love and the Law of Violence," 210; Tolstoy, "Letter to Ernest Howard Crosby," 188; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 197–199, 263–267.

than can be encapsulated by the notion of 'state'. Just as the target of anarchist criticism has evolved from the nineteenth-century focus on the state to a broader network of globalised structures of patriarchy and oppression underpinned by the state but also including economic, cultural and other elements, so can Tolstoy's anarchism be applied more broadly today to this broader variety of inter-related structures of oppression. Indeed Tolstoy's anarchist critique of political violence and deception might be even more important in the twenty-first century given the globalised scale of the phenomena he wrote about and given the critical analyses of capitalism, gender and ethnicity (among others) which have been articulated since his death. Even if it is no longer as central a focus of anarchist ire as it was among the anarchists of Tolstoy's days, the state underpins a variety of structures of oppression.

These days, nonetheless, concrete state violence – including in democracies – comes in many varieties, including for instance police at demonstrations, visible walls such as borders or invisible walls between classes, war, prisons, and the expanding criminalisation of deviant behaviour. In all these examples, agents of the state can and not-so-infrequently do inflict physical violence on human beings, directly and indirectly. And yet today perhaps more than ever before, those agents of the state are led to dissociate themselves from any responsibility in those acts: one person signs the form, another moves the outlaw, another decides how they shall be treated, and so on, such that the administration of state violence ultimately appears impersonal and anonymous, and its agents see responsibility resting elsewhere in the system. And yet in democratic states in particular, what the state does, it does in the name of its *demos*, meaning it is all the more important for that *demos* to be fully conscious of the full picture of state activity.

Some anarchists have questioned Tolstoy's inclusion in the anarchist tradition (for instance due to his 'Christianity' or to his absence from concrete contemporary anarchist struggles), but many consider him one of the many voices illustrating its sheer diversity.³⁴ His denunciation of state violence and deception did

³⁴ A fuller discussion of this, with extensive references, is provided in Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, 94–95.

also draw respect from anarchists such as Goldman, Guérin and Kropotkin. Tolstoy moreover constitutes one of the main voices within the *Christian* anarchist tradition. In the wider Christian community, he has helped establish the credibility of a specifically anarchist reading of Jesus' teaching and example. Furthermore, Tolstoy also helped clear the path for a specifically pacifist avenue to anarchism, preparing the ground for a *rapprochement* between the two perspectives in the 1950s and 60s. In short, although Tolstoy presents anarchist arguments that can be found in other anarchists too, he nevertheless articulates an anarchism which cohabits with a justifiable reading of Christianity, which is specifically pacifist, and which concentrates in particular on denouncing both state violence and the various processes and excuses that help the human agents of that violence evade their moral responsibility for it.

III – Anticlericalism

Tolstoy's conclusions about the central meaning of Jesus' teaching led him to reflect on why this understanding of it was not advocated more visibly by Jesus' official followers, and this in turn led him to the conclusion that the church (or at least most orthodox churches and certainly his contemporary Russian Orthodox Church) had belied and betrayed that teaching and its mission – a message he was eager for Christians in particular to hear.³⁵

³⁵ For Tolstoy's views on religion and the church, see for instance: Christoyannopoulos, "Tolstoy's Anticlericalism"; Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 3; E. B. Greenwood, "Tolstoy and Religion," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*; G. M. Hamburg, "Tolstoy's Spirituality," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; Medzhibovskaya, *Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of His Time*. Tolstoy's own writings articulating his anticlericalism include: Leo Tolstoy, "A Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication, and to Letters Received by Me Concerning It," in *On Life and Essays on Religion*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); Lev N. Tolstóy, "Critique of Dogmatic Theology," in *The Complete Works of Count Tolstóy: My Confession; Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Leo Wiener, trans. Leo Wiener (Boston: Dana Estes, 1904); Tolstoy, "The Restoration

Tolstoy's claims

For Tolstoy, this betrayal of Jesus is typified by Emperor Constantine's 'conversion' to Christianity, when instead of adapting the empire to Christianity, the latter was adapted beyond recognition to suit the interests of the former. Ever since that conversion, the official church has cuddled up to state power, legitimising whatever regime happens to be protecting it. For Tolstoy, the mainstream church has thus become one of the major obstacles to the dissemination of Jesus' radical teaching.

Tolstoy also slates the sanctimonious tone with which the church preaches its corrupted interpretation. For instance, Tolstoy denounces the alleged infallibility of the church and of the Bible. The latter, for him, is just a collection of writings from very different authors cobbled together and tinkered with time and time again. The former is just a collection of men as likely to be fallible as any other.

Tolstoy is particularly dismissive of the various ways through which church theologians reduce the importance of Jesus' most important commandments. Tolstoy expects those who claim to follow Jesus to actually follow his teaching and example. Like other Christian radicals, he is therefore scathing of much of the official church for not doing so, indeed for even wilfully discounting the uncomfortable parts of Jesus' ethics and distracting its flock with fantastic dogmas and stupefying rituals. For Tolstoy, this amounts to a cowardly and despicable betrayal of the core teaching of the one whom Christians call God. Tolstoy's strong language attests to the extent to which he feels the church has betrayed its original mission – to teach and exemplify the radical morality preached by Jesus.

Tolstoy further accuses the church of deploying a broad arsenal of mental trickery to distract the masses from Jesus' revolutionary morality, including: the idea that miracles somehow provide proof of church creeds; the focus on external worship in which impossible propositions are repeated robotically (again as a distraction from the essence of Christianity); the deliberate mixing of truths with

of Hell"; Tolstoy, "What Is Religion?"; Tolstoy, *What I Believe*; Tolstoy, "Reason and Religion."

falsehoods in order to drown the former in the latter; and the way in which all this combines to stifle reason and basically amounts to carefully planned hypnotism. All this, according to Tolstoy, is calculated precisely to dilute Jesus' revolutionary morality.

For such views, predictably enough, Tolstoy was excommunicated – though this excommunication came only in reaction to the publication of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* in 1901. If anything, the result was to spur Tolstoy into publishing even more blunt criticisms of the Russian Orthodox Church. The church did try to re-admit Tolstoy into its congregation on his deathbed – in the hope that it could parade a victory if it could claim that Tolstoy confessed his errors and returned to a church that magnanimously forgave him at the last gasp. Tolstoy, of course, refused.

Criticisms

One criticism of Tolstoy's account of religion is that it is too crudely rationalistic.³⁶ His dismissal of the resurrection in particular means to some that he cannot be considered a 'Christian', because he denies a central tenet of that faith. Besides, the exaltation of 'reason' typical of Enlightenment thought has come to be criticised more recently (e.g. by post-colonial and post-structuralist schools) for the questionable nature of reason's 'universality' and because such universalism can lead to forms of neo-colonial imperialism.³⁷

Nevertheless, although 'reason' can indeed be criticised, the momentous achievements of science are based on it. Perhaps reason has too often been used as an excuse to impose Eurocentric policies instead of respecting local traditions (and this should be

³⁶ Georges Florovsky, "Three Masters: The Quest for Religion in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 3/2 (1966); Greenwood, "Tolstoy and Religion"; Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; G. W. Spence, "Tolstoy's Dualism," *Russian Review* 20/3 (1961); James Townsend, "The Theology of Leo Tolstoy," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 11/20 (1998).

³⁷ Benjamin Franks, "Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics," *Anarchist Studies* 16/2 (2008); Nathan Jun, "Deleuze, Values, and Normativity," in *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

recognised and denounced), yet what other tool have we against superstitions, obscurantism, and other threatening ghosts whose harm haunts the annals of history? Is one of the central aims of education not to foster a critical and rational mind? Indeed how unpopular really is what Enlightenment thinkers called reason today? Do many critical citizens not use ‘reason’ to measure claims thrown at them? The critique of ‘reason’ and ‘rationalism’ articulated by post-structuralist scholarship in recent decades is rich and important, but even if it convincingly demonstrates that arguments founded on reason are not ‘*universally*’ applicable, the reflections articulated by rationalist thinkers such as Tolstoy remain pertinent and applicable in at least some, perhaps many, historical contexts. Besides, perhaps Tolstoy went quite far in dismissing all of Christianity that he judged to be irrational, but he is not alone in this. Numerous agnostics and atheists will be sympathetic, as will indeed those Christians who are minded to filter some of the traditional package of Christianity in light of evolving science. Tolstoy’s rationalism might be fairly extreme, but rationalistic approaches are still adopted by many nowadays. Tolstoy’s thought, therefore, can still find sympathetic ears in the twenty-first century.

A separate criticism is that religion should not be reduced solely to morality: moral guidelines are important aspects of all religious traditions, but there is much more to religion, and Tolstoy is guilty of ignoring all those other aspects that make religions richer than a mere moral code can be.³⁸ However, it remains the case that ethical concerns are quite central to them. Every religious tradition advocates certain types of behaviour and frowns upon others. There may well be much more to Christianity than the moral teaching of Jesus, but that teaching is part of it too. Tolstoy might be rightly accused of ignoring or dismissing many Christian dogmas, but then could many avowed Christians today not equally be accused of ignoring or dismissing Jesus’ moral

³⁸ Sergey Khudiev, *The Trouble with Tolstoy* (Pravmir), available from <http://www.pravmir.com/the-trouble-with-tolstoy/> (accessed 18 February 2016); Pål Kolstø, “The Demonized Double: The Image of Lev Tolstoy in Russian Orthodox Polemics,” *Slavic Review* 65/2 (2006); Matual, *Tolstoy’s Translation of the Gospels*; Townsend, “The Theology of Leo Tolstoy”.

teaching? Tolstoy's views on the facets of Christianity which he dismissed may not stir everyone's interests, but what he does say about Jesus' moral teaching might still be worth paying some attention to, because it is both central to the Christian story and, according to Tolstoy, actually rather rational and wise. Just because Tolstoy's Christianity was rationalistic and moralising need not prevent those whose religiosity is more mysterious or numinous from engaging with Tolstoy on morality.

Some have argued that not all institutional Christianity is that noxious, and that the Russian Orthodox Church in Tsarist Russia – clearly a central focus for Tolstoy's ire – was a particularly pronounced case of what he criticised.³⁹ There have also been many examples of Christian groups across time and place (including in Tolstoy's Russia) that were much closer to Jesus' teaching than the mainline church: the Christian tradition is not monolithic, and the potential for different Christian interpretations has been taken up by numerous offshoots over the centuries. Tolstoy indeed recognises and praises these. Moreover, morality-focused interpretations of the gospel similar to Tolstoy's have sprung up both before Tolstoy and since. Nevertheless, much Christianity does tend to come close to what Tolstoy criticises. Moreover, with time, many of even the more radical Christian sects which Tolstoy praises made compromises, became comfortable and gradually lost their radical aspirations. In other words, a process of institutionalisation does seem to systematically dampen the originally more radical offshoots of Christianity.

Relevance today

It may seem when watching from much of Western Europe today that anticlericalism has become largely irrelevant – religion, it is said, has been losing influence as society has gradually secularised. Yet, as recent scholarship on postsecularity has argued,

³⁹ Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*; Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*; Rancour-Laferriere, *Tolstoy's Quest for God*; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You"; John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

it seems premature to expect it to disappear in the way much Enlightenment thought had expected it to.⁴⁰

For a start, even in Western European countries – those often cited as the most secularised – state and church are rarely fully separated. In some European countries, the subsistence of the clergy is funded by the state; in others, Christian ‘heritage’ forms an integral part of national identity (church property might be maintained and preserved by state funds, for instance); in many, the symbols and iconography of one are present in the other, and so on. In short, religion still influences politics and vice versa, even in much of Western Europe.⁴¹ The collaboration between church and state which Tolstoy criticises so vehemently still persists.

This is even truer outside Western Europe – not least in Tolstoy’s own country. The clergy remains powerful and influential in much of the Christian world (as indeed do religious figures in other religious traditions). In other words, despite a degree of secularisation both in Western Europe and beyond, much of what Tolstoy says about institutionalised Christianity is no less apposite today than it was in Tolstoy’s context. Indeed, church theologians continue to cite many of the arguments mocked by Tolstoy to downplay the radicality of Jesus’ morality or to otherwise justify Christian submission to the established political and economic regime. Tolstoy’s

⁴⁰ For instance: Joseph A. Camilleri, “Postsecularist Discourse in an ‘Age of Transition,’” *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Fred Dallmayr, “Post-Secularity and (Global) Politics: A Need for Radical Redefinition,” *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012); Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, eds., *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Eduardo Mendieta and VanAntwerpen. Jonathan, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴¹ See for instance: Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

voice therefore still speaks to those contexts where mutually-beneficial partnerships between churches and political institutions survive and thrive, and in so doing adds to the many other voices, including but not limited to atheists old and new, calling for a firmer separation of religious institutions from political one.

At the same time, a considerable number of (in particular, but not only) Westerners have become visibly disillusioned by 'institutional' Christianity, especially since the Second World War. Whilst scholars still debate the extent of secularisation in the West, there is broad agreement that religiosity has evolved. Many have turned away from church attendance and been attracted by new, more personal, expressions of spirituality – and Tolstoy's critique of the church may well resonate with the views of those who have consciously moved away from the church, as well as with atheists and religious sceptics.⁴² That said, Tolstoy was not interested in *spirituality* but in *morality*.

Either way, it seems likely that Tolstoy would wish to reiterate his arguments to those who consider themselves Christians today. His writings (including his detailed exegeses) invite Christians to reconsider Jesus' teaching anew, to question or bypass the exegesis traditionally preached from church pulpits and make up their own mind on whether Jesus did not quite clearly and deliberately call his followers to exemplify the morality he preached. Tolstoy might be an eccentric and anticlerical Christian thinker, but he contributes to Christian thought nonetheless. The main reason he was so hostile to the church was because he felt that it was diluting, dismissing and ignoring the very essence of Jesus' teaching. There is every chance he would feel similarly today, though he would also praise and encourage those Christians who question the veracity of the comfortable church's interpretation and who try to wholeheartedly follow Jesus' teaching and example. In short, Tolstoy's

⁴² Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*; Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World*; Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (Harrow: Pearson, 2007); Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, "The Postsecular in International Relations: An Overview," *Review of International Studies* 38/5 (2012).

anticlericalism is not as dated or limited to its narrow context as might seem. It is addressed to Christians then, but also today and tomorrow, for them to become more Christ-like and more critical of the self-appointed official intermediaries of God on Earth.

IV – Activist methods

If the global arena is so violent and its institutions are failing to deliver justice, how, then, are we to respond? What does Tolstoy expect from Christians and pacifists in particular? In other words, what is to be done, and how?⁴³

Tolstoy's claims

Tolstoy was very concerned with the growing popularity of violent methods among the revolutionaries of his day – not least in Russia. This was the era of the anarchist wave of terrorism, of mounting tit-for-tat revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence. Tolstoy warned that violent methods would only lead to more violence, and that therefore revolutionaries must forego the use of violence lest they merely instigate a new, different but equally unjust dictatorship. For him:

Anarchists are right in everything; in the negation of the existing order, and in the assertion that, without Authority, there could not be worse violence than that of Authority under existing conditions. They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by a [violent] revolution.⁴⁴

⁴³ For Tolstoy's thoughts on what is to be done, see for instance: Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy's Political Thought*, chap. 5; Kennan, "A Visit to Count Tolstoi." Tolstoy's own writings specifically on this question include: Tolstoy, "An Appeal to Social Reformers"; Lyof N. Tolstoi, *What to Do?*, trans. unknown (London: Walter Scott, n.d.); Leo Tolstoy, *An Appeal to Russians: To the Government, the Revolutionists and the People*, available from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Appeal_to_Russians:_To_the_Government,_the_Revolutionists_and_the_People (accessed 24 September 2018); Tolstoy, "Bethink Yourselves!"

⁴⁴ Tolstoy, "On Anarchy," 68.

Tolstoy can understand the appeal of violence, nurtured as it is by a deep frustration against the cunning and resilience of the system. Besides, violent revolutionaries only employ the methods they have been 'taught'. But for Tolstoy, as explained above, violence was not the way to go. Surely, Tolstoy hopes, revolutionaries must be capable of devising "better means of improving the conditions of humanity than by killing people whose destruction can be of no more use than the decapitation of that mythical monster on whose neck a new head appeared as soon as one was cut off?"⁴⁵ Tolstoy would thus invite twenty-first century activists to think carefully about the tactics they adopt and about the risks of compromising with violence.

Injustice must be denounced, but for Tolstoy, the only truly revolutionary method is the one articulated by Jesus, and its "essence [...] lies in substituting an inward aim (to attain which no one else's consent is necessary) in place of external aims (to attain which everyone's consent is necessary)."⁴⁶ According to Tolstoy, the only true revolution must be led by example. It must start within us, by a change of heart which leads to a refusal to be complicit in, or consent to, violence and injustice. In turn, our example might inspire others to follow it and do the same. The structures of violence and injustice would be incapacitated by the infectious defections of the human cogs that constitute them. Tolstoy has faith in the contagious power of such inner transformation:

Men in their present condition are like a swarm of bees hanging from a branch in a cluster. The position of the bees on that branch is temporary and must inevitably be changed. They must bestir themselves and find a new dwelling. Each of the bees knows this and wishes to change its position and that of others, but no one of them is willing to move till the rest do so. [...] It would seem that there was no way out of this state for the bees, just as there seems no escape for worldly men who are entangled in the toils of the social conception of life. [...] Yet as it is enough for one bee to spread her wings, rise up and fly away, and a second, a third, a tenth, and a hundredth, will do the same and the cluster that hung inertly becomes a freely flying swarm of bees; so let but one man understand

⁴⁵ Tolstoy, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," 197.

⁴⁶ Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 413.

life as Christianity teaches us to understand it, and begin to live accordingly, and a second, a third, and a hundredth will do the same, till the enchanted circle of social life from which there seemed to be no escape will be destroyed.⁴⁷

Tolstoy thinks – or at least hopes – that the world can be transformed by enough pioneers adopting Jesus’ method of refusing to be directly or indirectly complicit in any violence whatsoever. He hopes that enough people living and relating to each other differently might inspire others to do the same. For Tolstoy, however, the way forward also involves what could be described as a kind of ascetic self-control.⁴⁸ Tolstoy is critical of the material indulgences practiced by high society and envied by the rest: not only do they distract the mind and awaken intoxicating emotions, but their production relies on the ongoing exploitation of workers and limited resources. Gastronomic pleasures, alcohol, tobacco and the like should ideally therefore be tempered. The purest ideal is complete abstinence. Tolstoy also particularly frowns upon meat-eating given the cruel brutality of murdering animals to eat their flesh.

Against this, Tolstoy preaches the virtues of manual work to earn one’s living. Cultivating the earth for one’s food not only undermines the economic processes that allow some to stay idle and ride on the exploitation of others, but is in itself a source of health, self-sufficiency and contentment. This is why Tolstoy was a long-term admirer of the life of agricultural communes.

Tolstoy himself tried to transform the way he lived. He became a vegetarian, he laboured his fields, he donated most of his royalties, and he recurrently got into heated arguments with his wife about what to do with his property. As a campaigner, he tirelessly wrote dozens of books, letters, articles and pamphlets reacting to ongoing events, appealing to powerful people and institutions, pleading his contemporaries to reject violence and to disassociate themselves from the state and church. For this, predictably, his writings were censored, and his followers persecuted

⁴⁷ Tolstoy, “The Kingdom of God Is within You,” 234–235.

⁴⁸ Christoyannopoulos, *Tolstoy’s Political Thought*, chap. 4.

– though the authorities dared not persecute him lest they turn him into a martyr.

Some have remarked that Tolstoy, far from adhering to the *non-resistance* advocated by Jesus in the verse about turning the other cheek, in fact advocated a form of nonviolent *resistance*. Tolstoy spoke out against the regime, encouraged conscripts to refuse their conscription, and advocated a form of resistance to the state by withdrawing from it.

Yet it seems that Jesus did ‘resist’ in some sense too. He denounced religious authorities and overturned tables in the temple. In his actions, however, he remained nonviolent and forgiving (whether violence against humans was used in the temple cleansing episode is questionable)⁴⁹, even as he was being crucified. It seems, therefore, that some degree of ‘resistance’, or certainly some reaction to injustice, is part of what Jesus preached – though the spectrum of options probably lies between the temple cleansing and turning the other cheek.

What *Tolstoy* calls for is similar. His own writings display some ambivalence between non-resistance and nonviolent resistance: depending on whom he is addressing and the context he is reacting to, sometimes he seems to be calling for absolute *non-resistance*, sometimes for absolute *nonviolence* in clearly responding to, and in that sense ‘resisting’, evil. But even if what is called for is resistance, crucially, of course, Tolstoy insists on remaining nonviolent in that resistance. In fact, look closer at the text and even when Tolstoy speaks of ‘non-resistance’ he actually seems to have ‘not resisting with violence’ in mind. When Kennan asks Tolstoy whether resistance to oppression is justifiable, he replies: “That depends upon what you mean by resistance; if you mean persuasion, argument, protest, I answer yes; if you mean violence – no. I do not believe that violent resistance to evil is ever justifiable under any circumstances.”⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Tolstoy insists that it is essential to “fight [...] by means of thought, speech, actions, life”.⁵¹ Clearly then Tolstoy is not advocating total non-resistance, but resistance, action, defiance – just never of a violent kind.

⁴⁹ Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 102–106.

⁵⁰ Kennan, “A Visit to Count Tolstoi,” 256.

⁵¹ Tolstoy, “On Anarchy,” 70.

Criticisms

Whether those seeking revolutionary change should always restrict themselves to nonviolent methods has long been a source of debate among anarchists.⁵² One criticism is that nonviolent resistance does not work, that it has only ever worked when violent campaigners had also been fighting for the same cause too – every Martin Luther King has its Malcolm X, as the (excessively binary and simplistic) saying goes.⁵³ That may be true. And yet many a revolution hinged on the change of allegiance of key protectors of the regime – the army, the middle class, the commercial elite, and so on.⁵⁴ In those pivotal moments when revolutionary demands are conceded, does the courageous refusal to adopt violence by many – despite the reactionary violence inflicted on them in their attempt to improve things – not play at least some role in convincing those protectors of the status quo to withdraw their protection? Most pacifist campaigners had their violent counterparts, but the opposite is true too, and the refusal to adopt violence by many often played a significant part in helping convince regime protectors of the legitimacy of the argument for radical change, whereas revolutionary violence often hardened their resolve to preserve the regime.

⁵² April Carter, “Anarchism and Violence,” in *Anarchism*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*; Peter Gelderloos, *The Failure of Nonviolence* (London: Active Distribution, 2013); Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto, 2008), chap. 4; Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, “Anarchist Ambivalence: Politics and Violence in the Thought of Bakunin, Tolstoy and Kropotkin,” *European Journal of Political Theory* (2016); Vernon Richards, ed., *Violence and Anarchism: A Polemic* (London: Freedom, 1993); Chris Rosedale, *Resisting Militarism: Direct Action and the Politics of Subversion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), chap. 7.

⁵³ Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, 55–57, 73–77.

⁵⁴ Atack, *Nonviolence in Political Theory*, 113–114, 123–124; Joseph Llewellyn, “Building Emancipatory Peace through Anarcho-Pacifism,” *Critical Studies on Security* 6/2 (2018), 46–50; Howes, “The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence,” 434–435; Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 7.

Some argue that real and meaningful change cannot come only from mere changes of personal lifestyle, that it takes collective struggle and organising to get tangible improvements.⁵⁵ Yet even if that is true, lifestyle changes and collective struggles are not mutually incompatible. Perhaps Tolstoyan methods on their own will not suffice, but that need not mean that engaging in broader methods of campaigning need require dissent from Tolstoy's advice on personal lifestyle and a refusal to compromise with violence.

Some worry that Tolstoy's recommendations would lead to a collective suicide: if we all turn the other cheek in the face of evil, the worst people will take over, and civilisation will be sacrificed.⁵⁶ This seems true if indeed the evildoers and their supporters have no heart and would never repent, but of course, Tolstoy's hope is that their heart might turn in the face of a form of denunciation which displays unexpected and determined nonviolence and forgiveness. How else and why else would Tolstoyan methods gain any new converts anyway? Widespread suicide is only a logical consequence of Tolstoyan behaviour if one projects ahead an increasing adoption of Tolstoyan methods (which would mean hearts *can* turn) yet also a refusal to countenance that such ethical behaviour can be contagious (which now suggests the opposite). Therefore, Tolstoy assumes that way before it would lead to collective suicide, the seemingly logically suicidal but primarily principled and courageous commitment of nonviolent exemplars would transform humanity.

⁵⁵ Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia: Columbia Alternative Library, 1997); Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK, 1995); Laurence Davis, "Individual and Community," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Laurence Davis, "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy," *Anarchist Studies* 18/1 (2010); Albert Meltzer, *Anarchism: Arguments for and Against*, available from <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/albert-meltzer-anarchism-arguments-for-and-against> (accessed 12 September 2018); Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁵⁶ Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, 47–51, 58, 86–87; Frazer and Hutchings, "Anarchist Ambivalence: Politics and Violence in the Thought of Bakunin, Tolstoy and Kropotkin," 18.

Some have also been critical of the austere and prohibitive self-denial of Tolstoyan asceticism.⁵⁷ It seems the only gratification Tolstoy tolerated was that of masochistically adhering to a particularly categorical morality. Some will prefer a less desolate way of life. But even if ascetic self-denial need not be imposed to such a rigorous degree, perhaps it is important to at least remain alert to the sometimes morally dubious production processes behind what one consumes, and to the distracting potential of hedonistic escapism.

Others could argue that, even were it to work, Tolstoy's method to improve the human condition is too slow, that it would take too long and we do not have such time.⁵⁸ This might be true, and the ecological crisis, to name but one, may indeed be a challenge that cannot wait to be addressed. At the same time, if a revised moral order is not one that is wanted and willed by all, if therefore coercive means are needed to enforce it, then more violence and injustice will ensue, rendering that moral order unstable again. For Tolstoy, transformations that are imposed are never stable or satisfactory.

Relevance today

The question of how to improve the world is no less important and debated today than in Tolstoy's era. Whatever the promises of secular (or indeed religious) ideologies, suffering, injustice and violence persist. Freedom, equality, indeed even true democracy remain closer to utopian aspirations than reality. Many have opted for formal institutional channels to try to improve things, but the

⁵⁷ Ronald D. LeBlanc, "Tolstoy's Way of No Flesh: Abstinence, Vegetarianism, and Christian Physiology," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 84–91; Vernon Lee, "Tolstoy as Prophet. Notes on the Psychology of Asceticism," *The North American Review* 182/593 (1906); Matual, *Tolstoy's Translation of the Gospels*, 16–18; McKeogh, *Tolstoy's Pacifism*, chap. 6–7; G. W. Spence, *Tolstoy the Ascetic* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967).

⁵⁸ Leo Tolstoy, "Nobel's Bequest: A Letter Addressed to a Swedish Editor," in *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1987), 237; Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is within You," 235.

global political economy is becoming more unequal, while weapons and their potential for mass destruction are spreading. Many good intentions seem to get diluted and lost in these institutional channels that are meant to help reach them. Many therefore face the uncomfortable realisation that our institutions are failing, and wonder how best to proceed. To those seekers of truth and justice, Tolstoy's writings on the dangers of violent methods remain worth reflecting upon. Tolstoy invites us to think carefully about how to bring about justice, about tactics and in particular about the dangers of compromising with 'violence'.

More generally, many today still concede that violence is sometimes necessary – whether to implement reforms through the state or to resist injustice outside it. Good ends can, in the eyes of many, justify violent means. In other words, the very same justifications of violence which Tolstoy criticised remain widespread nowadays. Yet one interesting development in the past century is the increasing popularity of nonviolent methods of activism and denunciations of violence. Gandhi, who was partly inspired by Tolstoy but who translated high Tolstoyan ethics into concrete and pragmatic tactics of nonviolent resistance, in turn inspired many after him. Since Tolstoy and Gandhi, nonviolent activism has been increasingly popular and increasingly successful – indeed interestingly more effective, some empirical work shows, than more violent methods.⁵⁹

In any case, (at least) three colossal challenges face humanity: an ecological crisis, a deeply unstable and unsustainable global economy, and the security challenges posed by the continuing proliferation of weapons – both conventional and of mass destruction. These challenges are all potentially very dangerous, will not be contained within artificial human borders, and arguably require more radical solutions than those likely to come from established institutions. This calls for action, for a collective human awakening. Many campaigners and movements share

⁵⁹ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Howes, "The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence."; Llewellyn, "Building Emancipatory Peace through Anarcho-Pacifism"; Nepstad, *Nonviolent Struggle: Theories, Strategies, and Dynamics*, 18–20.

those concerns, and to them Tolstoy would reiterate his warnings about consenting to or being complicit in violent means, whether bottom-up or top-down.

However, Tolstoy would not only address radicals and reformers. He would call on us all to awaken to the violence and suffering perpetrated within the global political economy, and crucially to our role in it by both legitimising it and staffing it. He would call us to choose carefully the role we play, however small, in this global context. Following Tolstoy, one could argue that there are at least four (overlapping) ways in which we all make choices: as producers, consumers, politically-active citizens and through everyday personal encounters.⁶⁰ As producers, we spend decades of our professional lives working in a particular sector. Tolstoy would urge us to think carefully about what that profession is dedicated to – is it public service, is it science, it is the weapons industry, fossil fuels, merely the interests of profit maximising? Similarly, we all consume, but do we consume ethical, local or organic products? Where and under what working conditions were these products produced? Did their production kill? Is our consumption too escapist or indulgent? And whose pockets do we fill? As citizens, we can vote, sign petitions, write letters and take part in campaigns – what choices do we make there?⁶¹ And as community members, we have conversations with one another, we respond to remarks made by family members, friends or random encounters. How committed are we to truth and justice in such micro-political encounters? Tolstoy wants us to consider our role in the broader structures we constitute, to see the connections between our behaviour and the impact of it through these structu-

⁶⁰ Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, “Think the World’s in a Mess? Here Are Four Things You Can Do About It,” *The Conversation*, 16 November 2016, available from <https://theconversation.com/think-the-worlds-in-a-mess-here-are-four-things-you-can-do-about-it-68789> (accessed 15 August 2017).

⁶¹ Tolstoy of course did not believe in representative democracy, but he did petition politicians up to the Tsar, he corresponded with activists around the world, and helped organise campaigns such as famine relief and the emigration of persecuted Doukhobors.

res, and where appropriate, to withdraw from these structures, to stop furthering evil and to exemplify alternatives instead.

Some will argue we cannot all make our own choices. The jobs on offer may not be many, for instance, and organic food comes at a price. Yet this is why Tolstoy's remarks are addressed most pointedly towards the comfortable – those who have more freedom to make these choices. Those who are poor, less educated and oppressed have more limited choices in those four realms, but the richest are freer to choose. Indeed they often know, if not explicitly then at least deep down, that they are making choices which might hurt others. They might see those as deplorable or necessary, and they might note that the world is tough and will remain so whatever they chose at their individual level. In other words, and following Tolstoy, they might be deceiving themselves and desisting from their moral responsibilities. The higher up the pyramid of privileges, the harsher Tolstoy's gaze will be. But some degree of choice, most of us do have, to some degree.

Conclusion

It might be argued that Tolstoy was neither a Christian (because his thought strips away too many of its defining characteristics) nor an anarchist (because he seems to follow 'revealed' biblical authority). He is also too hard-line a pacifist for many pacifists, and his thoughts on activist methods remain controversial for those eager to improve the human condition. However, Tolstoy does arguably develop with remarkable logical consistency the radical pacifist implications of Jesus' teaching with regards to collective violence. He is therefore 'Christian' in the sense that his thought takes its cue from Jesus' morality, and he is an 'anarchist' in the sense that he rejected the state and the unjust economy which it patrols on that basis. It is, moreover, precisely because of his hard-line commitment to pacifism that he develops anarchist conclusions and favours activist methods that refuse any compromise with violence.

Some might see Tolstoy as somewhat confusing in terms of his ultimate motive: sometimes he seems to preach nonviolence out of

fidelity to what is divinely commanded, regardless of the impact it may or may not end up having on society; yet sometimes he seems more clearly driven primarily by a desire to transform society. The confusion is partly the result of Tolstoy adapting his language and his arguments depending on who he is addressing: when addressing Christians, especially the clergy, he tends to insist that nonviolence is what God (through Jesus) clearly demands; but when addressing secular interlocutors in secular and rational terms, his tactic is to defend nonviolence on similarly secular and rational grounds, and here the worthiness of nonviolence stems from its potential effect on society. Either way, it seems quite clear that Tolstoy was longing for social transformation. It also seems clear that he was aware it might not take hold, and in such a scenario he still seems to have favoured principled behaviour on the part of those who shared his views. In any case, the revolution he envisaged did rest on some pioneers' fidelity to nonviolence, so it should come as no surprise that he insisted on such fidelity come what may, and in the hope that what might come would be a nonviolent pacification of society. In short, Tolstoy's primary aim is social transformation, though even if it fails he still favours nonviolence, and to Christians he will repeat that it is what God commands.

Tolstoy's political writings are those of a critic – an iconoclastic prophet, as it were. He plays a role analogous to the Socratic gadfly about violence and about the suffering inflicted by structures which we constitute and legitimise. The world has changed dramatically since 1910, and Tolstoy's arguments are possibly too categorical, but much of his diagnosis remains painfully perceptive, even if his solutions are not necessarily more realistic today than in his time. Eccentric though his thoughts might be, they invite us to reconsider our role in the violence perpetrated upon others.

It might also be worth recalling that in the years that followed Tolstoy's death in 1910, both his native Russia and indeed the world witnessed conflagrations of violence on an industrial scale – precisely the horrors Tolstoy feared. The Russian Revolution and other dictatorships illustrated what a Left-wing revolutionary transformation of society from the top down could lead to, and two world wars illustrated the destruction which human beings justifying violent means to attain perceived laudable aims could

lead to. In the unstable balance of power that has followed the Cold War and 9/11, in a world facing an ecological catastrophe, the seemingly unstoppable proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and increasingly widening economic inequalities, in a world where economic, security and ecological imbalances are so acute that system collapse is not implausible, the risks of violent conflagrations are arguably greater than in 1910. For that reason alone if for no other, Tolstoy's Christian anarcho-pacifism remains worth paying attention to in order to reflect upon our choices and how they affect others today.

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Community, Communion, and Communism: Religion and Spirituality in Herbert Read's Anarchism

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Herbert Read was not a religious anarchist, but nevertheless a sense of the spiritual played an important role in his thought. Through a comparison with the work of H.G. Wells, who Read treated as a representative of a particularly arid form of social theory, this chapter reconstructs Read's argument that spiritual unity was integral to any functioning society, and would therefore also be important to any successful anarchist community. The truth of the lesson was revealed for Read in the centrality of spiritual vibrancy to historical moments of particular artistic creativity. With cultural effervescence his measure of the successful realisation of meaningful freedom, he theorised a utopian anarchist community defined by both its economic communism and spiritual communion.

Even though he was no particular fan of H.G. Wells' writing, Herbert Read admitted, perhaps mainly out of politeness, to enjoying the "fantasia about dreams called *The Happy Turning*" that Wells was "circulating among a few friends" in the summer of 1943.¹ However, Read informed Wells, while he agreed with the "underlying moral" of the story, he confessed that he "jibbed

¹ H.G. Wells to Herbert Read: 13th July 1943", *Herbert Read Papers, McPherson Library, University of Victoria*. [Hereafter: HRP] HR/HGW-7 Eud.04.

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at [...] one aspect”, which was “its out of date anti-clericalism.”² Lest he be misinterpreted, this was not, Read added, out of any attachment to “priests or churches”, but instead reflected the simple fact that organised religion exercised little power in mid-century Britain. In countries “like” Spain religion might play an influential role, but in Britain as “in most parts of the world [churches and priests] seem to me to be as harmless as the rats and crows which [...] inhabit their historic monuments.”³

Read’s letter to Wells suggests that he unequivocally saw religion as an irrelevance in the modern world, yet his comments do not convey the underlying complexity of his position. While demonstrating his hostility to the rituals, conventions, and hierarchies of the Church, more broadly Read actually held a generally ambiguous, and frequently magnanimous, view of religion and spirituality, seeing religion as an important, often vital, cohesive force throughout human history. But religious feeling was not something that he simply saw as an historically useful phenomenon. When pondering the shape of an anarchist future unencumbered by capitalism and the state, Read often noted the importance of shared spiritual values in ensuring the survival of any experiment in anarchy. Anarchism was for Read a rational project – the soundest basis upon which to found a just and free society – but he was at the same time a critic of the kind of arid rationalism that he thought characterised social scientific thinking in the mid-twentieth century. Anarchism’s rational ideal must also be in tune with, and draw upon, the spiritual values beating in the heart of any viable community, he concluded.

Read’s perspective on religion therefore offers an interesting *via media* in debates about the possible compatibility of religious and anarchist thought, from an intellectual who enjoyed a complex relationship with anarchism as a political tradition. Most famous in his lifetime as a propagandist for modernist art,⁴ Read always

² Herbert Read to H.G. Wells: 27th August, 1943 in *HRP: HR/HGW-9 Eud.04*. For Read’s comments on Wells, see: Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 88–89.

³ Read to Wells: 27th August, 1943.

⁴ For the definitive biography of Read, see James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

pointed to the ‘unity’ of his diverse interests – which included literary criticism, the philosophy of art, psychoanalysis, and art education – with anarchism a key connecting thread. ‘There is no separation’, he wrote in 1954, ‘between what I have written on this subject [anarchism] and what I have written on social problems generally...on the social aspects of art...or on the social aspects of education. The same philosophy reappears in my literary criticism and in my poetry’.⁵ The intellectual restlessness that characterised his life, and his imperfect efforts to think about the consequences of his defence of the numinous, mysterious, and individual impulses underpinning artistic creativity for the rational and collectively-minded political ideology he subscribed to, mean that his ideas offer a useful route into thinking about anarchism’s relation to the spiritual. While this debate has often centred upon the legitimacy of deistic thinking in the context of a political tradition defined by its rejection of authority, Read’s theorisation of necessary spirituality offers a different take on this conundrum.⁶ He was not a ‘Christian anarchist’ in the sense of the intellectual position outlined by Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, where an ‘explicitly “anarchist” conclusion’ is reached “based on [an] understanding of “Christianity””, even if he has been thought of in these terms.⁷ Nicolas Walter, for example, admittedly no fan of Read whom he considered dilettantish and politically shallow, judged that he saw anarchism as an essentially “religious philosophy”.⁸ Walter overstated the case, but Read certainly did see connections between the religious impulse and communalist ethics that an anarchist community might usefully approximate. This sense of the importance

⁵ Herbert Read to Francis Berry: 10th April 1953, HRP, 61/20/9; Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 9.

⁶ For an overview see Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Lara Apps, ‘Anarchism and Religion’ in Carl Levy & Matthew S. Adams (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019), pp. 169–192 (especially pp. 170–176).

⁷ Alexandre J.M.E. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), p. 269.

⁸ Nicolas Walter, “Anarchism and Religion” in *Damned Fools in Utopia*, ed. David Goodway (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), pp. 279–285 (p. 284).

of spiritual unity also found expression in Read's broader concern with the social status of the arts, and the idea, explored in his historical studies, that those societies with the strongest communal ethic achieved the most vibrant art.⁹

To consider Read in terms of the "spiritual" also highlights the ambiguity of that concept. If, in comparing the slippery category of "spirituality" with the equally ineffable "religion", we characterise the former as exemplified by a quest for an "authentic connection with the inner depths of one's unique life-in-relation", and the latter as an impulse to "conformity to external authority", we begin to see how an anarchist may conceivably approach the spiritual as a component of social liberation.¹⁰ Inevitably, however, such neat distinctions fail to support the interpretative weight they must bear. After all, popular, but less precise uses of "spiritual" often point to a blending of these perspectives:

'Spirituality' is often used in Christian circles to express devotion to God [...] as when spirituality is thought of as 'obedience to the will of God' with the believer entering into an intense relationship (involving surrender) with the divine. Such spirituality is subjective

⁹ While there is a tendency to bifurcate his cultural and political ideas, Read was in fact mirroring ideas adumbrated by Kropotkin, who similarly saw a defining relationship between great art and communal unity. In contrast to Kropotkin, Read's articulation of this idea was a prominent feature of his thought, revealing a theme that has a deeper place in the history of anarchist political thought, but has often been implicit. On the division between Read's aesthetics and politics, consider the work of David Goodway and Peter Marshall, who, while recognising that Read saw a fundamental connection, are sceptical. David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 181, 184; David Goodway, "Herbert Read, organicism, abstraction and an anarchist aesthetic" in *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2001), pp. 82–97; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 592. For this narrative in Kropotkin's work, see: Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1907), pp. 124–143. For a more detailed exploration, see: Matthew S. Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

¹⁰ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 4.

in the sense that it involves often intense experiences...but objective in the sense that it is focused on something which [...] remains external to and higher than the self.¹¹

We should not expect Read to bring clarity to the concept of spirituality, but this chapter demonstrates that a sense of the spiritual that cuts across these definitions plays an important role in his utopian politics. Purged of any sense of obedience to God, his utopianism does, nevertheless, place importance on a social unity informed by an intense, authentic, relationship between individuals, and, in his writing on art, a surrender to something beyond individual experience that highlights a sense of the numinous running through his thought. Given that Read's anarchism drew most directly on the work of Peter Kropotkin – a figure often encountered as an unforgivingly deterministic and mechanically-minded thinker – this interest in the spiritual points to a distinctive thread in Read's philosophy, and one that reflects a willingness to draw insights from otherwise distinct philosophical approaches, including the individualism of Max Stirner and Carl Jung's psychoanalysis.¹²

Having established his sympathetic interpretation of spirituality, and, in the second section of this chapter, traced its prominence in his thought in relation to his hope for a revived culture, the final section considers Read's position in the wider intellectual history of the period. Juxtaposing his defence of spirituality with Wells' critique of religion reveals the generational gap between these thinkers, one that it is possible to map onto the complex cultural legacies of the First World War. His congeniality to spiritualism, and his predilection for romanticism, demonstrates the inappropriateness of overstating the case for seeing the war as a "slaughterhouse" for Edwardian verities.¹³ Rather than a brave new world, modernism, and post-war British culture more generally, often felt a renewed acquaintance with tradition.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹² For more on Read's approach to Stirner and Jung, see: Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism*, pp. 175–179.

¹³ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York, 1989), p. 258.

I. “The needle between reason and romanticism”: utopianism, community, and the spiritual

Wells’ *The Happy Turning: A Dream of Life*, published in 1945 and written in the heat of the Second World War, charts the author’s attempts to escape the “overstrain” occasioned by the present “chaotic war”, in the comfort of sleep. “More and more”, he writes, “are my dreams what I believe the psychologists call compensatory; the imaginations I have suppressed revolt and take control.”¹⁴ An early reference to J.W. Dunne’s influential work *An Experiment with Time* (1927) points to the text’s affinities with one of Wells’ more famous forays into genre-blending fiction, *The Shape of Things to Come*. Published in 1933 and presenting itself as a “Short History of the World for about the next century”, in this text Wells occupies the role of editor and literary executor to the fictional historian Dr Philip Raven.¹⁵ Inheriting Raven’s notes upon his untimely death, Wells writes that he compiled the “dream book” from these scattered manuscripts, revealing an imaginative attempt to record the history of the future. In his introduction, Wells recounts Raven’s belief in the argument put forward in *An Experiment with Time* that “we may anticipate the future” and that “in the dozing moment between wakefulness and oblivion” some intimation of future events is possible.¹⁶ For the real-life Dunne, this was a prelude to highlighting the role of human consciousness in ordering time, a hardwiring escaped in sleep, during which precognitive dreams reveal that all states of time are, in fact, simultaneous.¹⁷

The dream state had long been a favoured method for utopian writers to imagine the contours of a possible future. Unencumbered by either the restrictions of an imagination-confining present, or the difficulty of inventing a feasible plot device that enables the present to be juxtaposed with the utopian future, the dream state

¹⁴ H.G. Wells, *The Happy Turning: A Dream of Life* (London: William Heinemann, 1945), p. 1, 7.

¹⁵ H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Gollancz, [1933] 2011), p. 4.

¹⁶ Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, p. 7.

¹⁷ J.W. Dunne, *An Experiment with Time* (London: A. & C. Black, 1929), pp. 29–38, 23–125.

allows the utopian writer to move between reality and fancy at will, mining the unwritten future for lessons of immediate political salience. Often, as in William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890), these slumbering visions were imbued with an appropriately romantic imagery, in this example a product of Morris' indebtedness to the late-Victorian cult of the medieval that was an antidote to the smokestacks and riveted-iron of nineteenth-century capitalism.¹⁸ Wells' oscitant premonitions, as his use of Dunne's pseudoscientific theories indicate, were rather different however, rooting themselves in the voguish language and concepts of contemporary sociology. Manifesting a "degree of institutional specificity" that stood in distinction to Morris' playfulness, Wells also tended to present his utopian speculations – despite their often-fantastical settings – in terms of their eminent plausibility.¹⁹ A common theme in these works, such as *Anticipations* (1901) and *A Modern Utopia* (1905), was the importance of enlightened minorities acting under the aegis of a powerful state replacing the anarchy of the present with a technologically sophisticated and orderly society, a vision echoed in *The Shape of Things to Come*.²⁰

Wells' utopianism is an important context for comprehending both Read's location in deeper traditions of British radicalism and utopian speculation, and his general antipathy towards Wells' work, which, for obvious reasons, does not register in their brief correspondence. Key is this distinction between the romantic and scientific, and it is Read's embrace of the romantic that informed his openness to a spiritual dimension in anarchist politics that would have been an anathema to a rationalist like Wells. Despite his position in the advanced guard of modernism, Read continued to insist upon his credentials as a son of the soil. "In spite of

¹⁸ Morris' book did, after all, bear the subtitle "being some chapters from a Utopian Romance". William Morris, *News from Nowhere or an Epoch of Rest in News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 41–228 (p. 41). See also: Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 38–40.

¹⁹ Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 65, 81.

²⁰ Wells, *Shape of Things to Come*, pp. 22–32.

my intellectual pretensions”, he wrote in *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938), one of his earliest political pronouncements,

I am by birth and tradition a peasant. I remain essentially a peasant. I despise this foul industrial epoch – not only the plutocracy which it has raised to power, but also the industrial proletariat which it has drained from the land and proliferated in hovels of indifferent brick.²¹

Politicised in part by reading the blended aesthetic and social critique of Morris and John Ruskin, and by the poverty and ugliness he discerned in pre-First World War Halifax, Read’s anarchism would reflect these influences.²² Believing that the diversity of artistic creativity was an “index” of social progress, and that modernist design, sensitive to the demands and requirements of local communities, could moderate the brutality of industrial capitalism, Read looked askance at the technocratic impulse that characterized scientifically-minded utopians such as Wells.²³ Striving to fuse the design-and-planning-led urge of modernism, with the localism and direct-democracy of the organic community, Read’s was a vision defined against Wells’ all-seeing “world state” in which progress was secured by the actions of a technocratic elite.

These diverging perspectives came to the fore in Read’s and Wells’ brief correspondence. Despite his lack of sympathy for much of Wells’ political vision, Read was evidently amused by *The Happy Turning*. A phantasmagoric and playful text in comparison to Wells’ other utopian works, the cluster of stories that comprised it, including one where Wells meets Jesus, who laments the perversions of his teachings with the admonition “*Never* have disciples”, were no doubt a relief from the oppressive internatio-

²¹ Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, [1938] 1947), p. 8.

²² For more on this, see: Matthew S. Adams, ‘To Hell with Culture: Fascism, Rhetoric, and the War for Democracy’, *Anarchist Studies* 23: 2 (2015), pp. 18–37.

²³ Herbert Read, ‘Preface’ to *To Hell With Culture* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. ix–xii (p. xii). For this see also: Adams, *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism*.

nal situation in 1943.²⁴ But Read noted that he “enjoyed it as a story and I fully agreed with its underlying moral”, concluding with the subtly ambiguous statement that “I find your fantasy as stimulating as ever”.²⁵ He did have reservations, however. He did not mind what Wells described as the gentle “blasphemy” of the text, but saw the more virulent denunciations of religion as anachronistic.²⁶ Religion, Read argued, posed an insignificant obstacle to social regeneration, adding laconically that it “will automatically be cleaned up as we rebuild”.²⁷ This was a mild rebuke, but it was underpinned by Read’s divergence from Wells’ more rigid brand of politics. Invoking Lord Acton, he made a plea for the value of both diversity and permissiveness in the face of dehumanising dogmatism:

But generally – and this, if anything, is what might divide us – I am all for Tolerance rather than Tidiness. I don’t believe that good and evil determine human institutions: there is good and evil in every human institution, whether the College of Cardinals or the House of Commons, the Kremlin or the White House. Acton (whom I’ve been looking into lately – what a wise man) wrote: “Good and evil lie close together. Seek no artistic unity in character” – a good motto for a novelist as well as for an historian.²⁸

For all that Read confessed to a real affinity with Wells’ work, this motto pointed in a different direction. Rejecting the “tidiness” of completeness, this was an idea whose truth, Read felt, was more apparent in his own anarchist politics than in Wells’ utopianism. The just society, he reflected elsewhere, was the one that truly protected and nurtured meaningful individuality and rested comfortably in its imperfection and incompleteness. “The only idea of a society which is capable of guaranteeing the integrity of the person”, Read once argued, “is the negation of the idea of society.” Rather than pointing to a kind of Stirnerian solipsism, for Read this reflected the fact that the “whole of what we mean by

²⁴ Wells, *The Happy Turning*, p. 14.

²⁵ Read to Wells: 27.8.43

²⁶ Wells, *The Happy Turning*, p. 6.

²⁷ Read to Wells: 27th August, 1943.

²⁸ Read to Wells: 27th August, 1943.

civilization or culture has been built up by a dialectical process”, and, accordingly, “every advance towards community must be countered by an affirmation of individual freedom”.²⁹ There was no place, in this vision, for either an all-powerful state or the idea that a utopian society was an end in itself, a resolution of humanity’s troubled history.

A month before they debated the importance of anticlericalism, Read offered Wells a more substantial overview of his politics. Seeking opinions on a series of letters that Wells had written for *The Times* pondering the Allies’ war-aims, Read proposed a number of amendments to what would eventually appear as the pamphlet *The Rights of Man, or What are We Fighting For?*³⁰ In suggesting textual improvements, Read drew heavily on the conceptual resources of his anarchist politics. “You have removed my particular bogey, the suggestion of a centralised world state with all the obsolete machinery of representative government”, but Read suggested two further clauses, one addressing “consumer interests” in “some sort of guild organisation of industry”, and the other calling for the abolition of that “mental dinosaur”, money. Read also suggested adding a further substantive clause, the “right to membership of a community”. He defined this community, in typically anarchic terms, as the ideal crucible for individual growth:

A community is an association of like-minded people for mutual aid. Each person within a community has a right to select that place within the community most appropriate to his abilities, and the duty to contribute his due quota to the common wealth. In return the community will guarantee him the supply of all the necessities of a happy and productive life.³¹

²⁹ Herbert Read, *A Coat of Many Colours: Occasional Essays* (London: Routledge, 1947), 317, 312, 317.

³⁰ H.G. Wells, ‘Letters to the Editor: War Aims’ in *The Times*, 26th September 1939, pp. 4; H.G. Wells, ‘Letters to the Editor: War Aims: The Rights of Man’ in *The Times*, 25th October 1939, pp. 6; H.G. Wells, *The Rights of Man, or What are We Fighting For?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940); H.G. Wells (ed.) *The Rights of Man: an Essay in Collective Definition* (Brighton: Poyning Press, 1943).

³¹ Herbert Read to H.G. Wells: 28th July, 1943, HRA: HR.HGW-7 Encl.02.

Here, the differences between Read's and Wells' politics come to the fore. Against the state, he poses the constructive and organisational potential of the guilds, as well as offering a trenchant defence of the community as the locus of individual growth. Beyond this, however, he firmly identifies with that Kropotkinian shibboleth, the abolition of the wage system as the prerequisite of any libertarian society.³²

A particular understanding of society – of its existential importance; of its necessary independence from an “abstraction” like the state, but also of its potential to stymie individual development – clearly ran through Read's thought.³³ While dismissive of the power of religion in his comments on *The Happy Turning*, Read's image of community nevertheless drew heavily on ideas of spiritual union. In the series of Nietzschean aphorisms that closed his pamphlet *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism* (1949), he developed this concept of society, arguing, in terms that Wells would have struggled to recognise, that the commune was social unit best suited to preserving “the freedom of the person”.³⁴ Revealingly drawing on the work of Martin Buber, he added that successful communal experiments, while rare, were those defined by a strong and unifying religious impulse. Where they failed, Read perceived the root of this collapse not in economic pressures, but principally as the result of a lack of durable bonds between the community's members. “Religious communities like the Hutterites”, he observed, are the communities with the “longest record of success”, not “because of their superior skill in agriculture or their genius for planning, but simply because their members have been *with* one another, in real communion.”³⁵ Quoting Henrik Infield's book *Co-Operative Communism at Work* (1947), Read concluded that the overriding evidence was that in religious and non-religious

³² For a classic definition of this position, see: Peter Kropotkin, *Act for Yourselves: Articles from Freedom*, ed. Nicolas Walter & Heiner Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1998), pp. 103–113.

³³ Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 310.

³⁴ Herbert Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1949), p. 27.

³⁵ Italics are Read's own. Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 28.

communal experiments, success was determined by the existence of a “central emotional impulse, comparable to the religious motive...[that]...is important to the success of comprehensive co-operation”.³⁶

Spiritual union was therefore essential, Read thought, and turning to the issue of equality – a principle so often in the history of utopian thinking redolent of austerity and Spartanism – invested it with a spiritual dimension too. Indeed, the association of austerity with equality, he complained, was the result of a failure to appreciate the spiritual ethos of this distributive ethic, a point he made by drawing a distinction between the desire to “make all incomes equal” and “*hold all things in common*”.³⁷ The former, he argued, was the intention of the “average democratic socialist”, going on to suggest that the “distinction between false communism and true communism” lay in this issue. Quoting the *Acts of the Apostles*, Read also suggested that this was a distinction familiar to “early Christian communities”:

The multitude of them that believed were of one heart [...] Neither was there any of them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.³⁸

While Read cleaved to the anarchist-communist tradition in demanding a community of goods (“all is for all” in Kropotkin’s dictum), he challenged the rhetorical objection that this is based on a “superhuman” perception of human nature through an appeal to the “spiritual”, a position in stark contrast to Kropotkin’s

³⁶ Henrik Infield cited in Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 28. A useful comparison here is with Herbert Read’s friend George Woodcock, whose interest in the dissenting Christian sect the Doukhobors remained a perennial interest. For more on this see George Woodcock and Ivan Avacumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968) and Matthew S. Adams & Luke Kelly, ‘George Woodcock and the Doukhobors: peasant radicalism, anarchism, and the Canadian state’, *Intellectual History Review* 28: 3 (2018), pp. 399–423.

³⁷ Italics are Read’s own. Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 34.

³⁸ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 34.

rationalism.³⁹ Communism of this kind was not unrealistic, Read continued, because it rested on a communion that made such organic, communal societies durable in the face of outside pressures. Invoking the Hutterites, he suggested that the “libertarian conception of society as a brotherhood” that made this communism viable, had deep historical roots. “The first Hutterite colonies were founded in 1526”, he wrote, adding, in a broadside aimed at those incapable of thinking of social life in the absence of the nation-state, that “no other social system can boast such an undeviating record of stability and self-sufficiency.”⁴⁰ The roots of this longevity lay in their perception of community, and Read returned to the idea of “communion” and “brotherhood” to describe an encompassing sense of community with a “necessary physical (sensational) basis”.⁴¹

Viewed in the context of Read’s broader philosophy, this understanding of necessary spirituality comes into sharper focus, and shows why Read and Wells had such a difficult time comprehending each other in their correspondence. A central aspect of Read’s thought was a belief in the importance of appreciating the intuitive, irrational, and ethereal aspects of the phenomenological world, a belief that explains his attraction to the work of Nietzsche, Georges Sorel and Henri Bergson.⁴² Against the rationalism of Wells’ utopianism or the “piecemeal planning, *practical* politics” of contemporary technocrats, Read stressed the

³⁹ Read, *Existential, Marxism and Anarchism*; Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 34.

⁴¹ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 34, 36.

⁴² Read would recognise major faults in these theorists, especially in their politics, but all three were important formative influences. His approach to Nietzsche is an illustrative example. In his autobiography, Read details his exposure to Nietzsche’s ideas in “cataclysmic” terms, confessing that encountering Nietzsche at university was a conduit to “Schopenhauer, to Kant, Hegel, Hume, Pascal, Plato”, and describing Nietzsche’s words as a “prophetic fire” that destroyed his “Sunday-school piety and priggish morality”. By wartime, this infatuation had faded, with Read observing in 1915 that “Nietzsche’s appeal to me is largely poetical.” See Read, *The Contrary Experience*, p. 167, 187, 203–206, 277–27’ Read, *The Contrary Experience*, p. 165; Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse: Essays in Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 176.

spiritually enlivening quality of an anarchism “guided by instinct rather than reason, [that is] passionate and spontaneous rather than cool and calculated.”⁴³ Such “absurdism” had a religious parallel, he noted, in that as all religions are based on a sense “of the numinous [which is] absurd, not rooted in normal experience, closed to normal channels of perception, and resistant to normal modes of expression”.⁴⁴ For a sociologically-minded utopian like Wells this was too unscientific, and for the practical planner inspired by modern sociology it was too fanciful: for both it offered little in addressing immediate social and economic problems. To Read’s mind, in contrast, the “ideal” had an important vitalising quality that was a corrective to the ‘despair [and] nihilism’ of those fixated on the immediately practicable and restored the importance of the human and creative to the mechanistic utopians – in his terms, the “poeticization of all practicalities”.⁴⁵

Losing sight of the irrational was, for Read, therefore, opening the door to a pernicious kind of technocratic politics. His comments on Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* (1907) offer another route into this issue. Reading Bergson’s classic text, he commented, served to temporarily ease the feeling occasioned by the loss of his childhood religion, which he observed had plunged him on a path of “bleak rationalism which was not consistent with my romantic temperament.” His fleeting Bergsonianism was an antidote to the “mechanistic interpretation of the universe” he was nurturing, that, while “keeping within the world of scientific fact”, eschewed a “finalist” interpretation of the universe and emphasised the spontaneity at the heart of natural processes.⁴⁶ All of this was a challenge to the scientific utopianism of Wells, and Read similarly condemned both historical materialism and its conceptual sibling “logical positivism”. Their insensitivity to “instinctive modes of thought, of super-rational intuitions, of the aesthetic nature of perception”, leaves its theorists “slaves to their formulae – hard, intolerant, and sadistic.”⁴⁷ His vituperation may

⁴³ Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 13, 17.

⁴⁴ Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 13.

⁴⁵ Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 20, 19, 23.

⁴⁶ Read, *The Contrary Experience*, p. 277, 278.

⁴⁷ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 29, 30.

overstate the case, but its purpose was to stress the importance of the numinous against the “arid” instincts of modern philosophy.⁴⁸ A revitalised social world, one defined by communalism and economic communism must be sensitive to the emotional and intuitive, and recognise the importance of a unity drawing its strength from something other than instrumental logic. This, in Read’s view, was to appreciate the contradictions of experience, and to realise that “wisdom [...] is the needle which comes to rest between reason and romanticism”.⁴⁹ A modern utopia must recognise this to achieve meaningful emancipation, or the shape of things to come could only be a worsening of the noxious present.

II. “In the beginning was the image”: art in history⁵⁰

Read’s notion of “communion” as a foundation of a vibrant society also manifested itself in his aesthetic theory. Given his lifelong interest in the visual arts, and persistent anxiety over their social position, this was a fitting fusion. He often commented on this essential unity in his philosophy, noting in the collection of his political essays *Anarchy & Order* (1954) that there was “no categorical separation [...] between what I have written on...[anarchism]...and what I have written on social problems generally [...] or on the social aspects of art.”⁵¹ Despite the renewed interest in Read’s political ideas of late, and the acknowledgement that his anarchism perhaps ran deeper than has been thought, his aesthetic philosophy has not been suitably integrated with his politics.⁵² Looking at his histories

⁴⁸ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Read, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Herbert Read, *Icon & Idea: The Function of Art in the Development of Human Consciousness* (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 88.

⁵¹ Read, *Anarchy and Order*, p. 9.

⁵² Amongst the work on Read, Goodway has done most to rescue Read’s political thought from oblivion. While he suggests that there is overlap between his politics and aesthetics, he is generally sceptical that his anarchism informed his aesthetic philosophy. See: Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*; Goodway, ‘Herbert Read, organicism, abstraction and an anarchist aesthetic’ in *Anarchist Studies*. A number of other works have traced stronger connections between his aesthetics and politics, but these have tended to be relatively brief. See: Allan Antliff, ‘Open form and the anarchist imperative: Herbert Read and contemporary anarchist art’ in

of aesthetics, and his vision of community as the crucible of great art, supports the view that Read's politics were a continual source of inspiration for his wider cultural theory. Moreover, Read's understanding of the sort of historical social structures that allowed past cultures to achieve artistic greatness displays an overlooked debt to late nineteenth-century socialism, particularly in the context of his more challenging works on aesthetic philosophy dating from the 1950s. Like Read, Kropotkin believed that Renaissance art drew its strength from the power of a communal identity supposedly pervasive in the city-states, and his image of the Greek sculptor chiseling to "express the spirit and heart of the city", parallels Read's approach to modern European cultural history.⁵³ Read gathered these ideas from more sources than Kropotkin alone – after all, Kropotkin was working in a characteristically socialist furrow, one also ploughed by Henry Hyndman, William Morris and Thorold Rogers – but it was a reading of Kropotkin in particular that informed Read's work.⁵⁴

In one sense, Read's art theory seems ahistorical. His oft-repeated assertion that the artistic urge was a perennial and inherent aspect of the human condition, does not necessarily lend itself to nuanced historical analysis. As he reflected in 1951: "There is no phase of art from the Palaeolithic cave-paintings to the latest developments of constructivism, that does not seem to me to be an illustration of the biological and teleological significance of the aesthetic activity

Anarchist Studies, 16: 1 (2011), pp. 6–19; Allan Antliff, 'David Goodway critiques Herbert Read' in *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), pp. 98–106; Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (London: Continuum, 2011); Dana Ward, 'Art and Anarchy: Herbert Read's Aesthetic Politics' in *Re-Reading Read: New Views on Herbert*, ed. Michael Paraskos, (London: Freedom Press, 2007), pp. 20–33. For works on anarchism in which Read is mentioned, but analysis of his thought is comparatively underdeveloped, see: April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 91–3; Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), p. 52; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, pp. 587–593; David Miller, *Anarchism* (London, J.M. Dent, 1984), pp. 141–151.

⁵³ Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 139.

⁵⁴ A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 155.

in man”.⁵⁵ While deeming art the product of a constant aesthetic desire might entail a static interpretation of the history of art, Read was, in fact, at pains to show that art was, nevertheless, an area of constant innovation. “My whole reading of the history of art”, he added in the same work, “tells me that change is the condition of art remaining art”.⁵⁶ In seeking to understand this change, Read was equally adamant that any overly “materialistic” explanation, shorthand for the Marxist art critics that were prominent in British art criticism in the 1930s and 1940s, was insufficient.⁵⁷ Despite his claims for the universality of the aesthetic sensibility therefore, Read was fully committed to an historical interpretation of art that was sensitive to the impact of social and cultural change. In one of the earliest expressions of this nascent aesthetic philosophy *Art and Society* (1936), a work that was reprinted in 1967 with a fresh preface from Read defending its central assertions, he called for an understanding of art that was attuned to the role of material factors but also cognisant of art’s relative autonomy:

Art [...] is [...] influenced like all our activities by the material conditions of existence, but as a mode of knowledge at once its own reality and its own end. It has necessary relations with politics, religion, and with all other modes of reacting to our human destiny. But as a mode of reaction it is distinct and contributes in its own right to that process of integrations which we call a civilization or a culture.⁵⁸

In cautiously trying to move the debate away from viewing art as an “efflux” of material conditions, Read was challenging the Marxist orthodoxy in art criticism, but also making the case for an historically-attuned idealistic theory of art.⁵⁹ This reading of art history was at the fore of his 1954 work *Icon & Idea*, which

⁵⁵ Herbert Read, ‘Preface [1951]’ to *The Philosophy of Modern Art: Collected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 13.

⁵⁶ Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, p. 57

⁵⁷ Read, *Icon & Idea*, p. 21. For a riposte from Read to these critics, including Alick West, see: Read, *Coat of Many Colours*, pp. 212–221.

⁵⁸ Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 2.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), p. 47.

argued that art was an existentially vital source of meaning, and had even contributed to humanity's evolutionary survival:

Art [...] was never [...] an attempt to represent the totality of appearances; but rather it has been the piecemeal recognition and patient fixation of what is significant in human experience. The artistic activity might therefore be described as a crystallization, from the amorphous realm of feeling, of forms that are significant and symbolic.⁶⁰

In a letter to the poet Stephen Spender, Read offered a pithier précis of *Icon & Idea*:

The whole argument of my Harvard Lectures [...] is that society owes everything to the artist – that the philosophy and science of any age is but a commentary on its art. And even its religion – religion as a commentary on instinctive ritual, on magical objects and events. The poet is a legislator, not in the sense that he lays down laws, but because he creates the pattern of ideas and 'endows' society with thought.⁶¹

Art is at the fore of human development, and as well as underpinning our intellectual advances, offers an avenue into what lies beyond conscious thought – the realm of feeling, with its rich, suggestive, and vital symbolism.

The dualism that Read saw at the heart of artistic activity, at once eternal and individual but also shaped by context and eminently social, points to a productive tension in his thought. But his understanding of communion as the foundation of a healthy social compact, and his abiding interest in the relationship between the artist and society, clearly highlights an important historical dimension to his complex aesthetic theory. Here, as much as in his comments on the unconscious and symbolic component behind artistic inspiration, we see the significance of the spiritual to the position he reached, an idea that comes to the fore in his discussion of the Renaissance. Artistically, Read was often rather ambivalent towards the achievements of the Renaissance,

⁶⁰ Read, *Icon & Idea*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Herbert Read to Stephen Spender: 22nd February, 1955, HRA, 49/28/1-HR/SS-70 Encl.o12.

but thought that its enduring cultural impact, acting parallel with the philosophical triumphs of the age, was a result of a general emancipation from the “central imperial power [of] the Church”.⁶² In freeing itself from the requirement of “illustrating” religious “dogma” that cramped the creativity of medieval art, the Renaissance began with a loosening of these binds and a growing interest in “natural phenomena” and a “reaffirmation of classical humanism”.⁶³ Mirroring Kropotkin’s view of the rise of the city-states and the communal movement in twelfth-century Europe, Read argued that this cultural change emerged from a complex of economic and social factors. Following Kropotkin’s argument in *Mutual Aid*, he suggested that with the eclipse of the Church’s authority, social life was diversified and invigorated.⁶⁴ “Here a republic challenged the authority of the Pope”, he wrote,

Elsewhere a king disposed the [...] monasteries [...] events which loom large in our history books. More significant, however, is the change in mood and temperament which affected people at large. The actual process consisted, I believe, of an infinite series of small deflections and counter-deflections caused first by one force and then [...] another, the heart taking, as a result, the zig-zag course of a vessel tacking against the wind. As the historical process developed, it revealed itself as a disintegration, better still, as differentiation.⁶⁵

The power of Renaissance humanism grew from this freedom, as, in Read’s view, the artist won the space to express “his sensibility”, rather than being required to glorify God, and in turn could reflect on the relationship between the individual and society. “The artist declared himself, confessed his humanity”, Read wrote, “and celebrated the humanity of his fellow-men”.⁶⁶

Read was not arguing that turning the clock back was either possible or desirable. He chastised William Morris for his naive commitment to medievalism, and criticised his failure to recognise

⁶² Read, *Art and Society*, p. 67. On his ambiguous relation to the Renaissance, consider: Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, pp. 1–5.

⁶³ Read, *Icon & Idea*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ For Kropotkin’s narrative, see: P. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Penguin, [1901] 1939), pp. 129–179.

⁶⁵ Read, *Art and Society*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Read, *Art and Society*, p. 67.

the potential for machinery to produce aesthetically beautiful artifacts.⁶⁷ Neither was Read blind to the iniquities of the patronage system that underpinned this period of artistic creativity. In *Art and Society*, for example, he noted that the Renaissance often offered a “specious” freedom, one that might leave the artist “free to express himself, but only on condition that the “self” expressed was a marketable commodity”.⁶⁸ Also, Read cautioned against seeing the Renaissance as a united phenomenon, noting the existence of a “Northern Renaissance” operating under the influence of the Reformation, and a “southern Renaissance” pursuing its own unique path, with the latter offering a secularized, “positive process [...] in the direction of increasing self-assertion, self-affirmation, self-control”, and a subsequent reorientation of art.⁶⁹ But Read’s interest in the social aspect of the Renaissance rested on a belief that it approximated the notion of communion he explored in his political writings, and despite his qualifications, he associated the Italian experience of the Renaissance as an epitome of this spiritual communion. Echoing characteristically anarchist concerns over the size of decision-making units, he noted that the “integrated communities of the past - Athens, Etruria, the Christian communities of the Middle Ages, Venice in its republican glory – [...] were never large”, and their working democratic principles, even if they were “sometimes [...] careless of civil liberties”, allowed art to grow. More than this, Read concluded that the pervasive mutual aid ethic existing in these communities nurtured a spiritual unity with direct cultural consequences:

They were not conscious of the artist as a separate [...] kind of man. They were only conscious of a living community, its members differentiated according to their individual skills, and all contributing to the common glory.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Read did note that Morris reached some accommodation with the machine later in life Read, *Poetry and Anarchism*, 9; Herbert Read, *Art and Industry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934 [1944]), 39–47.

⁶⁸ Read, *Art and Society*, 65

⁶⁹ Read, *Art and Society*, p. 66.

⁷⁰ This aphorism can be found in the extended version of ‘Chains of Freedom’, published in *Anarchy and Order*. See: Read, *Anarchy and Order*, p. 222.

From this imperfect communion, the imperfect art of the Renaissance grew.

Read was evidently not glorifying the role of Christianity in a conventional sense. While recognizing the realities of aristocratic patronage and the imprimatur of the Church as forces shaping Renaissance art, he also emphasised the idea that its grandeur grew from a social soil fertilised by the freedom and unity of the communal movement. The spiritual – however attenuated by competing forces – was nevertheless essential. Writing in a different context, Read noted that while the achievements of modern science had made the “supernatural” sanction of religion obsolete, that obviously did not mean that the “state of our scientific knowledge is final or absolute”. Rather than religious obscurantism or Zamyatinian rationalism, the solution to social stability lay instead somewhere between these poles:

No one who has given the least thought to the morphology of societies will be disposed to deny that they always depend for their cohesion and survival upon some unifying idea, which unifying idea has generally been of a mystical or religious kind. Only the most inveterate rationalist would be hardy enough to believe that a society might exist on a purely rational basis [...] I do not estimate the survival value of such a society very highly – it would probably die of a kind of communal *accidie*.⁷¹

Read’s art histories give an indication of how he saw communion in action, and reveal how this spiritual ethos stemmed from his perception of mutual aid as a logic of group organisation. Although working in a seam of thought inaugurated by Kropotkin, and coupling his ideas to Kropotkin’s, Read’s emphasis on the emotional aspect of mutual aid betrays a subtler conception of this principle. Kropotkin was not silent on the emotional quality of mutual aid, after all, both *Ethics* (1921) and shorter pieces such as the pamphlet *Anarchist Morality* (1892) dwell on “large natures overflowing with tenderness, with intelligence, with goodwill”, but his motivating desire was to root this ethical language in the discourse of

⁷¹ Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 314, 315.

nineteenth-century science.⁷² Anarchism was a moral denunciation of capitalism, but one apparently backed up by the weight of the latest scientific thinking. Read largely accepted this position, tellingly observing that Kropotkin had adduced impressive “empirical evidence” to justify the theory of mutual aid, but deliberately eschewed the language of positivism, fearful that it would open the door to the emotionally withered politics of a utopian like Wells.⁷³ Indeed, in *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940), while lambasting Marxism for its premature rejection of religious feeling, Read confessed that although he had “no religion to recommend and none to believe in [...] on the evidence of [...] history [...] a religion is a necessary element in any organic society.”⁷⁴ And, he tied the idea of spiritual ecstasy to aesthetic pleasure, arguing that “poetry, in its intensest and most creative moments, penetrates to the same level of the unconscious as mysticism.” This sibling relationship led Read to ponder if the “origins of a new religion”, one congruent with anarchist principles, might be found “if not in mysticism, then in art.”⁷⁵ Wherever it was to come from, a reassessment of the spiritual would define anarchist society, and the effervescent cultural creativity and experimentation that would come with it.

III. Locating Read

Read’s sympathy towards spiritual expressions, and his belief that any future anarchist society must be united by some kind of spiritual ethos, shows that he was engaged in a creative reading of the historical tradition of anarchism, notably Kropotkin’s work. His cultural politics was not a simple reapplication of Kropotkin’s ideas to meet the challenges of contemporary political life, but a significant revision of these political principles in a quest to maintain the relevance of anarchism in a very different world. This revision bore the imprint of both Read’s particular interests (art

⁷² Peter Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Morality’ in *Fugitive Writings*, ed. George Woodcock (Montreal: Black Rose Books, [1892] 1993), pp. 127–153.

⁷³ Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, p. 63

⁷⁴ Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1940), p. 25.

⁷⁵ Read, *Philosophy of Anarchism*, p. 26

and cultural creativity), but also a broader intellectual climate in which coming to terms with the legacy of the First World War was, for obvious reasons, a key concern. Read, who had served on the western front with distinction and found his initial notoriety as a war poet, was a characteristic representative of this tradition, and the Great War remained a perpetual frame of reference in his writing. Indeed, in the year before his death, Read tied his conversion to anarchism directly to his experience of war, observing that the “fidelity” of comradeship that emerged in the heat of battle, was a pellucid lesson to him in the instinctual nature of mutual aid.⁷⁶ The war was also a time of intellectual growth for Read, who, his education interrupted by mobilisation, avidly digested the pamphlet literature of nineteenth-century socialism and the latest modernist periodicals including A.R. Orage’s *The New Age* and Dora Marden’s *The Egoist*, both of which would later be vehicles for Read’s literary work. His idiosyncratic modernism developed in this context, his initial enthusiasm for the semantic discipline and clarity of Imagist poetry ultimately tempered by his enduring interest in the defining characteristics of romanticism: emotion, expression, and a fascination with nature.

Read’s politics emerged from this complex of ideas: obsessed with the importance of artistic self-expression and built upon an appeal to the spiritual, whilst at the same time accommodating itself to the rationalistic discourse of nineteenth-century anarchism. Inevitably this entailed tensions, but Read’s navigation of these competing values – his efforts to strike a balance between “reason and romanticism” that informed a particular vision of modernist art – should also be recognised as the product of its time.⁷⁷ With his championing of modernism in mind, a contribution

⁷⁶ Herbert Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 41. For more on these themes, see: Matthew S. Adams, ‘Herbert Read and the Fluid Memory of the First World War’, *Historical Research*, 88: 240, pp. 333–354; Matthew S. Adams, ‘Mutualism in the Trenches: Anarchism, Militarism and the Lessons of the First World War’ in Adams & Ruth Kinna (eds.) *Anarchism, 1914–18: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism, and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 243–262.

⁷⁷ Tellingly, this was the title of Read’s first collection of essays. Herbert Read, *Reason and Romanticism: Essays in Literary Criticism* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926).

that has only recently been rescued from historical oblivion,⁷⁸ the First World War figures prominently in efforts to understand the growth of this cultural stance. One approach is to see the war, in undermining the verities of the Victorian and Edwardian age, as a crucial moment; its jarring and destabilising effects giving rise to new types of poetic diction and artistic imagery that reflected the scale of the trauma. What Graham Greene once referred to as the “Victorian look of confidence, of being at home in the world and knowing the way round”, was superseded by a post-war cynicism, whose emergence one scholar boldly dated to the first day of the Somme, 1st July, 1916.⁷⁹ Modernism was the artistic articulation of this mentality, matched in the hedonistic behaviour of the “younger generation” in the 1920s, who met with scepticism “the moralistic idealism that had kept busy the slaughterhouse that was the Western Front”.⁸⁰

While the First World War may have been a catalyst for modernism in the arts, it would be reductive to see this cultural growth purely in terms of the rupturing effects of war. Indeed, as Read was well aware, modernism had deeper roots, as he playfully observed when arguing that “modern art” was born in the immediate aftermath of the “Universal Exhibition of 1889”.⁸¹ Here, he wrote, the displays of “primitive art” intoxicated Gauguin and Van Gogh, forcing them to see a connection across the ages that unmasked the importance of social unrest and “insecurity” on the movement “away from representational realism [...] towards some degree of abstraction or symbolism”.⁸² Not only was modernism in the arts frequently informed by a renewed contact with tradition then, but in the aftermath of war people often looked back, rather than for-

⁷⁸ Michael Paraskos, ‘The Curse of King Bomba: Or How Marxism Stole Modernism’ in Paraskos (ed.) *Rereading Read: New Views on Herbert Read* (London: Freedom Press, 2007), pp. 44–57; Jerald Zaslove, ‘Herbert Read and Essential Modernism: Or the Loss of an Image of the World’ in David Goodway (ed.) *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), pp. 287–308.

⁷⁹ Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (London, (1951) 2004), p. 14; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1975), p. 29.

⁸⁰ Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 258.

⁸¹ Read, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 304.

⁸² Read, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 304, 309, 308.

ward: in mourning, an idealised past was more of a balm than the queasy disruptions of challenging modernism.⁸³

Again, Read's own work, in spite of his perceived position as the "last modern", shows this process at work.⁸⁴ In the article "The Greatest Work of Art in the World", he recounts a visit Florence on the eve of war in July 1939. With the city pregnant with anticipation at the impending conflict, Read admitted that his "systematic tour of churches and museums, palaces and picture galleries" provided distraction but little satisfaction, until, returning to the Museo Archeologico, he encountered a "small object I had never seen before [...] unlabelled and unhonoured."⁸⁵ This bronze - "the head of a negro boy, probably a slave" - affected Read more deeply than the treasure troves of "High Renaissance" artefacts. As he wrote:

Whatever he was, and whenever he lived, this artist created something without age or epoch, something so elementally simple and fresh that it had the power, in my sophisticated mind, to rouse the highest pleasure and to prompt – as an aftermath – the deepest questionings.

Read over-dramatised this event, but his point was to emphasise the ability of the forgotten craftsman to create an object whose beauty could survive the ages, and sit happily alongside the canonical works of the Renaissance. This democratic vision informed his aesthetic politics, but also demonstrates the retrospective aspect of modernism at work. Rather than emancipation from history, modernists like Read were involved in a creative discussion with the past, and the artistic departures of modernism often gained their impetus from a contact *with* tradition instead of its renunciation. Read's panegyric for the bronze in a dusty Florentine cabinet was an expression of this idea, and, aside from an invitation to think more openly about the criterion of beauty, shows that it is more useful to see modernism in a history of continuity, rather than rupture.

⁸³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸⁴ King, *The Last Modern*.

⁸⁵ Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, p. 1, 2.

Placed in this intellectual context, Read's position on anarchist spirituality becomes clearer. Although he continued to frame both his politics and aesthetics as a product of logic, and saw the essential truth of these theories increasingly revealed by modern science, he equally strove to strike a balance with a sense of the numinous. Concluding *The Contrary Experience*, following a protracted reflection on how the work of the naturalist D'Arcy Thompson and the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead echoed his belief that the laws of art were akin to the laws of nature, Read noted that this language of logic was always tempered in his mind by a fascination with the unknowable:

In this story of the growth of my mind, every advance has been due to the exercise of the faculty of reason; but that advance is not uniform, unimpeded. It abounds in deviations and contradictions: the opposed terms of a dialectical progression. The very bases of reason, the perceptions of an unclouded intellect, are continually [...] contradicted by the creative fictions of the imagination, by a world of illusion no less real than the reality of our quick awareness.⁸⁶

His temporising over the importance of reason versus intuition may make Read's philosophical voice a difficult one to comprehend, but this search for a compromise bears the imprint of a thinker working in an age seeking to come to terms with an unprecedented cataclysm. Just as the spiritual more generally was to undergo something of a renewal in the aftermath of war, so it is possible to read Read's spirituality as a product of the rejection of an essentially Victorian rationalism that impelled Europe on the path to war.⁸⁷ Faith in progress and the boons promised by science, and, importantly, the conquering of political life by adventurous social scientists keen to reshape society in accordance with their observations and measurements, left Read cold. He may have criticised Wells for wasting too much energy ridiculing a Church that was already bankrupt, but underlying this was a belief that the more positive aspects of spiritual communion had

⁸⁶ Read, *The Contrary Experience*, p. 346, 353.

⁸⁷ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, pp. 54–77; Jennifer Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 10: 4 (1999), pp. 404–430.

also been neglected by social thinkers too intent on unmasking the laws that governed society. Mutual aid, Read wrote, might be a demonstrable fact by turning to “biology and history”, but if anarchists lost the “mystique” of this theory they were following a road tramped by positivists and dialectical materialists decades earlier. Their faith in the powers of logic led to the “pretentious” belief that from the “incomplete record of past events” it was possible to deduce a “law of history”, which in turn led to the willing application of force to achieve these apparently predestined ends. To lose sight of the unknowable was a mistake.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Read was not a religious thinker, and distrusted the claims of organised religion. His understanding of spirituality was, in this sense, functional⁸⁹, and its importance rested in its ability to provide communities with strong social bonds, and thereby support a vibrant artistic culture. This rested on a particular sense of the spiritual. It was not defined by a “relationship with a Transcendent Being”, but it certainly did point to practices and habits “informed by a certain spiritual tradition, which fosters a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life”.⁹⁰ It was the promise of a sense of unity and commitment to a common purpose that this revealed that attracted Read, and in railing against a culture that he increasingly saw as moribund, he became interested in the integrative value of spirituality. His was thus not an unqualified acceptance of religion, and Read clung to an interpretation of organised religion that would have been familiar to atheistic nineteenth-century socialists. But in adding a sense of the spiritual to the theory of mutual aid, Read made a significant, and historically revealing, contribution to anarchist thought. While heavily indebted to Kropotkin, the scientific air of nineteenth-century anarchism did not appeal to Read’s artistic temperament. In the process of upholding Kropotkin’s key ideas – clear in his defence of mutual aid

⁸⁸ Read, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 96.

⁸⁹ I am indebted to Alexandre Christoyannopoulos for this point.

⁹⁰ David R. Hodge, ‘Spirituality: Towards a Theoretical Framework’, *Social Thought*, 19: 4 (2000), pp. 1–20 (p. 2)

as a scientifically sound theory – Read nevertheless tried to soften its potentially unforgiving rationalism with a dose of spirituality; a tonic that was also a reminder, in the post-war context, of the dangers of scientific hubris and tidy social thinking.

It was perhaps with a hint of regret that Read confessed that he could never become a “believer” in a simple sense. “And so we come to the spiritual void that opens in my own path”, he wrote, shortly before his death in 1968:

I have read Berdyaev and many other Christian apologists, and have been moved especially by two of them, Kierkegaard and Simone Weil [...] The difficulty I experience with all such Christian apologists is that they rely, for their final argument, on the necessity of grace.⁹¹

Yet, on the next page, Read willingly appropriated the language of theology to insist on the pressing need for radical change. “The present and urgent necessity”, he argued, “is to admit the sickness of man’s soul and take practical measures to cure it.”⁹² While Read clearly lacked any conventional religious faith, it is also apparent that his anarchism was invested with a deep sense of spirituality. Looking forward to an anarchist society in which rich aesthetic sensibility was universal, Read understood art as enabling an existential reflection on the nature of human life, and granting access to the deeper issues of human existence. In short, art would enthuse humanity, understood in the original meaning of the word *enthous* – “possessed by a god”. The conflict between the rational and intuitive was not something Read could solve, and neither did he intend to, rather these poles created a magnetic field that pulsed through his aesthetic politics. And Read was well aware of his equivocation. Examining whether a personal relationship with an idea of God in the manner of Martin Buber or Carl Jung was the solution, he confessed that he had left the permutations of philosophical spirituality frustratingly unexplored, something, he added, that might mask his own lack of conviction.

⁹¹ Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, p. 47.

⁹² Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, p. 48.

“I seem to avoid the final issue”, he concluded, “perhaps [I] have done so all my life.”⁹³

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Revolution as Redemption: Daniel Guérin, Religion and Spirituality

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The contribution of Daniel Guérin (1904–1988) to the ‘rehabilitation’ of anarchism in the 1960s is well known, as is his commitment to anticolonialism and gay liberation. Based on biographical research on Guérin’s early years examining the reasons for his ‘conversion’ to revolutionary politics (given his social origins in the Parisian grande bourgeoisie), this chapter asks to what extent we can say that his political commitments from 1930 onwards were motivated or underlain by religious or spiritual ideas, or represented some kind of political or secular religion. Using unpublished archival sources as well as Guérin’s autobiographical and fictional writings, I examine the various childhood influences on his ethical and spiritual ideas, especially his discovery as a teenager of Tolstoy and his close friendship during the 1920s with the novelist François Mauriac, as evidenced in their correspondence, which makes clear the spiritual crisis Guérin struggled through as he sought to reconcile his concern with sexual liberation, his evident fideistic tendencies, and the reactionary stance of the Catholic church. Moral outrage and guilt over his own privileges led him to seek redemption through a Gandhian ‘religion of service’, putting himself at the service of the Revolution (with a capital R) in order to help the oppressed and exploited achieve liberation. Love (‘fraternity’, ‘mana’) was central to his thinking and to his responses to others’ suffering; for him it was constitutive of what it is to be human and therefore enabled self-realisation through ‘merging with the people’. This faith in Revolution is an aspect of what Gentile calls a ‘religion of humanity’, and of what Aron referred to as a ‘secular religion’ – a doctrine that promises ultimate salvation, but in this world.

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In short, love is the great, the solemn, I would almost say the *only* purpose of humanity.

– Pierre-Joseph Proudhon¹

If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization.

– Mohandas Gandhi²

To what extent can we say that Daniel Guérin's political commitments were motivated or underlain by religious or spiritual ideas, or that they represented some kind of political or secular religion, however defined?³ The impetus for this questioning lies in research conducted on the first three decades of Guérin's life as part of a longer biographical study, research which has thrown light on a surprising side of the young militant's ideas.⁴ Indeed Guérin (1904–1988) is doubtless best known to students of anarchism for his two best-selling 1965 books, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, and the anthology *No Gods, No Masters*, as well as for his later promotion of a synthesis of anarchism and Marxism.⁵

¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques. Philosophie de la misère* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1850), pp. 363–64. All translations are the present author's unless stated otherwise.

² Mohandas Gandhi, *An Autobiography. The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 155. First published 1927–29.

³ These terms first came to be widely used in the 1930s – the period during which Guérin first became politically active – in analyses of Bolshevism, fascism and nazism, and saw aspects of some ideologies and political movements as replacing traditional religions. The concepts are still contested. See Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴ Other aspects of this period in Guérin's life have been examined in greater detail in David Berry, 'Metamorphosis: The Making of Daniel Guérin, 1904–1930', *Modern & Contemporary France* vol. 22, no. 3 (August 2014), 321–42; and Berry, 'From son of the bourgeoisie to servant of the Revolution: The roots of Daniel Guérin's revolutionary socialism', *Moving the Social – Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements* vol. 51 (2014), pp. 283–311.

⁵ *L'Anarchisme, de la doctrine à la pratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1st ed. 1965); translated by Mary Klopper as *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Introduction by Noam Chomsky. *Ni dieu ni maître, anthologie de l'anarchisme* (Lausanne: La Cité-Lausanne, 1st ed. 1965); translated by Paul Sharkey as *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998),

(It is perhaps worth noting in passing that despite the strong tradition of anticlericalism in French anarchism, and the French left generally, Guérin did not include anything concerning religion in his anthology beyond a passing mention of ‘the theological ramblings’ of primitive human societies in an extract from Bakunin’s *God and the State*.⁶) Marxists, especially Trotskyists, admire his *Fascism and Big Business* and his *Class Struggles under the First Republic*.⁷ Others will be more familiar with his campaigns for the liberation of the French colonies from the 1930s onwards, or for homosexual emancipation in the 1960s and against militarism in the 70s and 80s. The purpose of this paper, however, is to focus on one particular aspect of what he described as ‘the unorthodox paths by which a son of the bourgeoisie sought to merge with the people and ultimately to put himself at the service of the Revolution’⁸: what experiences and intellectual influences of a spiritual nature led him to reject bourgeois society in favour of other values—in the process undergoing a series of ‘conversions’.⁹ Prolific though he was, Guérin never devoted any of his writings to religion or spirituality as such, and this will the-

2 vols. See also David Berry, ‘The Search for a Libertarian Communism: Daniel Guérin and the ‘synthesis’ of Marxism and Anarchism’, in *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* ed. by Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta & David Berry (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017), pp. 187–209. For a comprehensive primary and secondary bibliography, see the website of the *Association des Amis de Daniel Guérin* (<http://www.danielguerin.info>).

⁶ *Ni dieu ni maître* (Paris: La Découverte/Syros, 1999 edition), p. 171.

⁷ *Fascisme et grand capital* (Paris: Gallimard, 1st ed. 1936); translated by Frances and Mason Merrill as *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pioneer Press, 1st ed. 1939), introduced by Dwight Macdonald. *La lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793–1797* [*Class Struggle under the First Republic*] (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; revised edition 1968), 2 vols., has never been translated in full.

⁸ Daniel Guérin, *Autobiographie. D’une dissidence sexuelle au socialisme* (Paris: Belfond, 1972), p. 9.

⁹ On this notion of ‘conversions’ and the subsequent production of new life-narratives by the autobiographical subject, see Todd Weir, ‘Between Colonial Violence and Socialist Worldview: The Conversions of Ernst Däumig’, *German History* 28: 2 (2010), 143–66. See also D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

refore be a biographical study based primarily on a close reading of his several autobiographical texts, his fictional works and his private correspondence, as well as other unpublished papers. In the process, I hope to clarify the nature and roots of his later political positions and more specifically their ethical, philosophical or spiritual foundations. For as Orwell said of the examination of his own formative influences:

I give all this background information because I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in — at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own — but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape.¹⁰

Family background

To a large extent, the story of Guérin's adoption of the cause of the oppressed was to be coterminous with his growing determination to reject all ties with his own class, the *grande bourgeoisie*. Nevertheless, it becomes clear on reading Guérin's autobiographies and from interviews that Guérin's politics and more general outlook on life owed much to the influence of his branch of the family: humanist, liberal and cultured, both his parents had been 'passionately pro-Dreyfus' – in other words, republican, antinationalist and antiracist.¹¹ Daniel's father, Marcel Guérin, had in his youth served at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel—the original university 'settlement house' of the so-called 'settlement movement', which welcomed graduates who volunteered to teach and to do social work in poor urban areas. Marcel published a report on his visit in the newsletter of the *Musée Social*: Daniel's personal papers contain a copy bearing the handwritten dedication: 'To my dear son Daniel to give him a

¹⁰ George Orwell, 'Why I Write' (1946), in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 1— *An Age Like This 1945–1950* (London: Penguin, 1970); also available at: http://orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw.

¹¹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 10 & 16.

taste for social questions.¹² This exposure to the situation of the working class in London's East End had prompted Marcel to read, amongst others, Marx, Proudhon and Kropotkin, and especially Tolstoy. The Tolstoyan influence was strong on the mother's side of the family too: a 'consummate polyglot', Daniel's great-grandmother had translated two of Tolstoy's novels into French.¹³

These Tolstoyan tendencies were evident at the time of the Great War, when the young Daniel's feelings of incomprehension and revulsion at the killing and the suffering were shared by his 'antimilitarist' father: 'the absurd slaughter disgusted him to the point of nausea.'¹⁴ Invited to participate in some propaganda work designed to boost national morale, Marcel Guérin refused outright, writing afterwards to a friend: 'I confess I suffered an attack of anarchism. It's my old Jacobin blood boiling from time to time.'¹⁵ But these pacifist leanings would resurface periodically, with news of further pointless mass slaughters provoking in him, in his own words, 'upsurges of antimilitarism and of anarchism'.¹⁶

Guérin's mother and grandmother signed up with the Red Cross and served as nurses. Accompanying his mother, Daniel witnessed with his own eyes some of the horrific injuries of the soldiers – including the last moments of a German prisoner of war who became for him no longer an 'Alboche' (an older form of the pejorative term 'Boche'), but 'just a man, a man who was dying in the convulsions of tetanus'. Like many others, Daniel also 'adopted' a soldier with whom he corresponded and to whom he sent parcels, meeting him when he came home on leave. His

¹² *Bulletin mensuel du Musée Social* 12, série B (30 August 1897). I am grateful to Anne Guérin for giving me access to this and other papers of her father's. See also Janet R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 15. On 'Tolstoyism' in France, see F.W.J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel in France, 1884–1914* (Oxford University Press, 1950).

¹⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 68 & 63.

¹⁵ Quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 64.

guilty feelings grew at leading ‘the life of a prince, far too pleasant, too easy, too protected, too spoiled’.¹⁷

Towards the end of the Great War, the fourteen year old Daniel dedicated a poem to his father, ‘Pendant qu’ils se tuaient...’ [‘While they were killing each other...’], which evoked a feeling of profound incomprehension in the face of the serene calm and beauty of the scenes of nature and of everyday life around him, ‘When all the universe resounds with suffering, When man, stupefied, loses hope.’¹⁸ Many years later, reading his father’s correspondence from this period would make Daniel realize how much his own attitudes owed to ‘this simmering anarcho-pacifism’,¹⁹ and in the 1970s he would be a prominent figure in antimilitarist campaigns. ‘At the age of 80’, he would write in an introduction to the memoirs of the anti-war syndicalist François Mayoux, ‘I can say that [...] the hatred of war, the struggle against war have been the visceral passion of my own life.’²⁰

On the Church and reading Tolstoy

Guérin was raised in the Catholic Church, albeit not particularly devoutly. In his autobiography he refers to his parents’ ‘vague Jansenism, an attitude which was more moral than religious’²¹, and many years later in an interview with the philosopher and journalist Christian Chabanis he would comment that his grandfather had been an atheist, his father had been ‘completely irreligious’, and although his mother had taken him to mass on Sundays it was largely ‘a society religion’.²² Be that as it may, in 1915 Daniel took his first communion, and the following year he

¹⁷ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 62.

¹⁸ Guérin, *Le Livre de la dix-huitième année* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1922), pp. 56–58.

¹⁹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 64.

²⁰ Marie & François Mayoux, *Instituteurs pacifistes et syndicalistes. Mémoires de F. Mayoux* (Chamalières: Editions Canope, 1992), p. 12.

²¹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 73. Jansenism emphasised humanity’s sinfulness and the necessity of divine grace.

²² Interview in Christian Chabanis, *Dieu existe-t-il? Non* (Paris: Fayard, 1973), pp. 222–3. A companion volume – *Dieu existe? Oui* – was published in 1979.

was sent to a Catholic school, the *Ecole Bossuet*, though whilst still taking classes at *lycée* (that is to say that the priests took their wards to *lycée* in the morning and brought them back in the afternoon before delivering them to their families at seven in the evening after religious instruction).²³ The repeated religious exercises, the sumptuous ceremonies, the candles and the incense induced in Guérin an ‘attack of mysticism’ and he experienced a taste, he claimed, of ‘what believers call the spiritual life’.²⁴ The feeling and the certainty would not, however, last for long: ‘I was not really gifted for the supernatural.’²⁵ Indeed, so negative was the impression made on him by the authoritarianism and the hypocrisy of the priests themselves at the *Ecole Bossuet* that the experience seems to have contributed to his loss of faith and the beginnings of his lifelong anticlericalism.

The real ‘crisis’, as the young Guérin experienced it, would occur soon afterwards. Whilst turning him away from institutionalised religion in some respects, the *Ecole Bossuet* had nevertheless instilled in him ‘something of a tendency towards belief’.²⁶ In the interview with Chabanis about the existence of god he would talk about the ‘passionate dialogues’ he held with Jesus during his year at the school: ‘For me, Jesus was a human incarnation, a human being whom I adored and to whom I spoke.’²⁷ But at the age of fourteen, Guérin definitively lost not only his belief in the Catholic Church but his faith in Christianity itself on reading his mother’s copy of Tolstoy’s diaries:

At first, this book inspired no mistrust on my part, as it was the work of a Christian, of a believer in search of true Christianity, the work what’s more of a social apostle of whose teachings my father had, at one time in his life, been a follower. And yet this book spoke a language which I had never before heard. It cast doubt on the absolute truth of the myths and beliefs brought forth by human societies of the most diverse epochs and origins. [...] Tolstoy brought into question my entire upbringing. Evil arises, according

²³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 64.

²⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 72.

²⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 72.

²⁶ Chabanis, *Dieu existe-t-il? Non*, p. 221.

²⁷ Chabanis, *Dieu existe-t-il? Non*, p. 223.

to him, from the fact that I attached too little importance to reason. It is the fruit of the false education which I had been given since my childhood. [...] The first thing I had to achieve was my religious emancipation. [...] I gave myself without reserve to Tolstoy.²⁸

But having accepted Tolstoy's critique of the Church and its teachings, Guérin found that his faith as a whole was undermined. His response was to throw himself into the study of theology, philosophy and even the physiology of the brain. His mother, in whom he confided regarding this spiritual crisis, promptly arranged for him to meet the eminent priest and historian of the Church's teachings, Monseigneur Pierre Batiffol. He and Guérin had interminable philosophical discussions, but these changed nothing – largely because, as Guérin writes, he came to the conclusion that 'this overly philosophical bishop had no more faith than I did': 'His arguments were so Cartesian, so scientific, so materialist, that he actually confirmed me in the decision I had taken to abandon my religious faith.'²⁹

Guérin continued nevertheless to read Tolstoy, and his novel *Resurrection* made a particular impression – 'perhaps because of the passionate attack on an iniquitous society', he comments in his autobiography.³⁰ One cannot help however but be struck by certain parallels with Guérin's own life: *Resurrection* recounts the moral and spiritual crisis of a cosseted and self-centred young aristocrat caused by his discovery of the suffering of the poor, and his subsequent determination to reject his own class and the artificiality of society in order to help the oppressed, no matter the cost to himself...

The Pagan and the Catholic

In 1922, Guérin had managed to pluck up the courage to take a collection of his poems written since 1918, *Le Livre de la Dix-Huitième Année*, to a publisher. Strongly influenced by Baudelaire amongst others, they bore witness to the depth of Guérin's emo-

²⁸ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 80–1.

²⁹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 81–2; Chabanis, *Dieu existe-t-il? Non*, p. 222.

³⁰ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 94–5.

tional life and the anguish caused by the conflict between the yearning for platonic love and that for sensuality—‘the tyranny of the organs’ as Proudhon put it³¹. Guérin was delighted to receive encouraging letters from a number of prominent literary figures, including Maurice Barrès and François Mauriac. Barrès was a novelist, journalist and right-wing politician who had been one of the leading figures in the anti-Dreyfus camp. He held complex and contradictory views with regard to both politics and religious belief; his novels were extremely influential on younger generations of writers in the inter-war years, including Mauriac, and Guérin was also an admirer.³² Guérin first met Mauriac – who would be made a member of the Académie Française in 1933, but was already a successful novelist by this time – the following year, and the two got on immediately. Mauriac was particularly attracted to the rebellious spirit and demanding intelligence of this ‘young pagan’.³³ In him, Mauriac recognised ‘at once his double and his opposite at the same age: a young, marginal and rebellious bourgeois, but one who was much more radical and emancipated in his way of living, of being and of thinking.’³⁴

At first, Mauriac took seriously his role as guardian or mentor, responding to Guérin’s assertion that he needed Mauriac: ‘It is true that I can fulfil for you what the adolescent Barrès wished for: ‘a friend who would be an older version of myself’’, he wrote. ‘I know you to the extent that I know myself and I hear what you do not say.’³⁵ Yet interestingly, in the same letter, Mauriac

³¹ Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques*, p. 363.

³² See *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1995) and R. Gibson, ‘The First World War and the Literary Consciousness’, in *French Literature and its Background*, ed. by John Cruickshank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), vol. 6, pp. 56–72.

³³ François Mauriac, letter to his wife, quoted in Jean-Luc Barré, *François Mauriac: Biographie intime*, vol. 1: 1885–1940 (Paris: Fayard, 2009), p. 380.

³⁴ Barré, *François Mauriac*, p. 380.

³⁵ François Mauriac, letter to Daniel Guérin, 19 November 1924, in François Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres d’une vie (1906–70)*, ed. by Caroline Mauriac (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1989), p. 99; also quoted in Barré, *François Mauriac*, p. 381.

also contrasted his own adolescent rejection of all constraint with what he perceived to be Guérin's nature, comparing him to the quasi-mystical, nationalist writer Ernest Psichari, who rejected what he saw as the decadence of *Belle Époque* society and had converted to Catholicism in 1913:

And you, on the contrary, my dear child of the Left [...], you are also, without realising it, a little brother to Psichari, made to obey and to command, infused with the passionate desire to enter a religious *order*.³⁶

Guérin quickly became the only person to whom Mauriac felt able to confess his deepest and most troubling feelings, and the profound emotional and spiritual crisis through which Mauriac was going at the time led in a short time to a reversal of roles between the two men.³⁷ The following year, Guérin started what was to be a long correspondence with Mauriac. He began it with a nostalgic letter about his loss of faith: 'An unconsolable mystic, that's what I am, you know. And yet more distant from God than ever'; 'Believers are happier than we are'.³⁸ The believer Mauriac, in reply, attempted to console him and encourage faith and moral steadfastness.

'...But something is always lacking in our hearts...', it is you who wrote this, my dear friend—and that is a humble reason to fall to our knees—a very humble reason, and yet one which remains for me, after so many years of doubt, anguish and desolation, the most effective. That hunger for a joy without shadow, that hunger for God survives within me despite all the disappointments, all the

³⁶ Ibid; emphasis in the original. On Psichari, see France, *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* and Gibson, 'The First World War and the Literary Consciousness'.

³⁷ It would be thanks to information divulged by Guérin in an interview many years later, that it would first become widely known that Mauriac had enjoyed homosexual relationships. See 'Entretien avec Daniel Guérin', in *Paris Gay 1925*, ed. by Gilles Barbedette and Michel Carassou (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1981), pp. 43–55.

³⁸ Undated letter to F. Mauriac [1924], Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Ms40251; Letter of 25 April 1924, in François Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres*, pp. 92–93.

errors, and, as I advance towards the end, it is in that hunger, that spiritual instinct, which I trust.³⁹

But how, Guérin objected, can one practise a religion which claims to be in the service of the poor and yet which for centuries has been an instrument of oppression in the hands of the powerful? What is more, he argued, it is religion which sullies physical love, ‘the healthiest and most natural act’, by imprinting upon it ‘the stigmata of Sin.’⁴⁰ Mauriac’s response was to insist that ‘it is not religion which attaches something tragic to the flesh, this tragic aspect is there in reality, and one has to be blind not to see it’; and a part of Guérin seems to have shared this feeling that the ‘frenzy of the baser instincts’ undermined the ‘purity’ and ‘nobility’ of which humankind is capable.⁴¹ This conversation between the two would be repeated in one form or another for some time and would never be resolved. For Guérin, Mauriac ‘needed to believe, above all, in order to escape from temptation’; he himself, on the other hand, needed to overcome ‘the strange resistance which, since puberty, has prevented me, at every attempt, from taking the plunge.’ With hindsight, he concluded that he and Mauriac ‘did not speak the same language, we have completely opposite problems to solve.’⁴² Thirty years later – shortly before coming out – Guérin would argue strongly that sexual liberation was but one aspect of the quest for human freedom in general: ‘If we wish to make free men, we must *disalienate* the Flesh, not repress it.’⁴³ So despite Guérin’s fideistic tendencies – what Le Bon saw as an instinctual ‘need to submit oneself to a divine, political or social faith’⁴⁴ – he rejected the Catholic religion, at least, because of its hostility to sex and in particular to homosexuality.

³⁹ F. Mauriac, letter to D. Guérin of 25 April 1924, in *Nouvelles lettres d'une vie*.

⁴⁰ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 139.

⁴¹ Letter of 2 March 1926, in François Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres*, p. 106.

⁴² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 139.

⁴³ Guérin, *Shakespeare et Gide en correctionnelle? Essai* (Paris: Editions du Scorpion, 1959), p. 10.

⁴⁴ Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie du socialisme* (Paris, 1920), quoted in Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 6.

Towards the end of 1924, during his military service and after being tormented by his confused and confusing emotional and sexual needs for several years, Guérin finally found happiness in an affectionate (albeit sexually unconsummated) relationship with a sergeant from a different unit: ‘So, I was no longer a monster, a pariah. I was receiving my share of joy, like every living being. [...] In Strasbourg, I was beginning to live.’⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he still struggled with feelings of guilt. A rather allusive letter to Mauriac provoked a fervent reply from the Catholic urging him to resist the temptations of the flesh created by his ‘appetite for tenderness’, so that he might ‘live’. Looking back, Guérin comments: ‘Yes, I certainly wanted to live. But in order to live at last, I had first to stop resisting the call of my very *nature*, and cease listening to the paralysing interdict imposed by religion.’⁴⁶

Point of departure: the divine need to love

In the autumn of 1925, two texts appeared which Guérin had written during his military service. The first, entitled ‘Point de Départ’, was published in the literary magazine, the *Revue Hebdomadaire*, with an introduction by Mauriac (who had advised Guérin on a first draft). It is in some ways characteristic of the kind of ‘generationalist’ writing – to use Wohl’s term⁴⁷ – which appeared in this period, and the humanist’s malaise to which it gives voice chimes with that of other intellectuals who had lived through

⁴⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 154.

⁴⁶ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ See Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); Gibson, ‘The First World War and the Literary Consciousness’; Mary Jean Green, ‘Visions of Death and Dissolution’, in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 850–5. The notion of ‘generation’ is of course not unproblematic, as Nora comments in the first sentence of a discussion of the history of the concept: ‘It is difficult to think of a notion that has become more commonplace yet at the same time more opaque than that of ‘generation’.’ ‘Generation’ in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory. The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 499–531.

the Great War and its aftermath.⁴⁸ The tone of bewilderment and disillusion is reminiscent of Paul Valéry's 1919 essay, 'La Crise de l'esprit' ['The Crisis of the Spirit'], which conjures the image of 'an intellectual Hamlet meditating on the life and the death of the verities'⁴⁹; or of André Malraux's *La Tentation de l'Occident* [*The Temptation of the West*] (1926), which concludes: 'There are no ideals to which we can sacrifice ourselves, for we know all their lies, we who do not know what is truth.'⁵⁰ Underlining the extraordinary situation of his own generation (who unlike Wohl's 'generation of 1914' had been too young to experience the war directly, but grew up with its consequences), Guérin emphasises the significance of the rupture represented by the Great War.⁵¹ He also attacks not only the complacency of pre-war Europe's belief in the solidity of its 'old idols' – its political institutions, its colonial conquests and its liberal economy – but also the responsibility of earlier generations for the catastrophe of 1914. Writing in 1938, the Italian philosopher Adriano Tilgher would use the concept of the numinous to interpret the various secular religions which appeared after the Great War and 'through which Western Civilization attempted to fill the vacuum left in the spirit by the decline of Christianity'.⁵² Guérin drew on the Indian writer and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore to question the value of the merely material advantages of modern capitalism: 'But what of the mind, what of the need for love?' With the decline of religious belief, he asks, 'what nourishment is left to us? In the depths of the eyes of each of our contemporaries, we can read utter dissatisfaction, thirst,

⁴⁸ See Gibson, 'The First World War and the Literary Consciousness', pp. 56–72.

⁴⁹ Paul Valéry, 'La Crise de l'esprit', first published in *Variété* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/La_Crise_de_l'_E2%80%99esprit

⁵⁰ Quoted in Gibson, 'The First World War and the Literary Consciousness', p. 66.

⁵¹ On the generation of intellectuals born in 1905, see Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: khagheux et normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

⁵² Quoted in Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 10. Gentile (p.1) defines secular religions as 'ideologies and ideals that intended to replace traditional metaphysical religion with new humanist concepts that created a cult of humanity, history, nation and society.'

emptiness.⁵³ And yet criticism of Guérin's fatalism by Mauriac, and the advice not to simply curse life but to illuminate it and strive to change it had an effect: 'This lesson, which at the age of 21 I had been unable to draw by myself, did not fall on deaf ears.'⁵⁴

The Magic of Good Friday

The second text to appear in 1925 was Guérin's first novel, *L'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint* [*The Magic of Good Friday*], whose main purpose he described as being to 'come to terms, this time through the transparent veil of a fiction, with the dramas of tenderness and of unsatisfied desire which had poisoned my youth.'⁵⁵ But there is an evident spiritual theme in the novel too. The story's central character Armand is tormented by the conflict between reason, the passions and 'the divine need to love'.⁵⁶ At a moment of crisis in the story, he turns to the Jansenist philosopher Blaise Pascal, and reads:

What is it then that this desire and this inability proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.⁵⁷

'Such words', Armand notes, 'are enough to turn a man's life upside down.' Soon after, he attends a performance of Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, which, despite its Christian symbolism, has at its heart a number of Buddhist ideas (a result of Wagner's reading of Schopenhauer): the 'pain of untamed desire', freedom through self-abnegation, and enlightenment through self-denying

⁵³ Guérin, 'Point de départ', *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 43 (24 October 1925), 457–68 (introduction by Mauriac pp. 457–58); extracts also quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 156–9.

⁵⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 160; *L'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1925).

⁵⁶ Guérin, *L'Enchantement*, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), no. 425.

compassion and service. The title of Guérin's novel is a reference to the 'Karfreitagszauber', the 'magic of Good Friday' which, in the climactic scene in the final act of *Parsifal*, renews the world and redeems humankind, now freed from its burden of sin. Whilst still resistant to the Church's theological dogmas (despite his best efforts to rediscover an orthodox faith), Armand had nevertheless found a kind of grace and a way forward.

Unknown lands: the road to Damascus

In 1927 Guérin would embark on a life-changing episode when he was offered the job of running the Syrian-Lebanese branch of the Agence Générale de Librairie, a subsidiary of Hachette, the family business. As Mauriac wrote to him on hearing the news, it would be exactly the kind of 'break' in Guérin's life that he needed.⁵⁸ For Guérin, tiring of a life in which 'physical satiation' – thanks to a string of sexual partners – had begun to take too large a place, this opportunity was to be a welcome 'leap into the unknown':

This journey was going to take me much further than the Levant. Although I did not know it at the time, I was leaving behind me not just the bosom of my family, but other shores as well: bourgeois society and Europe. I was setting a course for a succession of unknown lands: the Orient, Islam, Asia, decolonisation and, beyond, socialism.⁵⁹

During his time in Beirut, the person who most profoundly affected Guérin was Louis Massignon, a professor at the *Collège de France* (the most prestigious academic institution in France) and an expert on Islam and sufism. Described by Guérin as a mystic, Massignon had come to his 'fervent' Roman Catholicism through his researches into Arab mystics, having written a thesis on sufism:

Whilst, objectively, his project was decolonisation, as one would say nowadays, his subjective purpose was to build a bridge between

⁵⁸ Letter of 9 September 1927, in Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres d'une vie*, p. 116.

⁵⁹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 178 & 183.

Christianity and Islam. [...] In his ardent youth, in Morocco, he had become enamoured of the muslims.⁶⁰

Indeed, Guérin's representation of his life in the Levant was of a contrast between these two different worlds between which he slipped 'without transition'. He had one foot in Beirut, leading the usual, 'worthless' life of a privileged member of the French expatriate community; the other foot was in Damascus, 'at the heart of Islam', a life which included on one occasion, attendance at an all night ceremony of the sufi Aissawa sect, with its ecstatic rhythms and mystic whirling dervishes.⁶¹ Guérin became more and more attracted to Islam, reading the Koran with great diligence and listening enthralled to descriptions of Mecca and tales of the English Arabist and muslim convert St. John Philby, recounted by the French consul in Saudi Arabia. 'Islam is more than a religion: it is half of the universe', he wrote to his father. And in his autobiography he remarked: 'I had a weakness for this religion without priests – just as, a little later, I would be attracted to Buddhism, a religion without gods.'⁶² Around the same time, according to a remark made by Mauriac in a letter to Guérin, the latter had also become interested in Jacques Maritain, the philosopher who was moved to convert to Catholicism because of his disenchantment with 'scientism' and who would publish *Primauté du spirituel* [*The Superiority of the Spiritual*] in 1927, before going on in later years to formulate a Christian humanism not dissimilar to Emmanuel Mounier's 'personalism'.⁶³

A visit from Guérin's father was the occasion for a trip round Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. Guérin's impressions of Jerusalem are interesting, initial disappointment being effaced by 'the pure antinomic jewels of two arts and two beliefs: the

⁶⁰ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 191; Guérin, *Ci-gît le colonialisme* (Paris: Mouton la Haye, 1973), p. 11.

⁶¹ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 196.

⁶² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 199.

⁶³ Letter of 2 March 1926, in Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres d'une vie*, p. 105. See Anthony Levi, 'Jacques Maritain' and François Nectoux, 'Emmanuel Mounier', in *Encyclopedia of Modern French Thought* ed. by Christopher John Murray (New York & London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), pp. 458–60 & 490–1.

Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Mosque of Omar. Which to prefer? Christianity? Islam?’⁶⁴ These words would seem to suggest more than issues of aesthetic and architectural taste. One is reminded of comments made by the novelist *cum* travel writer Pierre Loti at the end of his account of a journey to the ruined temples of Angkor in Cambodia—a book we know Guérin read and enjoyed:

So many places of intense adoration which I have come across on my path and which all correspond to a particular form of human anguish, so many pagodas, so many mosques, so many cathedrals, where the same prayer rises from the most diverse of souls!⁶⁵

Guérin spent the early summer of 1928 editing and to some extent researching and writing the *Guide bleu* for Syria (*Blue Guides* being the tourist guidebooks published by Hachette since the mid-nineteenth century). This was an onerous task, but an enlightening and fulfilling one. It led him to study, amongst many other sources on the region’s ancient history, art and religion, Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* – first published in 1890 and the first comparative study of religions and myths from an anthropological point of view – and *Les Mystères païens et le Mystère chrétien* [*The Pagan Mysteries and the Christian Mystery*] (1919) by Alfred Loisy – a Catholic theologian and a professor at the Collège de France who was a modernist (in Catholic terms) and was excommunicated in 1908: ‘It was the history of religions which, in that period, most excited my irreligious curiosity.’⁶⁶

A value to replace the flesh

Something else on which Guérin worked hard in Beirut was a second novel, *La Vie selon la chair*, which was finally published at the beginning of 1929.⁶⁷ The title of the book – ‘Life according to the flesh’ – is a biblical reference: ‘For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of

⁶⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 200.

⁶⁵ Pierre Loti, *Un Pèlerin d’Angkor* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1912), pp. 228–9.

⁶⁶ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 202.

⁶⁷ *La Vie selon la chair* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1929).

the body, ye shall live' (Romans 8:13, King James Version). In it, Guérin gave vent to what he called his 'carnal tempests'.⁶⁸ A psychological novel, it follows the intertwined emotional lives of four characters. A number of themes are developed through the novel: the emotional and sexual anxieties of puberty, seen especially through the homosexual Hubert's growing awareness of his own 'singularity'; feelings of exclusion from a happiness shared by others; innocence lost and the guilt caused by the conflict between sensual desire and the young men's moral and religious education; 'nausea' in the face of the 'void', the meaninglessness of existence, and the ways in which different characters try to disguise this reality (amoral indulgence in sensual pleasures, meaningless but socially approved routines...); the realisation that, despite our belief in free will, our lives are largely out of our control; and the impossibility of ever really understanding or communicating with others: 'Humankind [...] seemed like a bizarre ensemble of incomplete beings, of ambiguous individuals incomprehensible to themselves.'⁶⁹

The novel's publication caused something of a brouhaha at home. This is not surprising, given the fairly grim picture the novel paints of four lost souls struggling to find happiness in a decadent, cynical, meaningless and sexually promiscuous society. It is also explicit for its time (although the treatment of homosexuality is relatively muted). Guérin's family was horrified. Mauriac, in whose novels the bestiality of sex is a recurrent theme, wrote to his young *confidant*: 'Life according to the flesh – life according to the spirit: one has to choose.'⁷⁰ And yet in a sense the novel is in fact extremely moral. A recurrent theme is the characters' constant attempts to find meaning and a new direction in life, the need to make choices about what course to follow, the need in fact for self-discipline: the end of the story inconclusively leaves the three main characters on the threshold of new departures, searching for 'a value able to replace the flesh.'⁷¹

⁶⁸ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Guérin, *La Vie selon la chair*, p. 208.

⁷⁰ Letter quoted in Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 211.

⁷¹ Guérin, *La Vie selon la chair*, p. 279.

Guérin was deeply hurt by what seemed to him to be savage and unfair attacks on the novel, and the experience led him to want to break with his family and, he added, ‘with myself.’⁷² Combined with his ever growing taste for exploring Africa and Asia, this rejection also helped alienate him from France. Indeed Guérin’s preferred reading in this period concerned the history of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, as well as books on the Buddha – whose teachings fascinated him by virtue of their focus on ‘the extinction of identity in Nirvana, beatitude through deliverance from the passions’.⁷³ He now proposed to devote a three month retreat in the Far East to studying the political, economic and social questions which he had not yet been able to examine in any depth. He left again for Marseille and, on 23 December 1929, without notifying his parents, set sail for the Far East aboard the cargo boat, *Bangkok* – which, ironically, was carrying munitions for the French expeditionary forces in the colonies in Indochina.

On a slow boat to Indochina

The *Bangkok* was a freighter, not a passenger-ship, and he was given ‘a minuscule cabin, which was very uncomfortable, but for me heavenly’.⁷⁴ Like a monk in his cell, he devoted himself to the intense, solitary study of a small library of books on Marxism, syndicalism, anarchism, colonialism and pacifism, but also of Asian religions, reading and re-reading them, taking reams of notes, and scribbling approving or critical comments on them:

Why on earth had I taken Marx’s *Capital*, Kautsky’s *The Social Revolution* and *Socialist Programme*, *La révolution défigurée* by Trotsky, *Les Réflexions sur la violence* by Georges Sorel, Gandhi’s autobiography, and books about Proudhon, Jaurès, Lenin, India and China, on American imperialism, on Soviet Russia, labourism and syndicalism? Today I struggle in vain to recollect the origin of such a sudden and multifarious curiosity.⁷⁵

⁷² Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 212.

⁷³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, pp. 213–14.

⁷⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 217.

⁷⁵ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 218. Guérin’s reading notes are in the IISH, Amsterdam, Daniel Guérin Papers, Box 1, Folder 62. Subsequent

The effort exhausted him:

I was banging my head against a certain number of walls. My approaches towards socialism were littered with stumbling blocks and dilemmas. Socialism from above (Leninism) or from below (revolutionary syndicalism)? Marxist class struggle or Tolstoyan ‘love’ and Gandhist non-violence? For or against Stalin’s Russia? For or against the Communist Party? For or against anarchism? The tension nearly made my head explode.⁷⁶

An examination of Guérin’s notes from this reading provides us with some insights into his political and ethical thinking at this point in his life, shortly before his experiences in Indochina would trigger a radical change in his life. The first thing to note is that Guérin’s retrospective description of this episode as representing his ‘apprenticeship in Marxism’ seems misleading, or at least too simple.⁷⁷ I have analysed his political views at this point elsewhere, but with regard to the focus of the present paper, a number of things are striking.⁷⁸

Comradeship and moral rectitude

Firstly, there is a strong and repeated emphasis both on personal moral rectitude and on an ethic of comradely solidarity between socialists of all shades of opinion. Ideological correctness is not sufficient: it is important to be ‘an upright man [*un homme droit*]’, and ‘at bottom, political history is explained much more by differences of character than by differences of ideas.’⁷⁹ One might detect here the influence of Mauriac, who in his introduction to Guérin’s ‘Point de départ’ had remarked on the dogmatism and sectarianism of French politics:

references to these notes will give just the sleeve number (in Roman numerals) within this folder.

⁷⁶ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 221.

⁷⁷ Coversheet attached to file, IISH, Box 1, Folder 62; and Guérin, *A la recherche d’un communisme libertaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 1984), p. 9.

⁷⁸ See Berry, ‘Metamorphosis’.

⁷⁹ XVII: ‘La ligne droite du socialisme’.

The highest privilege of the novelist is that in these times of democracy, in which all of us live within the walls of a party, nobody reproaches him for his incursions between the lines and even as far as the enemy camp; there he learns that from one field to another, the motivations for human actions hardly vary. The novelist is exempt from the hate which the passion for the public good nowadays lights in the heart of the best of us [...].⁸⁰

As a consequence, one of his main criticisms of the Russian bolsheviks, despite his admiration for Lenin and Trotsky, was that they seemed to him to be so driven by malice and hatred:

Beware of hatred, which defiles the soul. And if we fight what must be fought, let it be on the basis of Love, in the light of Love. [...] Too much hate. The cause is too beautiful, too irresistibly just, to be mixed up with so much hate.⁸¹

The refusal of such dogmatism and sectarianism, and respect for the opinions of those with whom one disagrees, would certainly always be one of the characteristics of Guérin's political practice.

The spiritual ideal

Secondly, 'idealism', Guérin insisted, is an essential part of revolutionary politics, and much of his reading notes concerned not just the importance to socialism of idealism and morality, but also religion or spirituality. Reading Gandhi immediately after Sorel prompted him to comment on the superiority of the former in that Gandhism always held up 'a spiritual ideal at the end of its action' (although he did concede that "direct action" through non-violence has not shown itself to be entirely effective').⁸² He also

⁸⁰ *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 43 (24 October 1925), p. 458.

⁸¹ XIV: Notes on Pierre Chasles, *La Vie de Lénine* (1929). Capitalisation in the original.

⁸² III: Notes on *Le message révolutionnaire de Gandhi*. When Gandhi visited Paris in 1931, Guérin wrote a very sympathetic report for the fortnightly syndicalist magazine *La Révolution prolétarienne*, and the following month published Gandhi's answers to a questionnaire Guérin had submitted to him through Romain Rolland, who hosted Gandhi's visit: 'Gandhi à Paris', December 1931; 'Gandhi et la lutte de classes.

read *Unto This Last* (1862) by the English art critic and social reformer John Ruskin, a critique, based on a biblical parable, of the dominant economic ideas of the time, the reading of which in South Africa had prompted Gandhi to transform his way of life. Guérin also read Tolstoy's letters to Gandhi, as well as his *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893) — a book which also had a powerful influence on Gandhi's evolution towards non-violence.⁸³ Guérin directed some of his more impassioned criticisms at Trotsky for what seemed to him to be the casual acceptance of violence: 'Terrible. No, I refuse to believe that it will be in an immense pool of blood that we should build the edifice of the new social order.'⁸⁴

Guérin accepted that Tolstoy could be somewhat fashionable with the bourgeoisie, as it was unthreatening and seemed (to some at least) to require little action in comparison with Marxism; nevertheless, 'there is in Tolstoy and in Gandhi, his spiritual son,' he insisted, 'a precious light which can illumine Marxism and extend it in Love [*le prolonger dans l'Amour*].'⁸⁵ Guérin's notes also include the plan for a book entitled *La Ligne Droite du Socialisme* (literally *The Straight Line of Socialism*, although 'droit' also has ethical connotations), which includes a proposed chapter on 'Gandhism beyond Marxism'.⁸⁶

Guérin continued to study Asian civilisations, reading amongst other works René Guénon's *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* and Emile Hovelacque's study of China. Of what he called 'the Orient', Guérin wrote:

Un entretien avec Gandhi et Romain Rolland', January 1932. Available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

⁸³ Leo Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom Of God Is Within You.' *Christianity Not As A Mystic Religion But As A New Theory Of Life* (New York, 1894; translation by Constance Garnett). First published in French as *Le Salut est en vous* (Paris: Perrin, 1893). See Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 136.

⁸⁴ XV: Notes on Léon Trotsky, *La Révolution défigurée* (1929).

⁸⁵ XIII: Notes on Luc Durtain, *L'Autre Europe: Moscou et sa foi* (1928). See also Marie-France Latronche, *L'influence de Gandhi en France de 1919 à nos jours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); and, for the argument in favour of seeing Gandhism as a form of non-violent anarchism, Manuel Cervera-Marzal, 'Gandhi: de l'antilibéralisme à l'anarchisme non-violent', in *Réfractations*, 28 (May 2012), pp. 128–45.

⁸⁶ XVII.

Its spiritual civilisation can enrich us, bring us back to simplicity and to charity, which we have long forgotten. [...] All of humanity will one day drink from the same spiritual sources, in fraternity.⁸⁷

The idea that a fulfilling human life cannot be achieved through an exclusive emphasis on merely material benefits or physical enjoyment recurs in Guérin's notes with some frequency, and was a belief expressed both with regard to some socialists' understanding of the 'good life' and to the developing consumer society under twentieth-century capitalism – as in this outburst provoked by a book on the contemporary USA: 'It is the final triumph of matter over spirit, the death of all inner life and of all spirituality. This is where we must listen to the lesson of the Orient, and reply to the businessman with Gandhi.'⁸⁸ (Despite his antiracism, Guérin was not immune to the essentialising exoticism characteristic of many European writers.⁸⁹) Although Guérin notes explicitly his agreement with the Marxist view of the social role of religion as the opium of the people (in the sense that it taught the proletariat to be patient and simply content themselves with asking for alms, in Guérin's view), he was worried about Marxism's seemingly exclusive emphasis on the *material* advantages of socialism:

This is the terrible danger, the only danger of Marxism – Constantly to announce a *material* paradise is not to raise man up, but to cast him down even lower. *We must regard sufficient material well-being as nothing more than the simple and necessary precondition of intellectual and spiritual development.*⁹⁰

Guérin was of course not alone on the left in finding Marxism spiritually inadequate, and many of his comments echo the ideas of those such as Ernst Bloch for whom Marxism was 'insufficiently utopian'.⁹¹ Nor is this a question which seems to have concerned

⁸⁷ IX: Notes on Emile Hovelacque, *La Chine* (1920).

⁸⁸ X: Notes on Octave Homberg, *L'Impérialisme américain* (1929).

⁸⁹ See Kate Marsh, 'Gandhi and *le gandhisme*: Writing Indian Decolonisation and the Appropriation of Gandhi 1919–48', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 14: 1 (2006), 33–47.

⁹⁰ XX: Notes on É. Vandervelde, *Jaurès* (1929). Emphases in the original.

⁹¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth, and Dissolution*, vol. 3: *The Breakdown* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978),

Guérin only in his 20s. In 1945, he wrote a congratulatory letter to the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone after reading *The Seed Beneath the Snow*:

I do not know how to find the words to describe to you the profound impression the novel has made on me. [...] What struck me above all is that your book is on the borderline between Catholic spiritualism and Marxist materialism. I do not believe anybody else combines in himself these two conceptions of the world.⁹²

Indeed Guérin thought so highly of the novel that in 1961 he adapted it for the stage.⁹³

The folder of Guérin's reading notes also contains a cutting from the review *Monde* about Hendrik de Man, a social psychologist at the University of Frankfurt – where he was a colleague of Karl Mannheim and Max Horkheimer – and a leading figure in the Belgian Workers' Party.⁹⁴ De Man had first come to prominence just a few years before with the publication in 1926 of *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* [*On the Psychology of Socialism*], an 'intensive critique of the stultifying legacy of Second International determinism'.⁹⁵ De Man's ideas for a positive alternative to

p. 423. I know of no evidence that Guérin knew of Bloch's work (although he did read German), but most of Bloch's main ideas were already developed in the 1920s: *Geist der Utopie* [*Spirit of Utopia*], which argued that humans are utopian subjects, appeared in 1918, and *Durch die Wüste* [*Through the Desert*], which attacked the utilitarianism and nihilism of modern bourgeois civilisation, in 1923.

⁹² Letter of 23 October 1945, BDIC F^oΔ Rés.688/10/1. See Stanislaw G. Pugliese, 'Wrestling with Two Angels: Communism and Christianity in the Work of Ignazio Silone', in *New Directions in Italian and Italian-American History*, ed. by Ernest Ialongo and William M. Adams (New York: Calandra Italian American Institute CUNY, 2013), pp. 50–64; and Tom Moylan, 'Anticipatory Fiction: *Bread and Wine* and Liberation Theology', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35: 1 (Spring 1989), 103–17.

⁹³ The adaptation was published as *Le Grain sous la neige* (Paris: Del Duca Editions mondiales, 1961).

⁹⁴ *Monde* was created by the writer, pacifist and communist Henri Barbusse in 1928.

⁹⁵ Gerd-Rainer Horn, 'From 'Radical' to 'Realistic': Hendrik de Man and the International Plan Conferences at Pontigny and Geneva, 1934–1937', *Contemporary European History*, 10: 2 (July 2001), 239–65 (p. 243).

orthodox Marxism, with a view to reinvigorating the socialist movement, were developed subsequently. He notably argued for a redefinition of ‘interests’ and ‘needs’ in order to embrace religious and ethical ideas, and emphasised the disinterested, ethical impetus in socialism. His main criticism of Marxism was that it was overly deterministic, neglecting morality, psychology and the human will, and that it was too disdainful of the power of religion as a provider of a set of moral values. De Man published *Au-delà du marxisme* [*Beyond Marxism*] in 1927, and the following year was one of the founders of a new movement whose focus was the reconciliation of Western religious traditions with socialism.⁹⁶ De Man asserted that there was ‘a common ethical substructure to all universalistic religious systems’ and that these ‘would be translated into secular realization only through the socialist program.’⁹⁷ He also argued that the socialist movement was suffused with ‘eschatological yearning’.⁹⁸

Thirdly, Guérin seems to have been drawn both to the total personal commitment implied by the bolshevik idea of the ‘professional revolutionary’ and to Tolstoy’s and Gandhi’s ideas on the priority to be attached to moral self-improvement. On reading a biography of Lenin, he noted: ‘A man who claims to be a socialist no longer has the right to devote a part of his intelligence to sterile intellectual exercises.’⁹⁹ And in his notes on a study of Trotsky, having first invoked Gandhism, he commented:

Before replacing the bourgeoisie, first show yourselves to be superior to them [...] by virtue of your morality: abstain from drunkenness; accept the rigorous discipline of the trade union; push aside exclusively material appetites; love your neighbour – and you will be more worthy of power than the bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Peter Dodge, *Beyond Marxism: The Faith and Works of Hendrik de Man* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 67.

⁹⁷ Dodge, *Beyond Marxism*, p. 108.

⁹⁸ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 7.

⁹⁹ XIV: Notes on Pierre Chasles, *La Vie de Lénine* (1929).

¹⁰⁰ XIII: Notes on Pierre Fervacque [pseud. of Rémy Roure], *La Vie orgueilleuse de Trotski* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1929).

Bourgeois socialists, he wrote, can never understand working-class realities unless they are completely ‘expropriated’, cut off from their roots and forced to live as workers: ‘This rôle must be really lived’.¹⁰¹ There are perhaps certain parallels here between Guérin’s subsequent decision to do precisely that (of which more below) and the social-Catholic ‘worker-priests’ of the 1940s–50s, as well as the students of the puritanical maoist *Union des Jeunes Communistes (Marxistes-Léninistes)* going to work in the factories in the 1960s.¹⁰²

Metamorphosis

In his notes on Sorel, Guérin commented that ‘it is not through ideology that I came to socialism, but through the body and through the heart’, and in his autobiographies and interviews, Guérin was keen to emphasize the *visceral* nature of his political commitment, derived from his direct personal knowledge of the bourgeoisie and of the colonial system, but also from his relationships with working-class men:

Although founded on very wide reading, the metamorphosis which led me to socialism was not objective, on an intellectual level. Rather it was subjective, physical, stemming from the senses and the heart. [...] I had sought camaraderie. It was that which I hoped to find a hundredfold in socialism.¹⁰³

He felt at that time as if the ‘metamorphosis’ he was undergoing was a kind of sublimation of his own sexuality in his new aim in life:

I resolved to employ my particular form of eroticism, thus far uncontrolled, wasted and more or less asocial, and to subordinate it to the highest ends: the liberation of all, which would at the same time be my own liberation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ XXII/a: Notes on Hyacinthe Dubreuil, *La République industrielle* (Paris: Bibliothèque d’éducation, n.d.).

¹⁰² See Christophe Bourseiller, *Les maoïstes. La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (Paris: Points, 2008), pp. 109–26.

¹⁰³ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 218.

¹⁰⁴ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 219.

Back in Paris in April 1930, Guérin's attempts at explanation did little to soothe his parents' alarm at his decision, and faced with their incomprehension and disapproval, he cut his economic ties with his family. Having found work as a proof-reader, he moved out of the family home and found a room in the working-class quarter of Belleville.¹⁰⁵ Both geographically and sociologically, this was a Paris which had not been part of his world until now, beyond going to work in La Chapelle in 1925. Guérin liked it there: 'It was the happiest period of my life, getting to know this proletarian milieu.'¹⁰⁶ The other inhabitants of the building, mostly young construction workers, were friendly and sociable and became a kind of substitute family. His small room was (to use Guérin's words) like a monk's cell in its bareness. As a police surveillance report on him put it:

He occupies a modest and uncomfortable room. [...] The subject is described as a mystic. He strives to live modestly in accordance with the meagre resources he earns from his work as a manual worker and journalist. He nevertheless regularly visits his parents, 22 Boulevard Saint-Michel, who naturally deplore the political attitude of their son.¹⁰⁷

As Guérin himself commented, 'I looked for myself, I more or less found myself', and an essential part of that was abandoning the class from which he sprang:

¹⁰⁵ See Patrice Spadoni, 'Daniel Guérin – 5 rue Lesage', in *Un Paris révolutionnaire*, ed. by Claire Auzias (Paris: L'esprit frappeur, 2001), pp. 366–8.

¹⁰⁶ Interview in television documentary, *Daniel Guérin*, dir. Jean-José Marsand, questionnaire and interview by Pierre André Boutang (Broadcast on FR3, 4 & 11 September 1989, série Archives du XXe Siècle; film made in 1985); interview material re-used in Laurent Muhleisen & Patrice Spadoni, *Daniel Guérin, 1904–1988: Combats dans le siècle* (Productions Imagora, n.d.).

¹⁰⁷ Archives Nationales, Centre des archives contemporaines (CAC), Versement coté 19940448, Fichier central de la Direction générale de la Sécurité nationale du Ministère de l'Intérieur, Box 450, file 38145; quoted in Antonio de Francesco, 'Daniel Guérin et Georges Lefebvre, une rencontre improbable', *La Révolution française (Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française)*, <http://lrf.revues.org/162>

I irrevocably abandoned one familial clan [...] to join another, which was infinitely more vast since it embraced the wretched of the earth. It is more exalting than the first, for it counts within its ranks truth and justice, and more powerful, since it has number in its favour.¹⁰⁸

This was undoubtedly a pivotal moment in Guérin's life, and is strongly reminiscent of the moral crisis which led Tolstoy in the 1870s to renounce all his earlier literary works, and of Gandhi's decision to adopt what he called a 'religion of service', feeling that 'God could be realized only through service.'¹⁰⁹ Guérin, vowing to devote his life to 'the struggle for the abolition of the social and colonial scandal', similarly renounced all the 'superfluous' pastimes of his privileged youth, burning his unpublished fictional writings and consigning to silence his published poems and novels, ashamed of their very existence.¹¹⁰

Mana

Others' commentaries on Guérin's early years, as well as his own, have tended to be framed either in terms of the break with his own class and his quest for 'the great family of fraternal camaraderie and shared struggle', 'the camaraderie of community';¹¹¹ or in terms of the problems he experienced coming to terms with his sexuality;¹¹² or in terms of his quest to 'reunify' his self, his identity, as both revolutionary *and* homosexual. It seems to me that another (complementary) perspective is possible. On such a reading, spirituality acquires a more important – perhaps even central – rôle in determining Guérin's life decisions and, indeed,

¹⁰⁸ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁹ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 155.

¹¹⁰ Guérin, *Autobiographie*, p. 227. On Guérin's social and political engagements from 1930 onwards, see David Berry, 'Un contradicteur permanent': The ideological and political itinerary of Daniel Guérin', in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France*, ed. by Julian Bourg (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 149–74.

¹¹¹ Guérin, *Eux et Lui*, pp. 7 & 8.

¹¹² Guérin, 'Commentaires très libres sur les Mémoires d'un jeune homme excentrique', Text of a talk given by Daniel Guérin on 17 February 1965.

his everyday conduct, and particularly at this crucial moment in his life. It is doubtless necessary to distinguish between religion and the admittedly rather ambiguous term spirituality. We have already seen that Guérin rejected the Church and Christian dogma, and his history of the French Revolution is certainly sympathetic towards the revolutionaries' policy of 'dechristianisation'.¹¹³ In 1968, he insisted on the need to fight the 'obscurantist fanaticism' of the Catholic Church.¹¹⁴ And in the raw confessional text *Eux et Lui* (first published in 1959), he wrote (in the third person) of his lack of religious belief:

Neither god nor the devil cohabited within him, fighting over his soul. The absence of god did not represent, in him, an obsession with god, and hell was the least of his worries. A believer [...] would have perceived in him the ravages caused by the absence of god. But he ignored such self-interested suggestions and he managed perfectly well without god.

So clearly Guérin had moved beyond his youthful agonising over religion in the sense of belief in a supernatural deity and church doctrine, yet he went on: 'For him the cosmos, with which he believed he communicated and which filled him with its *mana*, took the place of god.'¹¹⁵ How one should interpret this remark is unclear. '*Mana*' is a concept drawn from the cultures of the Pacific islands (Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia) and has a number of meanings which depend on context, but tend to be associated with sacred or spiritual authority, power or energy.¹¹⁶ Perhaps Guérin is suggesting some kind of numinous experience of the sacred which, in the words of the theologian Rudolf Otto, produced an irrational energy which...

¹¹³ Guérin, *La lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793-1797* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; revised edition 1968), 2 vols.

¹¹⁴ 'De la répression sexuelle à la Révolution', from *Le Point*, Brussels, December 1968, in Guérin, *Homosexualité et révolution* (Paris: Le Vent du ch'min, 1983), p. 34.

¹¹⁵ Guérin, *Eux et lui* (Lille: Gai Kitsch Camp, 2000), p. 16.

¹¹⁶ Tony Swain & Garry Trompf, *The Religions of Oceania* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

engages man's sentiments, drives him to 'industrious fervour' and fills him with a boundless dynamic tension both in terms of asceticism and zealotry against the world and the flesh, and in terms of heroic behaviour by which the inner excitement erupts into the external world.¹¹⁷

Or perhaps, rather, it makes sense to see similarities with Bloch's utopian spirit – Guérin certainly had strong chiliastic tendencies, as seen, for instance, in *Eux et Lui*, when he cites Trotsky's 1940 *Testament*:

[W]hatever may be the circumstances of my death I shall die with unshaken faith in the communist future. This faith in man and in his future gives me even now such power of resistance as cannot be given by any religion.¹¹⁸

Or perhaps it means little more than an 'emotional attitude', to use Orwell's words? In a later autobiography, he employed the concept of *mana* again when discussing the fact that many people seemed unable to reconcile Guérin the anticolonialist and revolutionary socialist with Guérin the campaigner for (homo) sexual liberation:

Personally, I believe that one and the same vital energy or, to use the Melanesian term, one and the same *mana*, has been the driving force in my political as well as my carnal life.¹¹⁹

Similarly, he once commented in an interview that 'the driving force of my life has been love'¹²⁰ – which brings us back to Gandhi. Reading of Guérin's determination to start his life afresh in 1930, and recalling the way in which he earlier described his 'discovery'

¹¹⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London & New York, 1917), quoted in Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ Guérin, *Eux et lui*, p. 94. Translation from Leon Trotsky, 'Testament' (3 March 1940), <http://www.marxist.com/testament-of-leon-trotsky.htm>

¹¹⁹ Guérin, *Le feu du sang. Autobiographie politique et charnelle* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1977), p. 7. See David Berry, 'Workers of the World, Embrace!' Daniel Guérin, the Labour Movement and Homosexuality', *Left History*, 9: 2 (Spring/Summer 2004), 11–43.

¹²⁰ 'Géographie passionnelle d'une époque. Entretien avec Daniel Guérin', *Débattre* 10 (2000), 5–10.

of the working-class quarters of Paris as ‘restarting [his] life from zero’, one cannot help but be reminded of the closing lines of one of the many books he read on board the *Bangkok*, one which seems to have had a more profound impact than most, namely Gandhi’s autobiography: ‘I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him.’¹²¹

Conclusion

It seems clear that Guérin’s commitment to ending the ‘social and colonial scandal’ was motivated by moral outrage and by a profound sense of guilt at his own privileges as a member of the *grande bourgeoisie* and as a white man. He sought redemption through a Gandhian ‘religion of service’, putting himself at the service of the Revolution (with a capital R) in order to help the oppressed and exploited achieve liberation. Love (with a capital L) – ‘charity’, ‘the heart’, ‘fraternity’, ‘camaraderie’ – was central to his thinking and to his responses to others’ suffering; for him it was constitutive of what it is to be human and therefore enabled self-realisation through ‘merging with the people’ (Gandhi’s ‘putting himself among his fellow creatures’). Although he doubtless exaggerates the extent to which his decision to devote his life to social revolution was ‘visceral’ (rather being prompted by a more rational decision based on his extensive studies), it was certainly rooted in his personal experiences and relationships, and in his compassionate, empathetic responses to them – ‘in the heart’, to use his words. His deep dissatisfaction with the spiritual vacuousness both of capitalist society and of his own nihilistic indulgence in physical pleasures led him to seek ‘sure values’, meaning and ‘spiritual nourishment’ elsewhere. Guérin’s political commitment might thus be seen as an instance of the kind of religious experience described by Durkheim as producing ‘the transport of the individual beyond himself.’¹²² In such a view, society becomes the divinity.

¹²¹ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 454.

¹²² Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1930), quoted in Gentile, p. 8.

Does it make sense to use the much debated concepts of ‘political religion’ or ‘secular religion’ with regard to Guérin? The more general term ‘secular religion’ has been used of ideologies or ideals which replaced traditional, metaphysical religious beliefs with humanist ideas such as humanity or society. The notion of sacralisation – the creation by such beliefs of ‘an aura of sacredness around an entity belonging to this world’¹²³ – may be useful in helping us understand Guérin’s commitment to the cause. De Man wrote of the idea of the Revolution which ‘so powerfully evokes emotions that recall the eschatological visions of the Apocalypse, the end of the world, the Last Judgement, the Kingdom of God, etc.’¹²⁴ And Guérin’s use of a quotation from Trotsky’s ‘Testament’ suggests that Guérin’s relationship to his revolutionary socialist politics, the meaning and purpose with which it invested his life, his faith in the ultimate inevitability of the Revolution and the devotion it aroused in him could indeed be seen as a form of ‘sacralisation’ characteristic of a ‘political religion’. As religious historian Giovanni Filoramo put it:

[T]he process of sacralization is triggered when individuals and groups of people confer an absolute value on objects and symbols in order to make sense of their individual or collective existence.¹²⁵

Guérin, in common with many of his generation, did have a very nineteenth-century belief in the inevitability of the Revolution, a faith which can be seen as a form of ‘social transcendence’ of the kind identified by Salvador Giner.¹²⁶

But the definition and usefulness of the concepts of secular or political religion are still debated, and a particular problem here is that ‘political religion’ tended for a long time to be used principally in analyses of fascism, nazism or bolshevism, and were thus assumed to involve repressive and demagogic techniques designed to bolster totalitarian systems – what Gentile calls the ‘crowd manipulation interpretation of religion’. Guérin would himself devote a whole chapter of his 1936 classic *Fascism and Big Business*

¹²³ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Gentile, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Gentile, p. 14.

¹²⁶ Salvador Giner, quoted in Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 14.

to fascist ‘mysticism’ and insisted that fascism was a religion. But Guérin also gave attention to an analysis of the psychological mechanisms at play in inter-war Europe which meant that so many people were receptive, thus enabling fascism to become a quasi-religious mass movement based on faith, belief and emotional fervour – in other words Guérin employed a ‘fideistic’ interpretation, as well as a ‘crowd manipulation’ interpretation. Clearly, the latter kind of use of the concepts of political or secular religion, with their connotations of demagoguery, irrationalism and fanaticism – whether we are thinking of the inter-war years or the Cold War era – are inappropriate in Guérin’s case: he was too rational, too well informed, too committed to open and honest debate among comrades, too scornful of dogma and sectarianism. Indeed, as we have seen, he quite explicitly condemned the way in which Marx and Lenin had, in his eyes, been ‘sacralised’ (his term) and come to be regarded as infallible prophets.

And yet I think we can say that Guérin – as Mauriac perceptively pointed out when he compared Guérin to Psichari, emphasising the former’s apparent need to ‘belong to a religious order’ – did have strong fideistic tendencies, if we understand by that ‘the need to submit oneself to a divine, political or social faith’ in Le Bon’s words.¹²⁷ Guérin was an adherent of what Gentile calls a ‘religion of humanity’¹²⁸, in the sense that his socialism provided a morality, a meaning and direction, and hope for a better world.

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¹²⁷ Quoted in Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 6.

¹²⁸ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. xvi.

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Martin Buber's Notion of Grace as a Defense of Religious Anarchism

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“I asked Buber why God’s grace finds hardly any place in his work. He explained: ‘I write theology for men, not for God’”.
— David Flusser¹

I reconstruct Martin Buber’s conception of grace to show its importance for unifying his religious orientation and anarchist tendencies. I first lay out an Augustinian account of grace and concomitant defense of hierarchy and submission. I then examine Buber’s anarchism and previous analyses of his notion of grace, which were incomplete insofar as they ignored his redefinition of what is given by grace and who gives these gifts. The primary gifts of grace he identifies are who we are (meant to be), moral norms and reality, each of which come to us not just from God, but also from relations with other creatures. Buber corrects the classic Augustinian notion of grace by replacing radical dependence on God with radical creaturely interdependence. Once hierarchy and submission to an inscrutable authority are no longer taken to be necessary for human flourishing, we are free to think along broadly anarchist lines.

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¹ David Flusser, ‘Afterword’, in Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpenetration of Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 175–229 (p. 198).

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Introduction

In order to show the compatibility between a religious orientation and anarchism I shall reconstruct Martin Buber's (1878–1965) notion of grace [*Gnade*]. Well known for developing a distinction between I-Thou and I-It relations in his 1923 *Ich und Du* [*I and Thou*], this great Jewish thinker authored more than 700 books and papers on subjects ranging from philosophy and political structures to education and religion, including commentaries on both Jewish and Christian theology and, with Franz Rosenzweig, a new German translation of the Bible.² Buber was also quite politically active. In his youth he advocated for cultural Zionism and was close friends with the socialist anarchist Gustav Landauer. When the Nazis came into power Buber engaged in “spiritual resistance” by organizing Jewish adult education programs, despite being banned from public speaking. Once in Palestine, Buber advocated for Jewish-Arab parity and a bi-national state. Inter-religious dialogue was a special concern of his. In keeping with this proclivity, and building on Buber's own stated differences with the positions of Christian traditions, this work will use Augustinian views on grace as a foil to elucidate Buber's views on grace. Through this contrast I join those commentators who direct our attention to the ways Buber offers a genuine alternative and who aim to correct the common, but misguided, tendency to subsume his stance under Christian frameworks.

I begin with an Augustinian account of grace and concomitant defense of hierarchy and submission. This shows that so long as the notion of grace assumes an independent being deigning to bestow inscrutable gifts on radically dependent beings, the replication of this power structure between human beings seems justified by the “as above, so below” adage. I argue that Buber is able to propose very different power structures while retaining the “as above, so below” principle because he reconceives the nature

² See *Martin Buber: A Bibliography of His Writings 1898–1978*, compiled by Margot Cohn and Rafael Buber (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press; München: K.G. Saur, 1980), which lists 1416 entries. See also the twenty-two volume German critical text edition of Buber's writings: *Martin Buber Werkausgabe*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Bernd Witte (Güterloh: Güterlohshloher Verlaghaus, 2001ff.).

of grace. In order to illustrate the compatibility of his political and religious views I analyze his “anarchism”, which turns out to be not a simple advocacy of stateless or lawless societies, but a multifaceted position that has garnered numerous appellations. Joining the various accounts of commentators together produces the inelegant yet nuanced description of Buber’s position as “topi-an-communitarian-socialist-federalist-anocracy”. I then examine previous analyses of his notion of grace, which were incomplete insofar as they ignored his redefinition of what is given by grace and who gives these gifts. The primary gifts of grace Buber identifies are who we are (meant to be), moral norms and reality, each of which come to us not just from God, but also from relations with other creatures. For Buber, grace may occur between persons, and is not just bestowed by an inscrutable, higher being to a lower being. Buber thus corrects the classic Augustinian notion of grace by replacing radical dependence on God with radical creaturely interdependence. Once hierarchy and submission to an inscrutable authority are no longer taken to be necessary for human fulfillment, we are free to think along broadly anarchist lines.

As above, so below

In order to better understand the role that grace plays in uniting Buber’s religious and political philosophy, it helps to compare him to a familiar figure who can act as a foil. Buber identifies the views of the Augustinian tradition as directly opposed to his own: “the tendency from Augustine to the Reformation was to see faith as a gift of God. This ... resulted in the retreating into obscurity of the Israelite mystery of man as an independent partner of God”.³ As a familiar, albeit simplified, Augustinian story goes, although happiness and goodness are natural, we are incapable of attaining these states on our own.⁴ Each stage on the way to the fulfillment

³ Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: International Humanities Press, 1988), p. 107.

⁴ E.g., Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001), VI.20, p. 110: “no one can be continent except by your [God’s] gift”.

of happiness and goodness is driven by divine grace: prevenient grace leads to faith, faith helped by grace creates a will to rightly ordered love, will helped by grace actualises rightly ordered love, rightly ordered love produces meritorious works, and meritorious works lead to further grace and eternal life. All faithful prayer for grace is conducted by those who have already received grace: “it is not in our power to live rightly, unless while we believe and pray we receive help from him who has given us the faith to believe that we must be helped by him”.⁵ While there may be subsequent merit, there is no antecedent merit, for subsequent merit is ultimately the result of unmerited grace: “Everything, not only my salvation but even my choice to seek it, depends on whether God chooses that I will receive this gift of grace and persevere in to the end, and not only do I have no say over God’s choice but I am (by Augustine’s reckoning) in no position to know anything about it”.⁶

This model of grace supports a particular understanding of the proper ordering of relationships between humans. Having established God as our inscrutable divine sovereign, the Hermetic “as above, so below; as below, so above” adage can be used to defend the necessity of submission to human sovereigns. Augustine, for example, draws an analogy between the ordered obedience of body to mind, household to *paterfamilias*, citizens to sovereign, and humanity to God:

‘How is it that God rules man, the soul rules the body, the reason rules lust and the other perverted elements in the soul?’ By this analogy it is shown plainly enough that servitude is beneficial for some men, and that servitude to God, at least, is beneficial to all.⁷

⁵ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God, Against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), XIX.4, p. 852.

⁶ Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 101.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God* XIX.21, p. 883. See *City of God* XIX.16, p. 876, for another application of the “as above, so below” principle: “Now a man’s house ought to be the beginning, or rather a small component of the city, and every beginning is directed to some end of its own kind, and every component part contributes to the completeness of the whole of which it forms a part. The implication of this is quite apparent, that domestic peace contributes to the peace of the city — that is, the ordered

This argument for the necessity of hierarchical relationships of governance between humans may be summarized as follows:

- (1) God is our sovereign
- (2) Human nature is radically dependent on God
- (3) Without this dependency it is impossible for humans to attain virtue
- (4) Servitude to God is beneficial to all
- (5) As above, so below
- (6) Therefore, dependence on / servitude to a human sovereign is beneficial for at least some humans.

Following the “as above, so below” adage, conceptions of prevenient grace and sovereignty go hand in hand; hierarchical ordering is a necessity given our flawed will and incapacity to attain virtue on our own. Those who resist the concomitant notions of prevenient grace and hierarchical ordering, and maintain greater human freedom and personal responsibility, such as the Pelagians, are deemed to have at best a naïve account of human nature and at worst to be dangerous heretics.⁸

Two main counter-arguments could be used to dismantle the classic Augustinian defense of the necessity for submission to a hierarchical order and show the possibility of a religious anarchism. One tactic would be to question premise (5), that is, this application of the “as above, so below” principle. Like all arguments that rest on analogy, we might question if there are not relevant points of disanalogy to consider. Even if we do accept an analogical argument linking macrocosm to microcosm, the general statement that servitude to God is beneficial might not produce a sufficient defense of specific political systems, each of which might have

harmony of those who live together in the house in the matter of giving and obeying orders, contributes to the ordered harmony concerning authority and obedience obtaining among the citizens”. Even slavery is justified using this analogy (*City of God* XIX.15, p. 875).

⁸ For a more favorable account of the Pelagians than that of Augustine see Richard Fitch, ‘The Pelagian Mentality: Radical Political Thought in Fifth Century Christianity’, in *Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives*, ed. by Alexandre J. M. E. Christoyannopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 2–29.

institutionalized varying forms of dependence or servitude. The other tactic would be to question premises (1)–(4) and revise our conception of grace. If we replace the image of our relationship to God as one of subject to sovereign with an image of a relationship between independent partners, which Buber calls the Israelite mystery, then we may be able to use this new imagery to rethink the nature of relations between humans.

If the second strategy is used the first is unnecessary. The “as above, so below” analogy can be kept intact if our understanding of our relationship to God alters simultaneously with our understanding of our relationship to one another. Buber provides an example of how to maintain the “as above, so below” analogy and use it to wed theology with political philosophy in support of religious anarchism. In *I and Thou*, he explains that to show “the close association of the relation to God with the relation to one’s fellow-men” is his “most essential concern”.⁹ He reemphasizes this point throughout his life, stating in 1964 that his one basic insight is that “the I-Thou relation to God and the I-Thou relation to one’s fellow man are at bottom related to each other”.¹⁰ It is a central refrain of *I and Thou* that “in the beginning is the relation”.¹¹ Beings are interdependent and constituted by their relationships. In I-Thou relations we are in the mode of presence. We dynamically receive and respond to the other as a spontaneous totality, which, even when the exchange is non-verbal, Buber refers to as dialogue. I-It, or monologic, relations are dominated by our capacity for holding onto the past and projecting into the future. Instead of embracing the totality and vital newness of the other, we interpret him through the lens of static categories. This allows us (we assume) to be able to predict his responses, and thus I-It relations lie behind every relationship of mere utility. While Buber recognizes the necessity of I-It modes, he cautions us that contemporary humanity suffers from an excessive

⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 171.

¹⁰ Martin Buber, ‘Interrogation of Martin Buber’, conducted by M. S. Friedman, in *Philosophic Interrogations*, ed. by S. and B. Rome (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 99.

¹¹ See, for example, Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 69.

development of the capacity for I-It relations and an impoverished capacity for I-Thou relations. For the purposes of this study, what Buber calls his one basic insight or central concern, namely that our capacity to enter into dialogue with other creatures parallels our capacity to enter into dialogue with God, is especially important. Buber argues for interdependence throughout all of the levels of being. The nature of the partners alters the specific dynamics of the dialogue — we give language to beings that are below the threshold of language, we enter into language and give and receive with each other, and we create language to express what we receive from the transcendent¹² — but the dialogic orientation of the subject is the same regardless of the partner. Our capacity to enter into relationship with other creatures is not qualitatively different from the capacity to enter into a relationship with God, though the other we are in a relation with *is* qualitatively different. This embrace of the “as above, so below” adage and yet rejection of accounts of independence and dependence in favor of an insistence on interdependence will provide the foundation for Buber’s religious anarchism.

Buber’s “anarchism”

With the basic problem of grace and the use of the “as above, so below” adage laid out, we are now in a position to first take a preliminary look at Buber’s political philosophy, in particular, his “anarchism”, and then take a preliminary look at his views on grace, in order to eventually unite these two strands of inquiry and develop a more complex view of each. Evidence for classifying Buber as a thinker with anarchist leanings comes from his close and sympathetic relationship with Landauer and writings such as *Paths in Utopia* (1945), which favorably discusses Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin and Landauer, while critiquing Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, and the collection of essays *Pointing the Way*, which includes “Society and the State” (1951) and

¹² Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 57. When he revisits this tripartite categorization in his 1957 *Afterward to I and Thou*, Buber recasts it as marking different degrees of capacity for mutuality, not language. See Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 178.

“The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle” (1953).¹³ However, few commentators have been satisfied affixing this label to a complex, unsystematic thinker. Part of the problem has to do with the term “anarchy”, the etymology of which suggests a complete absence of government. Alexander S. Kohanski prefers the term “anocracy” to describe Buber’s thought: “*anocracy* ... means a ‘non-dominance’ (*a-kratia*) rather than a ‘non-government’ (*an-archia*), not the abolition of the state but a curbing of its oppressive power”.¹⁴ The appellation “anocracy” is used by Buber to describe the “anarchy” of both Kropotkin and Proudhon, but as we shall see, it more accurately describes his own political philosophy than the simple label “anarchy”.¹⁵

When Buber elaborates what we can call his own anocracy, he distinguishes between two principles: the political and the social. The state tends to be governed by the political principle, but the two principles are not tied to specific organizations as they refer to two different modes of relation. While the political and social principles generally correspond to I-It and I-Thou modes, the latter denote general modes of existence while the former delineate modes of structural organization. Social relations are based on “common need or a common interest” and are the primary structures in which human beings are fulfilled. Political relations are secondary, and replace “association by subordination, fel-

¹³ For an analysis of Buber as deeply influenced by Landauer’s anarchism, see Samuel Hayim Brody, *Martin Buber’s Theopolitics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), especially Chapter 1: ‘The True Front: Buber and Landauer on Anarchism and Revolution’. Brody goes on to argue that Buber’s thought is best understood as “Theopolitical Zionism”; Brody’s work was published after the completion of this paper and I was regrettably unable to incorporate his insightful analysis. For more on the influence of Landauer on the development of Buber’s philosophy of I-Thou relations see Paul Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber’s Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989). For Landauer’s own work, see *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew*, eds, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Anya Mali (Berlin/Munich: Walter de Gruyter Verlag, 2014).

¹⁴ Alexander S. Kohanski, ‘Martin Buber’s Restructuring of Society into a State of Anocracy’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 34: 1 (1972), 42–57 (p. 51).

¹⁵ Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. by R. F. Hull (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 43; emphasis in the original.

lowship by domination".¹⁶ While coercive and centralistic they are not in themselves bad or inhuman. Like the realm of I-It, they become dangerous when excessive and detached from what is essential. As Steven Schwarzschild explains, for Buber "evil and the State are both nothings, privations, the absence of thousness and of community respectively. The State is really 'absolute evil', insofar as Buber can have such a thing. But evil = the State must be lived with minimally, and it must be maximally redirected".¹⁷

Buber maintains that genuine society is not a mere aggregate of individuals, but is made up of mutual relations of smaller societies, each of which are in turn made up of mutual relations between persons, and praises Jewish village communes, with their decentralised, minimal political principle, as contemporary examples of genuine society.¹⁸ Consequently, Bernard Susser labels Buber's approach "anarcho-federalism", while Amitai Etzioni decides that Buber is best described simply as a "communitarian".¹⁹ In a renewed community, such as Buber fancied the Jewish village communes to be, there is a change in the apportionment of power as well as a change in the nature of power. Buber explains that the difference between administration and government lies in the measure of excess political power ("political surplus"), that is, domination and coercion, possessed by the state.²⁰ Ideally the political principle is incrementally minimized to what is indispensable, while decentralization and freedom are incrementally pushed to what is maximal, such that at some point government qualitatively transforms and becomes mere administration.²¹ However,

¹⁶ Martin Buber, 'Society and the State', in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 161–76 (p. 161).

¹⁷ Steven Schwarzschild, 'A Critique of Martin Buber's Political Philosophy: An Affectionate Reappraisal', in *The Pursuit of the Ideal: Jewish Writings of Steven Schwarzschild*, ed. by Menachem Kellner (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 194 note 90 (p. 347).

¹⁸ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 80 and p. 141.

¹⁹ Bernard Susser, 'The Anarcho-Federalism of Martin Buber', *Publius*, 9:4 (1979), 103–15; Amitai Etzioni, 'Communitarian Elements in Select Works of Martin Buber', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 33: 2 (1999), 151–69.

²⁰ Buber, 'Society and the State', p. 174.

²¹ Buber, 'Society and the State', p. 175.

the Jewish village model should not be blindly copied or enforced, for change must be “adapted and proportioned to whatever can be willed and done in the conditions given”.²² The minimum or maximum is constituted by an ever-shifting “line of demarcation” specific to each historical moment and place, or *topos*.²³

Like the religious socialists Paul Tillich, Leonard Ragaz and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Buber maintained that socialism, which he defines as genuine community, could not be understood via economic or political transformation but only by spiritual transformation.²⁴ In “Three Theses of a Religious Socialism”, Buber argues that 1) socialism requires orientation to a common center, 2) the difference between authentic and inauthentic religious or socialist programs lies in the degree to which they serve relationship, whether of man to god or between men, and 3) religion and socialism meet and are authenticated in concrete personal life, not in programs.²⁵ Since we are dealing with modes of relating and not with institutions, true revolution cannot come about merely through the overthrow of the state; we “cannot solve social problems by political means”.²⁶ Lasting, meaningful change to keep the political within its proper sphere occurs from the bottom up, through a revolution in the mode in which we relate to each other.

This revolution begins with individuals and their direct sphere of influence, when “their own inner ‘statehood’ is broken open”.²⁷ Since the state promises to its populace protection from both internal and external threats, it “fosters a perspective which allows differences of interest to appear as radical opposition” in

²² Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 56.

²³ On the notion of a “line of demarcation”, see Schwarzschild, ‘A Critique of Martin Buber’s Political Philosophy: An Affectionate Reappraisal’.

²⁴ Buber co-founded *Die Kreatur*, the first high profile interfaith journal, with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. For Buber on Leonard Ragaz, see ‘Religion and God’s Rule’, in *A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902–1965*, trans. By Maurice Friedman (New York, Humanity Books: 1999), pp. 109–12.

²⁵ Martin Buber, ‘Three Theses of a Religious Socialism’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 112–14.

²⁶ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 51.

²⁷ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 48.

order to justify its existence.²⁸ This cultivated divisiveness and mistrust encourages an unhealthy individualism and pattern of relation, such that even outside of official state activities “men stand to one another in a ‘statual’ relationship” and seek to dominate and coerce one another.²⁹ In contrast to the unhealthy individualism of the political, the social provides an authentic individuation of the whole person that enhances and is enhanced by community through “functional autonomy, mutual recognition and mutual responsibility”.³⁰ As the means of attaining the utopia — the restructuring of relationships — is the end of utopia itself, the formation of direct relationships with others constitutes revolutionary action and “utopian” vision is a misnomer for what should be called “topical” change.³¹ Consequently, Kohanski decides, “I would call Buber’s socialism *topian* rather than *utopian*”.³² Uniting all of the various features identified in Buber’s political philosophy, we are left with the hybrid position: to pian-communitarian-socialist-federalist-anocracy.

Previous analyses of Buber’s notion of grace

We meet further complexity examining previous interpretations of Buber’s notion of grace. Some confusion is due to the fact that religious writers have commonly used “grace” in two different ways. The first way is that utilised in our discussion of Augustine, where grace denotes an unmerited divine gift. However, because the notion of grace slipped into that of election, especially in the Augustinian Protestant tradition, we have a second usage of grace. Augustine argued that since original sin renders us incapable of obtaining virtue without grace, some of us must belong to the grace-receiving, virtuous “City of God” while others remain in

²⁸ Martin Buber, ‘The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 208–19 (p. 216).

²⁹ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 46.

³⁰ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 131.

³¹ Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, p. 81.

³² Kohanski, p. 50; emphasis in the original.

the sinful “City of Man”.³³ Drawing on passages such as I Tim. 1.9 (The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane) and Gal. 5:18 (But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law), a radical Protestant argument is made that the elected are free from having to follow laws.³⁴ We receive grace, understood as an unmerited gift. This gift allows us to have an ethic of grace, understood as action guided by rightly ordered love rather than law, such as occurs when we transition from a continent to a virtuous character. Critics of Buber have occasionally identified the second use of grace in his work, pejoratively calling him antinomian.³⁵ This might be one way of reconciling religiosity with anarchism: no human sovereign or laws will be needed if we are living under an ethic of grace. However, the reading of Buber as antinomian is not quite accurate, for while Buber is dubious that morality is about following laws or that revelation can be lawgiving, he nowhere endorses the notion that election frees us from the constraints of the law.³⁶ When he refers to the idea of the elec-

³³ E.g., Augustine, *City of God* XXI.13, p. 989: “... there is no escape for anyone from this justly deserved punishment, except by merciful and undeserved grace; and mankind is divided between those in whom the power of merciful grace is demonstrated, and those in whom is shown the might of just retribution”. See also *City of God* XIV.28, p. 593; XV.2, p. 598; and XV.22, p. 637.

³⁴ Authorized King James Bible, Pure Cambridge Edition.

³⁵ The criticism of Buber as antinomian is documented and analysed in Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 4th edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 313–14. Sam Berrin Shonkoff counters this charge, writing, “I prefer the term metanomian to antinomian in the case of Buber because he was not committed necessarily to the breaking of religious laws but rather to the expansion of religious practice beyond laws”. See Sam Berrin Shonkoff, ‘Metanomianism and Religious Praxis in Martin Buber’s Hasidic Tales’, *Religions* 9: 12 (2018): 399, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9120399>, note 8.

³⁶ E.g., Buber argues for “the constitutive impermanence of moral valuations” (‘Images of Good and Evil’, in *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations*, pt. 1: *Right and Wrong*, trans. by R.G. Smith, pt. 2: *Images of Good and Evil*, trans. by M. Bullock [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997], pp. 63–143 [p. 117]); and writes “I do not believe that *revelation* is ever a formulation of Law” (‘Martin Buber to Franz Rosenzweig, Heppenheim, June 24, 1924’, in *The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue*, ed.

tion of Israel he describes it not as a static gift but as a calling that must be realized: “[election] does not indicate a feeling of superiority, but a sense of destiny. It does not spring from a comparison with others, but from the concentrated devotion to a task ... if you turn election into a static object instead of obeying it as a command, you will forfeit it”.³⁷

Buber's ostensible *ethic* of grace raises the problem of what *gift* of grace supports this ethic. What is the source of an ethic of grace if not divine election? When Buber writes of I-Thou relationships he emphasises will as much as grace: contemplation can turn into a relation “if will and grace are joined”.³⁸ And,

The You encounters me by grace — it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed. ... the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once.³⁹

This coincidence of will and grace has led to two criticisms. Commentators that have emphasised his mention of grace while ignoring his mention of will, such as Richard A. Cohen, complain Buber's description of I-Thou relations renders social action and accountability impossible: “the embrace of encounter happens by chance, by ‘grace’ ... Buber shows no way to get from encounter to community. Each is self-contained and accidental”.⁴⁰ Walter Kaufmann erroneously suggests Buber split humanity into two worlds — those who live in I-Thou relations and those who do not — misleadingly implying a replication of Augustine's City of

by Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr [New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996], p. 314, emphasis in the original).

³⁷ Martin Buber, ‘Nationalism’, in *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 47–57 (p. 56).

³⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 58.

³⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Richard A. Cohen, ‘Buber and Levinas — and Heidegger’, in *Lévinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference*, ed. by Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco and Maurice Friedman (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), pp. 235–49 (p. 247).

God and City of Man.⁴¹ Etzioni declares, “Buber is closer to the Protestant than to the Catholic interpretation of virtue: we can find out if we are the chosen ones but not become so by working to become virtuous”.⁴² Fritz Kaufmann goes so far as to call Buber “the Jewish ‘Protestant’”.⁴³ These characterizations can be partially explained by the enthusiasm with which Protestant theologians embraced Buber and his I-Thou philosophy. Unfortunately, in their enthusiasm to make him their own they distorted his thought. Karl Heim, for example, described the discovery of the difference between I-Thou and I-It relations as a “Copernican Revolution” akin to that of Immanuel Kant. However, Heim then read an Augustinian Protestant understanding of grace into Buber’s philosophy, and with it a notion of hierarchy that led Heim to claim that one of the only ways one may have an I-Thou relationship is by submitting to the authority of one’s dialogic “partner”!⁴⁴ Meanwhile, those who emphasise Buber’s mention of will while ignoring his mention of grace complain that his theology offers “cheap grace, in the sense that God’s presence is supposedly easily available to the fully alert or attentive person”.⁴⁵ Buber does write, “No prescription can lead us to the encounter, and none leads from it. Only the acceptance of the

⁴¹ Walter Kaufmann, ‘I and You: A Prologue’, in *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 7–48 (p. 17).

⁴² Etzioni, p. 164.

⁴³ Fritz Kaufmann, ‘Martin Buber’s Philosophy of Religion’, in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber: The Library of Living Philosophers*, 12, ed. by Paul A. Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), pp. 151–70 (p. 210).

⁴⁴ Karl Heim’s usage of Buber is documented and analysed in Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 4th edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 192 and pp. 324–25.

⁴⁵ Michael Fishbane, ‘Justification Through Living: Martin Buber’s Third Alternative’, in *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Syracuse, NY and Jerusalem: Syracuse University Press and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2002), pp. 120–32 (p. 130). Note this is not Fishbane’s own view, which is explained below; he is summarizing an opposing view.

presence [*Gegenwart*] is required to come to it".⁴⁶ So is Buber an election-driven Augustinian Protestant or a will-driven Pelagian?

The answer is, of course, neither. In his insightful "Justification Through Living: Martin Buber's Third Alternative", Michael Fishbane shows what happens to our picture of Buber's ethic of grace if we pay attention to his language use and range of literary activities, including translation. When Buber set out with Franz Rosenzweig to give a new German translation of the Bible they took up *tzedakah* and rendered it, along with other words with the stem *tzedek*, in such a way that suggests an alternative to both the Augustinian Protestant and Pelagian views of grace and will. Martin Luther had translated *tzedakah* as *Gerechtigkeit* [justice or righteousness], leading both rabbinic and Protestant interpreters to assume it denoted an earned merit or theological credit. Buber and Rosenzweig instead translated it as *Bewährung* [tested or proved true]. *Bewährung* is "the interiorization of a certain truth in the course of personal living ... verification in life".⁴⁷ Fishbane shows how this *Leitwort* [keyword] pops up in Buber's writing. Buber writes, for instance, that the pure relation "cannot be preserved [*bewahrt*] but only put to the proof in action [*bewährt*"]".⁴⁸ This word choice points to a "third alternative", in which an ethic of grace is linked neither to willful good works nor to grace given faith:

Over against any sense of a religious accounting or justification before God through (fixed) righteous deeds, on the one side, or through faith (in a specific 'thing') on the other, Buber's use of *Bewährung* teaches the challenge of a living *emunah* in the course of life, such that one's faithfulness to the address of God's Presence is proved only through concrete acts in the world.⁴⁹

Emunah refers to what Buber calls Jewish faith, which he describes as trust in the presence of a person, and which he contrasts to *pistis*, the Greek faith of Paul, which is faith in the truth of

⁴⁶ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 159.

⁴⁷ Fishbane, p. 124 ff.

⁴⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 163.

⁴⁹ Fishbane, p. 128.

a proposition.⁵⁰ In this third alternative, the gift of God's grace simply means that the lives of those that "prove true" are transformed by their trust in the presence of God: "The *tzaddik* (*den Bewährten*) is transfigured by this *emunah*, and thus, so to speak, is protected by God's grace".⁵¹

For our purposes, what is important about this third alternative is the way grace and will are intertwined through the notion of faith as an active trust. Dan Avnon describes this active trust as a state of "alert inactivity" and "active longing".⁵² Yet even this alert inactivity, or trusting readiness to enter into relation, is no guarantee the relation will actually occur. One cannot say that Buber is "offering cheap grace" such that God's presence comes to us through will alone. This would be magical thinking that would deny the reality of God as an independent other that cannot be conjured up but nevertheless enters into relation with us. In his analysis of Psalm 73 Buber explains that the opening line, "Surely God is good to Israel: to the pure in heart", is not a commentary on prevenient grace or meritorious reward for those who are pure. Instead it is a description of what it is like to "prove true" through *emunah*:

[It] does not mean that God rewards him with his goodness. It means, rather, that God's goodness is revealed to him who is pure in heart: he experiences this goodness. In so far as Israel is pure in heart, becomes pure in heart, it experiences God's goodness.⁵³

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpenetration of Judaism and Christianity*, trans. by Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), passim.

⁵¹ Fishbane, p. 131.

⁵² Dan Avnon, *Martin Buber: The Hidden Dialogue* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), p. 61: "'And I will wait for YHVH who hides his face from the house of Ya'akov, and I will incline towards him' [Isa. 8:17]. ... the *limmud* [here a rare form of L/M/D meaning "disciple" or "a state of continuous study"] combines a state of anticipation, a form of alert inactivity (indicated by the phrase *heekeete l'YHVH*, 'I will wait for YHVH') and an inner inclination, an active form of longing (designated by *keeveete loh*, usually translated as 'I will look for Him')".

⁵³ Martin Buber, 'Right and Wrong', in *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations*, pt. 1: *Right and Wrong*, trans. by R.G. Smith, pt. 2: *Images of Good and*

Throughout his analysis Buber emphasises activity: “The Presence acts as counsel: God counsels by making known that He is present. ... [Man] is not relieved of taking and directing his own steps”.⁵⁴ Faith is not a cognitive state but a way of life, and God is not a proposition but a presence with whom one is in relation. This presence transforms us, but it does not remove our responsibility for our part of the relationship.

A fresh start: what is given by grace?

With their attention to language and the range of Buber's literary endeavors Fishbane and Avnon help resolve the question of how to relate Buber to Christian notions of will, election and righteousness. However, we are left with the question of how to reconcile Buber's religious views with his anarchist tendencies. To answer this we must take a fresh look at Buber's notion of grace. We can take as our starting point a statement by Friedrich Nietzsche that Buber mentions twice in *I and Thou*: “You take, you do not ask who it is that gives”.⁵⁵ In his first reference to this statement, Buber responds, “Man receives, and what he receives is not a ‘content’ but a presence, a presence as strength”.⁵⁶ Buber elaborates that receiving this presence awakens us to the fact of reciprocity: a presence is given and we respond with our presence. With this reciprocity “nothing can henceforth be meaningless. The question about the meaning of life has vanished”.⁵⁷ In his second reference Buber responds, “That may be so — one does not ask, but one gives thanks”.⁵⁸ The obvious answer — so obvious that it does not have to be explicitly addressed — to the question “Who gives?” is that God gives. The less obvious answer to “What is given?”

Evil, trans. by M. Bullock (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), pp. 3–60 (p. 34).

⁵⁴ Buber, ‘Right and Wrong’, p. 43.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Ecce Homo’, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 201–335 (p. 300): “*Man nimmt, man fragt nicht, wer da gibt*”.

⁵⁶ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 158.

⁵⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 158.

⁵⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 176.

is that his presence is what is given. Yet it is precisely where an answer seems the most obvious that we ought to give the question a second look. What exactly is it that we receive that gives such meaning to our life?

Buber describes three main things as gifts of grace or revelation: who we are (meant to be), moral norms and reality. While deferring the metaphysical question of which comes first, essence or existence, Buber makes the phenomenological claim that we do not experience our own identity as something we freely make: “We are revealed to ourselves — and cannot express it otherwise than as something revealed”.⁵⁹ Yet we are not ourselves as if we were elected so; we are still charged with the responsibility to actualise ourselves, and sometimes this responsibility is not fulfilled. On the one hand, the choices we make, and our relations to others, are no different from who we are. On the other hand, we are not simply our choices because we are also who we were called to be but are not yet, and perhaps never will be. We are also the ability to judge the difference between the two, which is to say, we have a conscience. As Buber describes it, the conscience is not just a gauge of right and wrong, but is the faculty that “compares that which he is with that which he was called to become”.⁶⁰ The conscience is the “ever-renewed self-confrontation of the person with the image of what he was destined to be and what he has relinquished”.⁶¹ Just as one does not freely invent the image our conscience shows us of our ideal or “true” self, we also do not freely invent moral norms, which even when absolute do not compel. Buber insists:

One can believe in and accept a meaning or value, one can set it as a guiding light over one’s life if one has discovered it, not if one has invented it. It can be for me an illuminating meaning, a direction-giving value only if it has been revealed to me in my meeting with Being, not if I have freely chosen it for myself from among

⁵⁹ Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: International Humanities Press, 1988), p. 135.

⁶⁰ Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Martin Buber, ‘People and Leader’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 148–60 (p. 153).

the existing possibilities and perhaps have in addition decided with some fellow-creatures: This shall be valid from now on.⁶²

Despite the language of revelation, we have an active relation to these norms, as we do to who we are. Each of us must actualise what is received. Similarly, we discover what is real, but nevertheless actively participate in its unfolding. In a striking account of our relationship to what is real, Buber describes reality as if it is an agent, our partner in life:

Although I myself have chosen it for myself, it guides me so that in proceeding I do not confound it with another and thus miss it; it stands by me. It must be one that has produced me and one that is ready, if I entrust myself to it, to bear me, to guard me, to educate me.⁶³

This passage sums up our relationship to what we receive as gifts of grace. We receive and are produced, guided and educated by the image of who we are meant to be, moral norms and reality; we are also active participants who trust what we receive [*em-nah*] and choose to prove this in our actions [*bewähren*]; and the relationship between what is received and our response constitutes the meaning of our life.

The specific gifts of grace we receive — our self, moral norms, reality, and the knowledge of all three — is not far from what our foil Augustine asserts. However, Augustine sees only a relation to God in all three revelations; all three come directly from God in the guise of the “inner teacher” and sociality plays no role in their acquisition.⁶⁴ The “inner teacher”, also called inner truth or inner light, or more plainly, God or Christ, provides not only a priori

⁶² Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 70. Buber is writing in opposition to Jean-Paul Sartre's “Existentialism is a Humanism”.

⁶³ Martin Buber, ‘Education and World-View’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 98–105 (p. 99).

⁶⁴ For an analysis of Augustine's argument for semantic individualism, which may be opposed to a social theory of language acquisition, see Gareth B. Matthews, ‘Augustine on the Teacher Within’, in *Augustine's Confessions: Critical Essays*, ed. by William E. Mann (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), pp. 31–43 (p. 34 ff).

truths, but all veridical judgments, including the rational inferences of defeasible arguments (e.g., from analogy). For instance, when describing how he learned to speak, Augustine relates, “I taught myself, using the mind you [God] gave me”.⁶⁵ The capacities given to us by the inner truth come to us as acts of grace, and not at all from the educative forces of other persons:

A person thus made new considers your [God’s] truth and understands it. He does not need some other human to explain it to him so that he may imitate his own kind; you explain it to him, so that he can discern for himself what is your will, what is good and pleasing to you and perfect. ... He becomes a Spirit-filled person, fit to judge of any matters that call for judgment, though he himself is not subject to the judgment of his fellows.⁶⁶

Human authorities only teach in two ways: 1) insofar as they point to realities that we would not normally have seen but, using the inner light, do understand upon indication and 2) as privileged witnesses to truths that cannot yet be seen by us and hence have to be believed in before they can be understood (if they are ever understood). Regardless of the type of pointing practiced by our teachers, it is the inward truth that allows us to judge to what signs are pointing, and to judge the veracity of the inference.⁶⁷

On the basis of this epistemology, Augustine maintains that others are not terribly helpful for recognizing the meaning of our life, and are typically harmful insofar as they direct our attention and love toward the wrong things. For example, Augustine attributes his youthful theft of pears to an “exceedingly unfriendly form of friendship,” where his “friends” merely served as an audience for his displays of freedom and power.⁶⁸ When discussing truer friends, Augustine still finds room for lamentation at his response to their death: “Woe to the madness which thinks to cherish human beings as though more than human!”⁶⁹ Augustine

⁶⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* I.13, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* XIII.32, p. 294.

⁶⁷ Augustine, ‘The Teacher’, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. by J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 69–101 (passim).

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* II.17, p. 42.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* IV.12, p. 64.

believes he should have loved God more than the transient and finite beings he called friends. The *creature* would seem to be a poor and misguided substitute for the *creator*. But in Buber there is no question of substitution or contest, though *fleeting* I-Thou creature-creature relations are contrasted to the *eternal* I-Thou relationship each creature has with God. With this reframing, we deepen creature-creature relationships in order to make them as eternal as possible, and cherish the preciousness of the other, “a creature, trivial and irreplaceable”, and our relationship with them all the more because of immanent and inescapable separation and death.⁷⁰

Who gives grace?

This is not a minor difference between the two thinkers. Buber modifies the classic Augustinian notion of grace by replacing radical dependence on God with radical creaturely interdependence. He hence would agree with the latter part of Augustine's claim, “no one who sees can boast as though what he sees and the very power to see it were not from you [God] — for who has anything that he has not received?”, but would take issue with the first part.⁷¹ Much of what we receive comes to us not just from God but also through relations with other persons, and even non-human entities. Buber maintains, for instance, that both who we are and what is real only reveal themselves through relations with others:

It is in encounter that the creation reveals its formhood [*Gestaltigkeit*]; it does not pour itself into senses that are waiting but deigns to meet those that are reaching out. ... No thing is a component of experience or reveals itself except through the reciprocal force of confrontation.⁷²

Reality only reveals itself to those who, in “alert inactivity” and “active longing”, reach out to it, while our individuation only occurs through relations with others. These need not always be

⁷⁰ Martin Buber, ‘Dialogue’, in *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald Gregor-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1–45 (p. 41).

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions* VII.27, p. 84; referencing 1 Cor 4:7.

⁷² Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 77.

intensive or explicitly confrontational relations, for often the mere presence of an other is enough for self-development. However, this does not imply a causal hierarchy, as if we do not exist until we passively receive the stimulus of the other calling us into being; it is a simultaneous acting and being acted on.⁷³ Steven M. DeLue explains Buber's notion of individuation:

as I relate to others and discover my possibilities, I work to fulfill them and as I do, I end up inevitably creating new relationships or new variants of existing relationships to others, each of which makes me aware of new possibilities for myself.⁷⁴

In contrast to Augustine's individualism and assumption of dependence on God, Buber presents a thoroughly interactive and social epistemology. The self is likewise conceived in very different terms. Since we are interdependent with other creatures our identity is not static and passively received but based on dynamic, ever changing relations. Even when reality or others resist our desires, such that we are dealing with a more explicit confrontation with otherness, this resistance furthers our individuation and the revelation of who we are and what is real:

But this, too, that I cannot accomplish it the way I intended it, this resistance also reveals the mystery to me ... this free human being encounters fate as the counter-image of his freedom. It is not his limit but his completion; freedom and fate embrace each other to form meaning; and given meaning, fate — with its eyes, hitherto severe, suddenly full of light — looks like grace itself.⁷⁵

Reciprocity — even in the form of resistance — gives meaning, and as this meaning comes to us from the gift of the presence of the other that confronts us, even this resistance can be experienced as grace.

Where is God in this picture of creaturely interdependence and reciprocal individuation? Human beings are independent partners with God that work to create relations and the indivi-

⁷³ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 81.

⁷⁴ Steven M. DeLue, 'Martin Buber and Immanuel Kant on Mutual Respect and the Liberal State', *Janus Head*, 9 (2006), 117–33 (p. 119).

⁷⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 102.

duation and reality that emerges out of relations. Indeed, Buber replaces the Christian notion of the consubstantiality of Father and Son with the notion of the consubstantiality of God and Man.⁷⁶ Buber must walk the “narrow ridge” between, on the one hand, preserving God as uncircumscribable, and, on the other hand, relaying the human experience of theophany. He attempts to carefully capture the mysterious sense in which an all-powerful being “needs” us to enter into relationships, to individuate and be our selves, and to help draw out others, in passages such as, “How would man exist if God did not need him, and how would you exist? You need God in order to be, and God needs you — for that which is the meaning of your life”.⁷⁷ Contrary to Augustine’s emphasis on dependence, Buber maintains that in the absence of consubstantiality no relationship with God is really possible: “Wishing to understand the pure relationship as dependence means wishing to deactualise one partner of the relationship and thus the relationship itself”.⁷⁸ Indeed, when prevenient grace supplants partnership — with all that implies, such as moral responsiveness — there are far reaching social and political effects.⁷⁹ Once we assume radical independence and dependence, the “psychical delusion of the spirit [*Seelenwahn*]” that we could exist on our own, as if we were that independent God and others were mere objects and not partners worthy of moral response, is created.⁸⁰ Following the “as above, so below” adage, we will be moved to imitate this image of relationship and increase centralization, domination and coercion.

One might still object the capacity to have a community founded on “functional autonomy, mutual recognition and mutual responsibility” is still an act of divine grace, for God, as our eternal I-Thou partner, is the center of community, the center that all other

⁷⁶ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 133.

⁷⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 130. Buber uses Nicholas of Cusa’s term, “*coincidentia oppositorum*”, to describe this mystery. For the relationship between the ideas of Buber and Nicholas of Cusa see Sarah Scott, ‘Knowing Otherness: Martin Buber’s Appropriation of Nicholas of Cusa’, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55: 4 (2015), 399–416.

⁷⁸ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 107.

⁸⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 141.

I-Thou relations depend on for their integrity. Recall that it was one of Buber's theses in "Three Theses on Religious Socialism" that socialism requires orientation to a common center. Writing of Hasidic groups, which he admired as exemplary models of community, Buber states:

The Hasidic communal group, like all genuine community, consists of men who have a common, immediate, relation to a living center, and just by this relationship have an immediate relation to one another. In the midst of the Hasidic community stands the *zaddik*, whose function it is to help the Hasidim, as persons and as a totality, to authenticate their relationship to God in the hallowing of life and just from this starting point to live as brothers with one another.⁸¹

We see Buber assert that community requires a common living center, which seems to cause the specific relationships among community members. We also see it is a human being — the *zaddik* [*tsaddik*, or *den Bewährten*] — that is placed at the center. However, this human being seems to not be a substantive center, for his function is to mediate and enable others to form relationships — first with God, and then with each other. Putting this together into a causal chain we get 1) the creation of a *zaddik*, 2) the creation of relationships between the *zaddik* and other persons, 3) the creation of a relationship between God and those persons, 4) the creation of relationships between those persons that results in a community. But it is a mistake to seek recipes for community building. The hard truth is all four steps occur simultaneously. A leader is only a leader of a people if she is already in relation to them, and they are only a people to be in a relation with if they are already in relation with one another.

Avnon argues that the founding of a Buberian community is not a metaphysical act of grace, for the "living center" is not God, but a living person: "[the community is] prepared by individuals, not by transcendent deities".⁸² We might add, it is not a metaphysical act of grace unless the nature of grace is reconceived to include the unearned, always gratuitous gift of presence that creatures give to each other. These "builders of community" are the overlooked

⁸¹ Buber, 'Interrogation of Martin Buber', p. 68.

⁸² Avnon, *Martin Buber*, p. 156.

foundation for the “anarcho-federalist” and “topian” socialist theories identified by Susser and Kohanski.⁸³ Yet now the objection may be made that highlighting the leader of a community seems contrary to Buber's anarchist tendencies. How does this emphasis on the figure of the *zaddik* differ from Augustine's argument that submission is due to the *paterfamilias* and the sovereign? No submission is due to the *zaddik*, and he may not be a leader in the political sense at all.⁸⁴ Rather, uniting Avnon's exposition with that of Fishbane, the *zaddik* is one who has “proved true”: “These are not primarily political leaders but rather the great founders, those who established ways of life within which human beings can more fully know themselves, whose way leads to a radical reevaluation of the meaning and significance of relation”.⁸⁵

So far we have seen that Buber maintains that the primary gifts of grace are who we are, moral norms and reality, and we have seen how who we are and reality are simultaneously received and generated through reciprocal relations of individuation. This explanation of the *zaddik* helps elucidate how moral norms become received and generated. It has already been mentioned that Buber does not maintain that morality is about rule following. That would imply that morality is merely a matter of submission to a passively received law, which would run contrary to his insistence each of us is responsible for the mutual creation of the three primary gifts of grace. Instead, moral norms come to us in the form of universally valid images of fulfilled human life. In the same way artistic genius is tempered by an education in universally valid — that is, tasteful — artworks, yet never falls into mere rule following, education depends on the internalization and imitation, but not replicating or rule following, of universally valid images of humanity:

⁸³ Dan Avnon, ‘The “Living Center” of Martin Buber's Political Theory’, *Political Theory*, 21: 1 (Feb., 1993), 55–77 (p. 60).

⁸⁴ On Buber's notion of political power see the argument that Buber inverts Carl Schmitt's political theology in Samuel Hayim Brody, ‘Is Theopolitics an Antipolitics? Martin Buber, Anarchism, and the Idea of the Political’, in *Dialogue as a Trans-Disciplinary Concept*, ed. by Paul Mendes-Flohr (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 59–86.

⁸⁵ Avnon, ‘The “Living Center” of Martin Buber's Political Theory’, p. 62.

There exist, indeed, not merely universally-valid concepts, as philosophy teaches, but also universally-valid images. The ages that possess real culture are ages where a universally-valid image of man stands above the heads of men. Looking upward to these images that are invisible and yet living in the imagination of all individuals constitutes the life of culture; the imitation of them out of the material of the person is the educating, the forming of man.⁸⁶

Buber offers Socrates, Goethe, Jesus and Buddha as examples of persons who ushered in new modes of individuating and relating, new universally valid images of humanity, “proven true”, that became the moral center of a community.⁸⁷ The *zaddik* is just such a person, that through “proving true”, serves as an exemplary model for community members. Here “proving true” means two things: the active trust mentioned earlier, and what has universal validity. Given Buber’s social epistemology the latter sense of proving true cannot simply mean what is know a priori, but what, like judgments of tasteful artwork or strong defeasible arguments, are learned and contextually specific but nevertheless generally valid.⁸⁸

However, the objection could be raised that if universally valid images serve as the center of community, pluralistic communities would seem to be impossible. The great historical communities may have each united around a single image, but this need not lead us to assume that another route is not possible. Indeed, Buber maintains that while most times have had a “figure of general validity — the Christian, the gentleman, the citizen”, few contemporary Western societies still have a universally valid image of humanity. Nevertheless, education and community creation can and does occur. What are educators doing if they are not merely transmitting a canon of universally valid images? In times in

⁸⁶ Martin Buber, ‘China and Us’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 121–25 (p. 123).

⁸⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 115–16 and pp. 138–41. Socrates, for example, is the “I of infinite conversation”.

⁸⁸ For the relationship between Buber’s moral philosophy and his use of aesthetics, especially the relation of Kantian reflective judgment to Buber’s moral epistemology, see Sarah Scott, ‘From Genius to Taste: Martin Buber’s Aestheticism’, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 25:1 (2017), 110–30.

which there are no such figures of universal validity, or pluralistic figures, the only thing left to form is “the image of God ... [the educator] is set in the *‘imitatio dei absconditi sed non ignoti’* [an imitation of the hidden but not unknown God]”.⁸⁹ That the educator is to educate in imitation of God is less strange than it may sound. The educator is to not teach content so much as model a way of living and interacting through her deeds. This illustrates to students how we individuate ourselves by relating to other selves and our common human intellectual inheritance, preparing them to live in a shared reality. This is especially important insofar as the state “fosters a perspective which allows differences of interest to appear as radical opposition” and cultivates existential mistrust in its citizens, such that the citizen “believes that he has ideas, his opponent only ideologies”.⁹⁰ The antidote this and the source of the social principle is education: “social education is the exact reverse of political propaganda”.⁹¹ This gives us a multi-layered understanding of the center of community. There may not be a single God’s Word, a single image for us to imitate. Sometimes the center is a great living spiritual leader, such as Jesus, but more commonly, “proven-true” educators hold the center, transmitting universally valid images through instruction in the canon, if one is present, and imitating God in the sense of modeling to students how to turn to each other. The “proven-true” educator is not a substantive center — not a locus of political power — but a mediating center for the social principle. Consequently, the act of grace which founds, perpetuates and builds community, is no more nor less than our own educative forces, our ability to draw out the social principle in other persons.⁹² Education — which, even if transmitting a canon, always depends on living, exemplary

⁸⁹ Martin Buber, ‘Education’, in *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald Gregor-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002) pp. 98–105 (p. 121).

⁹⁰ Buber, ‘The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle’, p. 216; Martin Buber, ‘Hope for this Hour’, in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York and Evanston, IL: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 220–29 (p. 221).

⁹¹ Buber, ‘Society and the State’, p. 176.

⁹² Interestingly, all scenes of conversion and divine illumination in Augustine’s *Confessions* are either communal (e.g., with his mother) or follow social transmission (e.g., learning of the life of Antony). But this is

educators — will either teach pupils the political principle is essential and lead them to stand in “statual” relations to each other, or it will teach them the social principle is essential and will lead them to develop that community of “functional autonomy, mutual recognition and mutual responsibility”.

Conclusion

In order to make sense of the various accounts of Buber’s anarchism as comprised of topian-communitarian-socialist-federalist-anocracy we had to investigate his notion of grace. So long as the notion of grace assumed an independent being deigning to bestow inscrutable gifts on radically dependent beings, the replication of this power structure between human beings seemed justified by the “as above, so below” adage. To reconcile religious and anarchist tendencies either the “as above, so below” principle had to be thrown out, or grace had to be redefined. We saw that Buber redefines grace by assuming radical interdependence. God and humanity are consubstantial, as are creature and creature. By focusing on interdependence Buber bypasses the antinomy of whether we are passively elected to receive gifts or willfully earn them. We receive the presence of God and other creatures, and in our response to each other we mutually exchange the gifts of individuation, moral norms and reality. We “prove true” insofar as we trust in the presence of others and work to build essential relations, that is, develop the social principle embodied in topian-communitarian-socialist-federalist-anocracies. In this analysis of grace, educators serve as the primary vehicles for the development of the social principle, and thus replace sovereign power as the center of genuine communities. Just as God gives the gift of presence, but does not elect or coerce, the centers of genuine communities give their educative presence to others, without taking on political power. Thus, to the extent that we can speak of election existing for Buber, it exists as a psycho-social problem, a problem of education.

With the notion of hierarchy and power removed from it, it may seem as if we are very far from any recognisable notion of grace.

overshadowed by his insistence we only really learn from God, the “inner teacher”.

Nevertheless, Buber repeatedly retains the term. Buber's use of the term grace is still appropriate insofar as the presence we receive — whether that of God or another creature — is an excessive, undeserved gift. Who can say that they have truly earned and not received the gift of sharing a life with another being? Buber's notion of grace leaves us asking, "What is it that we have taken from others, without realising its graciousness?" and "What of ourselves are we giving in our relations to others?" In a statement of thanks that Buber wrote on the occasion of his 85th birthday he explains that in Hebrew "the verbal form *hodoth* signifies first of all *to avow faith* in someone, after that *to thank*. ... to avow faith in someone means: to confirm him in his existence".⁹³ In a similar statement, written on his 80th birthday, he muses on to whom he must thank:

Before all to what is above. Now, indeed, so strongly as could never have been possible before, life is felt as an unearned gift ... But after that it is necessary time and again to thank one's fellow man, even when he has not done anything especially for one. For what, then? For the fact that when he met me, he had really met me, that he opened his eyes and did not confuse me with anyone else, that he opened his ears and reliably heard what I had to say to him, yes, that he opened what I really addressed, his well-closed heart.⁹⁴

It must have seemed strange to Buber's Christian readers that such a prolific author of philosophic and religious studies would avoid explicit analyses of grace. The absence of a definitive statement surely contributed to the erroneous interpretations, seen above, that he was evincing a "Catholic" or "Protestant" theology. As the epigraph of this paper notes, he was asked, "why God's grace finds hardly any place in his work. He explained: 'I write theology for men, not for God'".⁹⁵ Several years after responding in *I and Thou*

⁹³ Martin Buber, 'Expression of Thanks, 1963', in *A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902–1965*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York, Humanity Books: 1999), p. 230.

⁹⁴ Martin Buber, 'Expression of Thanks, 1958', in *A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902–1965*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York, Humanity Books: 1999), p. 225.

⁹⁵ David Flusser, 'Afterword', in Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpenetration of Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 175–229 (p. 198).

to Nietzsche's saying, "You take, you do not ask who it is that gives", Buber mentions the saying again. Now he warns:

As we take, it is of the utmost importance to know that someone is giving. He who takes what is given him, and does not experience it as a gift, is not really receiving; and so the gift turns into theft. But when we do experience the giving, we find out that revelation exists.⁹⁶

Buber showed that anarchist and religious orientations are mutually compatible, so long as we have the proper understanding of grace. The "as above, so below" analogy can be retained because we are co-workers with God and with each other. Buber may have written "theology for men, not for God", because he realized that while his readers likely already knew that we should thank God for his presence, we can struggle with truly thanking one another for the presence that each offers to the other, that is, truly confirming and having faith in one another. Doing so might just be the first step toward a community of "functional autonomy, mutual recognition and mutual responsibility".

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⁹⁶ Martin Buber, 'The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible', in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, ed. by Asher D. Biemann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 51–59 (p. 56).

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Contra Externalisation: Analogies between Anarchism and Mysticism

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*In her classic work *The Silent Cry*, Dorothee Sölle referred to mysticism as “the antiauthoritarian religion per se” (Sölle 2001: 36), suggesting an analogy between mysticism and anarchism. In this essay we explore this analogy by first discussing the mystical experience as a ‘stepping out’, as ekstasis, whereby the ‘I’ leaves itself as the being defined by the commotion of the world, achieving an at-one-ment with itself. The ‘stepping out’ of the mystic enables a mode of being marked by being ‘present in relation’, which contrasts sharply with the practices of ‘externalisation’ that outsource agency and surrender self-direction. Drawing on Plato’s critique of politics in the *Republic*, we identify ‘externalisation’ as the very essence of political life. Among modern philosophers, Rousseau is the foremost analyst of ‘externalisation’, and he provides the link to the radical reformers and anarchists who followed him. It is thus in the rejection of ‘externalisation’ that mysticism and anarchism converge, and accordingly we suggest that they occupy analogous positions within their respective fields of political theory and theology. How these ideas work together is most clearly illustrated in the life and work of Gustav Landauer, whose encounter with Meister Eckhart’s sermons was formative for his mystic anarchism and the concomitant rejection of politics as encrusted ‘externalisation’. The parallel discussion of mysticism and anarchism shows that, even if articulated in secular or even atheist terms, and to the extent that it advocates the overcoming of externalising practices, anarchism has at its core a spiritual concern.*

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Introduction and overview

In her 1997 book *The Silent Cry*, Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003) suggested that there was a strong analogy between mysticism and resistance. Mysticism heralds the possibility of a personal revelation outside the conventional canon of scripture and independently of clerical approval. The self-understanding of the mystics and their sense of purpose do not derive from the authority of a book, dogma, ritual or priest. The unmediated nearness to God proclaimed by mystics is a provocation to the existing institutions and intellectual authorities if their claim to power in society rests precisely on the idea of a privileged or indeed exclusive access to the divine. In the past, therefore, established institutions tended to look with suspicion at mystic visionaries and did not hesitate to collaborate with secular forces in order to oppress unorthodox teaching.

Because mysticism bypasses institutional authority, Sölle calls it “*the* antiauthoritarian religion per se” (Sölle 2001: 36), thereby suggesting an analogy not just between mysticism and resistance, but between mysticism and anarchism – and it is this latter analogy that we aim to explore further in this essay. We argue that there is a sense in which the role played by anarchism within political theory is analogous to the role played by mysticism within theology. In order to make this argument plausible, we begin in Section I. with a brief discussion of the mystical experience itself, which we understand as a ‘stepping out’, as *ekstasis*, which breaks through the commotion of the world and allows the mystic to experience a moment of ‘pure presence’. After describing some of the key features of this experience, focusing on the Christian variants, we proceed to investigate its relationship to community. Contrary to the common view that “mysticism negates community” (Buber, see below), we argue that the mystical experience is the beginning of a new kind of relationality, of a mode of being marked by being ‘present in relation’. Drawing on Plato’s critique of ‘politics’ in the *Republic*, we argue in Section II. that this relationality contrasts sharply with the practices of ‘externalisation’ that define the very essence of political life. In Section III. we turn to anarchism and argue that ‘externalisation’ is indeed the primary target also of the anarchist critique. We support this argument with a discussion of the foremost modern theorist of ‘externalisation’, Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, who during the 19th century was widely considered the ‘grandfather’ of contemporary radical reformers. While it is true that anarchists such as Godwin and Proudhon found much to disagree with in Rousseau, their thinking did converge on two core positions, namely that (i) moral self-direction was the defining feature of human existence and that (ii) externalisation was the fabric of modern, civilised society, which thereby jeopardised our very humanity. We conclude that it is in their orientation away from externalisation that anarchism and mysticism establish themselves as analogous in their respective fields. A brief discussion of Gustav Landauer’s ‘mystic anarchism’ allows us to provide an illustration of how the analogy unfolds within the life-work of an anarchist thinker and activist. While Landauer represents a ‘perfect storm’ within the cluster of ideas and concepts explored in this essay, it is important to underline that he is but an illustration – our argument is that the analogy between mysticism and anarchism holds at a deeper, theoretical level, so that it should be possible, in future research, to trace it in other anarchist thinkers as well. One of the interesting corollaries of this insight is that anarchism, regardless of whether it is presented in secular or even atheist terms, has at its core a spiritual concern.

I. Mysticism

Modern commentators are quick to emphasize that it is difficult to define ‘mysticism’ though all seem to agree that the term refers to a particular type of experience. In his classic definition, William James suggested that mystical experience was marked by “ineffability”, “noetic quality” and “transience and passivity” (James 1985: 379–382). William Ralph Inge finds in mysticism the “attempt to realise, in thought or in feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal” (quoted in Ellwood 1999: 16). Robert Ellwood defines the mystical experience as a religious experience that is “immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as a direct unmediated encounter with ultimate divine reality.” This experience engenders a “deep sense of unity” and suggests that “during the experience the experiencer was living on a level of being other than the ordinary” (Ellwood 1999: 39).

Jerome Gellman describes a mystical experience as an experience in which a person “has a nonsensory perception apparently of a reality (or state of affairs) of a sort that can neither be perceived by sense perception nor known by ordinary introspective self-awareness” (Gellman 2001: 4). Sölle summarises that “a mystic is someone who has particular experiences that bring about altered states of consciousness deriving from the encounter with the other, the divine reality” (Sölle 2001: 16).

In the accounts of mystical experiences, the encounter with the Divine is commonly represented as a ‘stepping out’, as ecstasy – *ekstasis*. Coming into contact with the other, divine reality entails a stepping out of the limits of our common, everyday world. The mystic, however, is painfully aware that the ‘I’ of the person undergoing the experience is included and indeed determined by this world, so that stepping out of the world entails a stepping out of the ‘I’, a losing of oneself. The ‘I’ leaves the everyday world and, at the same time, “leaves itself as the being defined by that world” (Sölle 2001: 27). Thereby, *ekstasis* becomes an expression of the “uttermost freedom from what determines our lives” (Sölle 2001: 27).

According to Eric Robertson Dodds, Plotinus was the first to use the term *ekstasis* in the context of mystical experience (Dodds 1965: 72; Hadot 1993: 32–33). In Plotinus’s symbolism, the soul transcends being and becomes one with the “completely other” on the last stage of the mystical ascent. In union with the One, the soul “becomes itself and what it was; life in this world of sense being a falling away, an exile, ‘a shedding of wings’” (VI, 9.9 as in Plotinus 1969: 622–623; cf. Gregory 1999: 127), where Plotinus took the ‘shedding of wings’ expression from Plato’s *Phaedrus* (248c). The soul experiences this movement, Plotinus explains, as a return to its origins, to the “land of its birth” where it is “nowhere deflected in its being”, having attained “to solitude in untroubled stillness”, “utterly at rest” (VI, 9.7, 9.9, 9.11 as in Plotinus 1969: 620–621, 622–623, 624–625; cf. Gregory 1999: 125, 128, 129). This is the “end of the journey” (VI, 9.11 as in Plotinus 1969: 625; cf. Gregory 1999: 130). Thus, as the soul finds itself in union with the One, it finds itself beyond being, completely outside itself – this is the moment Plotinus calls *ekstasis*.

In accordance with Plotinus's account, mystics talk about their experience not just as one of 'stepping out', of *ekstasis* and freedom, but also as an experience of being at one with themselves. The stepping out of the 'I' is a form of self-giving, a cessation of the ego as it was defined by the world, leading to the simultaneous discovery of a deeper, more real self. The implication is that in our normal lives we are very rarely wholly present in what we experience. We usually act and think only with a part of ourselves; we continue to watch ourselves and "do not attain the self-forgetfulness of being one" (Sölle 2001: 25). The freedom of mystical *ekstasis* is the freedom of being one, which allows us to act in fullness of our being. The stepping out, paradoxically, is thus also a self-discovery or indeed a restoration of self, which is free from fear to the extent that it enjoys a 'pure presence' – "nowhere deflected in its being", to quote Plotinus again. Retrospectively, after the stepping out experience, mystics tend to look back to their previous lives as a fake, oppressed, and unreal existence, which did not involve their true selves. Through the mystical *ekstasis*, the mystic is 'made whole'.

Inspired by Joseph Marechal's *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics* (1927), Bernard McGinn came to adopt the term 'presence' as the central notion for "grasping the unifying note in the varieties of Christian mysticism": "the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God" (McGinn 1997: xvii). Christian believers, McGinn elaborates, affirmed that God can become present in ordinary religious observances as e.g. in prayer, sacrament and other rituals, but not in any "direct or immediate fashion" (McGinn 1997: xviii). Mystical accounts, in contrast, attest to an immediate divine presence outside such observances. The presence referred to here, however, is always marked by duality and simultaneity, because while God is experienced as present, the one undergoing this experience will also be lifted to a new level of awareness, to a heightened and more intense consciousness involving the whole of his or her being. It is the simultaneity and coincidence of the two 'presences' that allows the mystic to experience divine presence as an interior phenomenon.

It is not a paradox, therefore, for Martin Buber to note that mystical *ekstasis* is an *inward* experience. *Ekstasis* is both a process and a moment of differentiation whereby the true self differentiates itself vis-à-vis the commotion of the world. The commotion, Buber explained, was “only the outside of an unknown Inward which is the most living thing of all”. The experience is beyond knowledge because “this Inward can withhold the experience of itself from knowledge, which is a daughter of the commotion, but not from the vibrant and self-liberating soul” (Buber 1996: 1):

But there is an experience which grows in the soul out of the soul itself, without contact and without restraint, in naked oneness. It comes into being and completes itself beyond the commotion, free of the other, inaccessible to the other. It needs no nourishment, and no poison can touch it. The soul which stands in it stands in itself, has itself, experiences itself – boundlessly. It experiences itself as a unity, no longer because it has surrendered itself wholly to a thing of the world, gather itself wholly in a thing of the world, but because it has submerged itself entirely in itself, has plunged down to the very ground of itself, is kernel and husk, sun and eye, carouser and drink, at once. This most inward of all experiences is what the Greeks call *ek-stasis*, a stepping out. (Buber 1996: 2)

The mystical ecstasy is thus an experience of unity and oneness with oneself, which in turn realigns the self's relationship with the world and with the divine. As a manifestation of the human-divine encounter, the experience is acknowledged in a vast range of spiritual symbolisms and practices, from world religions such as Christianity and Islam to more local practices such as trance possession of the *loa* in Haitian voodoo. In non-theistic religions, mystical ecstasy is often presented as an illumination; in theistic religions, the encounter is a union of the soul and God – *the unio mystica*. Especially in Christian contexts, the ‘stepping out’ of the *unio mystica* is a precondition of, and simultaneous with, the ‘entering into God’, which is followed by being ‘filled with God’, *enthusiasmos*. The experience is differentiation and union at the same time, because, by entering into God and by being filled with God, “I am both more me and more than me” so that “the very contrast between union and differentiation is itself transcended, a condition in which the affirmation of the one is not bought at the price of the denial of the other.” (Turner 1995: 58).

Mystics struggle to articulate their experience in language. As Buber explained, “[e]cstasy stands beyond common experience. It is unity, solitude, uniqueness: that which cannot be transferred. It is the abyss that cannot be fathomed: the unsayable.” (Buber 1996: 6) Sölle, too, notes that “nearly all mystics give voice to the problem of the inadequacy of language” (Sölle 2001: 56). Accordingly they draw on negation, paradox and silence as they attempt to communicate the process of their own transformation. Language, which dissects by naming, appears to interrupt or disturb the vision of unity; it introduces dualisms, dichotomies, binary distinctions in order to enable the speaker to ‘intend’ reality. To the extent that they succeed in negating, de-stabilising and avoiding such dichotomies, mystics speak an “anarchistic language” (Sölle 2001: 63) which is unable to name and hence to evoke relationships of domination.

That there is an intriguing and important relationship between mysticism and politics has not escaped the attention of commentators and, indeed, mystics. Not unlike Sölle, who characterises mysticism as ‘anti-authoritarian’, Evelyn Underhill speaks of a “mystic freedom which conditions, instead of being conditioned by, its normal world [...]” (Underhill 2002: 447). There is no ‘structure’, and certainly no structure of domination, that could prevent or contain the ecstasy of mysticism. Accordingly, those who stress the “inherent politics in all mysticism” (Fox 1981: 541) point to the potentially subversive nature of experiences and ways of life that transcend existing hierarchies, constraints and systems of oppression (Critchley 2009).

Yet, while the appreciation of mysticism as a form of resistance and critique – even as a form of deconstruction (Derrida 1992a, 1992b) – is surprisingly widespread, it is far less clear whether this form of critique can assume a political role not just by challenging existing power structures but also by informing alternative ways of life and the formation of alternative communities. Is the *ekstasis* of the mystic so radical that it implies a stepping out of community altogether? In an argument with Ernest Troeltsch at the First German Conference of Sociologists in October 1910, Martin Buber rejected the idea that mysticism was a “sociological category” and insisted that mystical experience was a form of “religious solipsism”:

It also seems to me that mysticism negates community – mysticism does not struggle with any organized community, nor does it set itself up as a countercommunity, as a sect would. Rather mysticism negates community, precisely because for it there is only one real relation, the relation to God. The process noted by Professor Troeltsch, the coming together of the believers, [...] does not at all occur in mysticism. The [mystic] remains thoroughly isolated in his belief, for nothing else matters to him than to be alone with his God. (Buber quoted in Mendes-Flohr 1996: xvii–xviii)

Buber would eventually replace the juxtaposition of ecstasy and worldly commotion with an elaboration of the “primary word” I-Thou (Buber 1958). At the time he understood this change of perspective as a ‘conversion’ away from the ‘exceptional’ experience of mystical otherness to the ‘need to be present’ in everyday life:

Since then I have given up the ‘religious’ which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. (Buber 1967: 26)

However, calling this change in his outlook a ‘conversion’ is an exaggeration, especially as the conversion itself resulted from an experience, an encounter (Moore 1996: xxi). The Thou is met through grace; it cannot be found by seeking (Buber 1958: 24). When spoken, “the primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relation”, which subsequently I “body forth”, and “[i]n bodying forth I disclose. I lead the form across – into the world of It.” Buber translates grace into relation: “all real living is meeting” (Buber 1958: 18, 23, 25). Ecstasy may be extra-ordinary, but its impact radiates into everydayness. Ecstasy is not a step into isolation but a shedding of the ties that bind us to the commotion of the world and hence a restoration of our ability to be open to, and hence to respond to, reality. The stepping out thereby becomes a new ‘immersing in’.

The mystic is thus not a selfish visionary or an individual seeking to escape from the world, but someone who is again able to be open to reality and hence to be ‘present in relation’. This process of restoration may entail a moment of individuation, but not in a sense that would hinder our ability to relate. On the contrary,

by turning inwards we become more able to attune ourselves to one another. Becoming more aware of ourselves, even where this involves pain, becomes a precondition for relating to others in a new, creative manner. We noted earlier how already in Plotinus's account mystical *ekstasis* entailed a being-one with ourselves, a moment in which we act in the fullness of our being. In this moment of pure presence, *bios* and *logos* – what I do and what I say – are in harmony, and to the extent that I have achieved a 'unity of self', the pronoun 'you' that others may use as they refer to me finally has a concrete and unique reference point. And to the extent that the pronouns 'I' and 'you' eventually acquire meaning, the 'we' emerges as a reality. "Only humans who are capable of truly saying 'you' to one another can truly say 'we' together" (Buber quoted in Sölle: 165). In fact, Buber's later philosophy of the I-Thou does not reflect a departure from his earlier interest in mystical ecstasy but rather its explication (cf. Mendes-Flohr 1978; Schwartz 2006). The relation to the Thou does not deny the ecstatic union experienced by the soul but examines this union in relation to its consequences.

II. Politics and externalisation

If *ekstasis* yields a surplus of freedom and thereby restores our ability to be 'present in relation', we need to ask how this ability could have been lost in the first place. The mystical vision is a revelation of possibilities which in a sense had been there previously, of opportunities which needed to be re-awoken. *Ekstasis* is thus the negation of a negation, the pushing aside of all that is preventing us from apprehending reality.

How do we get lost in the commotion of the world? And what is the role of society and politics in this process? A lucid analysis of these questions is provided by Plato's *Republic*, which in our reading implies a radical critique of politics. As our starting point we choose the passage at 404c–408b (Plato 1987), where Plato discusses the education of the philosophers who are to rule the city. At one point, Plato introduces an interesting image, which describes a common individual and social pathology. He portrays a man living a life of idleness who enjoys fatty foods – "the luxury

of Syracusan and Sicilian cooking” and “Attic confectionary” – and too much alcohol, and who thereby fills his body “with gases and fluids, like a stagnant pool”. As a result, his body will suffer and display symptoms of sickness. At this point an expert, a doctor, will be consulted. The doctor will look at the case and charge a fee in return for a diagnosis that confirms that our patient is indeed sick. The medical profession will have labels and names for the illness thus diagnosed – Plato mentions “flatulence” and “catarrh” as examples. From now on, our patient needs to look after his illness. He may require medication in order to manage symptoms; he may require regular visits to the doctor, who will in turn continue to attest that our patient is in need of medical care. Life may become a “lingering death” as our patient devotes much attention and energy to his affliction. We can easily imagine an entire industry of people who are all too eager to look after the patient by cossetting his illness because their very livelihoods depend on the patient requiring attention and treatment.

As Plato does not fail to note, however, there is an obvious and much less elaborate cure to the affliction: the patient must change his diet. He must change his habits, he must change his life, but this is exactly what he is not prepared to do. In frantic activity, he surrounds himself with theories, concepts, knowledge and people who will confirm to him that he is, indeed, ill. The point of the feverish activity is precisely to avoid a situation in which the patient would have to confront himself, his way of life. Elaborate systems of professions and services, often at the very heart of society, are created and entire lives are lived in order to escape the simple insight that we must change in order to live healthier, better lives. In the following reflections, we will refer to this pathology as ‘externalisation’. Through externalisation, we locate the causes of our ailments, our alienation, our suffering outside of ourselves, thus exposing ourselves to the commotion of the world. Externalisation does not just involve individuals as individuals; rather, externalisation is systemic in that it relies on the recognition provided by the surrounding society. Thus, the objectification entailed in externalisation is a social phenomenon, because for externalisation to work effectively, recognition is crucial.

In this image we gain a first inkling of society as a system of hideouts, where the members of society recognise and confirm each other's externalising practices (Shillabeer 2007). As they run away from themselves, they run towards each other. They objectify each other and thereby sanction the lies they tell about themselves. According to Plato, politics is crucial in this system because *externalisation is the essence of politics*. Politics is the creation of entire structures, of professions, of policies, of entire worlds that help us to not confront ourselves. Politics is externalisation, and as such it entails an infinite deferral: before I ever change myself, I can keep myself busy by changing the city, the state, the world. This is the reason also why for Socrates and Plato, philosophy and politics finds themselves in a relationship of tension, because philosophy, not unlike mysticism, is about self-knowledge – as embodied by Socrates, philosophy is about revealing and dissolving the lies we tell each other about ourselves.

Plato's *Republic* elaborates on this point not just in isolated images as in the example given above. The understanding of politics as externalisation is fundamental to the very structure of the dialogue. Initially, the *Republic* is a dialogue about justice, but then becomes, at a crucial point, a construction of a city "in words" and as a result the dialogue seems to deal with the political question of how to rule a city. However, in order to understand the purpose of the dialogue as a whole, it is important to understand why the characters in the dialogue felt it necessary to talk about cities in the first place. The transition occurs just after Socrates effectively won the argument against Thrasymachus, who had defended the position that "justice is simply what is in the interest of the stronger party". Socrates argues against Thrasymachus that "injustice never pays better than justice", and eventually prevails against his opponent, who accepts defeat: "This is your holiday treat [...], so enjoy it, Socrates" (354a). At this point, Socrates explains that he thought "the argument was over", and the book might have finished if indeed it was "only" about justice and the issues raised by Thrasymachus. Instead, the book continues because Glaucon is not satisfied with the ease with which Socrates defeated Thrasymachus and proceeds to

restate the case for injustice, and he does so over several pages. Socrates is surprised that Glaucon, who had previously expressed his support for Socrates's position, is able to produce such an eloquent and powerful defence of the argument that it "pays off" to be unjust. Socrates's admiration for Glaucon's flexibility is ironic: "You must indeed have something divine about you, if you can put the case for injustice so strongly, and yet still believe that justice is better than injustice." (368a)

The problem that Socrates now has to deal with is not just an intellectual problem. In fact, the rational part of the discussion had been concluded with Thrasymachus's defeat. Glaucon's refusal, almost against his will, to accept the conclusions that had been reached, is the new driving force of the dialogue and the new problem that Socrates has to resolve. This is also the point at which Socrates, instead of addressing the condition of Glaucon's soul directly and hence personally, takes a detour and begins to talk about a city because, he explains, the city is "bigger" and hence it will be easier to see what is going on. Because the soul, especially Glaucon's soul, is too close to home, political themes are introduced as a deflection, allowing the discussion, which otherwise would have become very personal – and, for Glaucon, possibly uncomfortable – to continue. Glaucon and Adeimantus are perfectly happy to talk about how the city must change for justice to unfold; they would have been much less happy to talk about how *they* and their lives must change for justice to unfold in their souls.

The 'political' themes in Plato's dialogue are thus introduced as a deliberate externalisation in order to cater for the needs of Glaucon's and Adeimantus's souls. This 'gesture' is repeated at other key turning points in the dialogue. The first just city that Socrates outlines is what he calls the "healthy" city, in which citizens are content to live a simple life with few luxuries. Having completed the construction of the healthy city, Socrates proceeds to discuss the very nature of justice to be found in it, but this discussion comes to a sudden halt as Glaucon intervenes, accusing Socrates of having founded "a community of pigs" (372d). What Glaucon is implying here, unwillingly, is that he cannot see himself in the just city, without the luxuries he depends on. Put differently, he

is not prepared to change so as to find his place in a city which he recognises as just. And so Socrates again proceeds to ‘externalise’ the problem, away from Glaucon, by discussing not the healthy but the “feverish” society, which will have all the luxuries that Glaucon requires, making the question of justice all the more complicated. The politics of the feverish society is thus an externalisation – a deferral, a deflection – of the fever in Glaucon’s soul.

In the subsequent dialogue, Socrates needs to carefully re-introduce philosophical themes so as to allow Glaucon and Adeimantus to contemplate what it might mean to gradually remove themselves from their feverish societies and thus to personally face the question of justice. Throughout the text, philosophy is presented as the antidote to an existence in a cave-like society, whose members actively shun reality and kill those who draw attention to their condition. The escape from the cave is presented as an ascent and, more importantly, as a painful struggle as the soul must overcome the temporary blindness caused by the excessive brightness of the sun outside the cave. As in St John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, the soul must endure a sudden deprivation – a loss of sight – which in truth is the result of an influx of light which eventually reveals the full potential of the soul’s ability to see. Accordingly, Plato emphasizes that the escape is more than a mere acquisition of knowledge. The escape or the ‘turning around’ (*periagoge*) as Plato describes it, is in effect the turning away from an ‘old’ life and the embracing of a ‘new’ life. The cave society had its very own codes of honour and glory, which distinguished the more keen-eyed prisoners who were best able “to remember the order of sequence among the passing shadows and so be best able to divine their future appearance” (516c–d), but clearly the released prisoner would not be able to return to the mode of life represented by the cave dwellers and their hierarchies: “[...] he would far rather be ‘a serf in the house of some landless man’, or indeed anything else in the world, than hold the opinions and live the life that they do.”

Thus, the turning around amounts to an *ekstasis*, a stepping out, whereby society’s practices and structures of externalisation lose their binding power. And in line with what we noted earlier – that the vision unfolds as a new ‘presence in relation’ – Socrates

explains that the released prisoner is to return to the cave and be of service to those who dwell there. In other words, he must show “some care and responsibility for others” (520b). Of course, it is Glaucon who initially misses the point and takes the prisoner’s vision as the foundation of a new code of honour, a new distinction, which would make him superior to the cave dwellers. It would be unfair, Glaucon protests, to ask the released prisoner to return to the cave because thereby he would be compelled to “live a poorer life than [he] might live”. Just as he was unwilling to live in a society of pigs, Glaucon refuses to mix with the cave people. But now Socrates is in a position to remind Glaucon that the city they had constructed in words provided for the education of the philosophers, thus implying an obligation on the part of the philosophers to use their vision for the benefit of the whole community.

In Plato’s analysis, therefore, externalisation is what ties us to the commotion of the world and prevents us from experiencing unity, including the unity of self. Through externalisation, we ‘outsource’ the responsibility we have for caring for our souls; we make ourselves dependent on a multitude of forces and interests over which we have very little control as we begin to live through the eyes of others. The false identity we gradually establish in our attempts to avoid confronting ourselves is confirmed through the recognition it receives from others, and vice versa. The result is a tacit ‘contract’ whereby the members of society sustain each other’s lies not just through silence or by ‘looking away’ but by positively endorsing and encouraging the various illusions people spin around themselves. It would be a mistake to consider externalisation as a purely negative force because members of society will display a remarkable creativity in maintaining, sustaining, extending and embellishing the stories they consider their own. Externalisation is an active force, which requires its agents to actively engage with other people in order to find reassurance that their cover has not yet been blown. Gaps in existing stories have to be managed and filled with new stories, and real decisions with real consequences are taken in order to keep our stories and identities alive. The manner in which people relate to each other through the bonds they create through externalisation is marked by mutual dependency and mutual suspicion. To the extent that

we ‘outsource’ ourselves, we remain ‘absent in relation’, as opposed to the interrelatedness that emerges from *ekstasis*, which restores our ‘presence in relation’. The nakedness of *ekstasis* is thus directly opposed to the ‘emperor’s new clothes’ that people wear in the societies built around practices of externalisation.

As the identities thus constructed inevitably remain fragile, extensive and costly efforts have to be invested into objectifying and ossifying them in structures and hierarchies. Therefore, even though members of society have to depend on each other for their stories to continue, their encounters and relations do not bring them closer together. On the contrary, the ultimate social effect of externalisation is differentiation and atomisation for the very purpose of the ‘contract’ is to allow members of society to be ‘absent in relation’; ultimately, they remain aloof from the bonds of dependency that define their social identities. Externalisation thus generates both feverish social activity and atomisation. The ‘contract’ offers “human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them.” (Havel 2010: 14) It also creates a culture of conformity, as everyone who dares to be different will attract the attention of those who rely on the predictability of the behaviour of others for maintaining their social status. Difference becomes problematic as it puts the existing narratives under pressure to adapt to a new, different situation, thus potentially exposing existing fissures and gaps. The dynamics of the situation will thus ensure that *mimesis* prevails whereby members confirm their complicity by copying each other. *Mimesis* ensures that externalisation becomes the very fabric of a particular kind of society, while politics is the means whereby these practices of externalisation struggle for permanency. In particular, the resulting objectification and rigidification must not be misunderstood as a political problem requiring a political solution. Politics, in Plato’s analysis, is part of the problem, not its solution. The solution, in contrast, is the experience of *ekstasis*: the restoration of openness, of ‘being present in relation’, and the new interrelatedness that unfolds from this presence.

In that we introduced these concepts through Plato’s analysis of politics and society in the *Republic*, they remain theoretical notions without historical referent other than the Athenian *polis*

that considered the teachings of Socrates, Plato's teacher, to be so dangerous and subversive that he was sentenced to death. In Plato's account, Socrates was not just an analyst of practices and structures of externalisation; he was also their victim, authenticating his analysis with his death. It is far beyond the scope of this essay to now trace the historical evolution of practices of externalisation in order to explore how 'politics', since the 'Greek discovery of politics' (Meier 1990), could evolve into the hegemonic discourse and externalising practice that dominates modern societies today. However, it is worthwhile to look at the transition to modernity as a key moment in this evolution, and it is feasible to do so because it is precisely at that moment that Jean-Jacques Rousseau presents himself as the heir of Socrates' and Plato's ambitions (Orwin 1998). Within the context of the questions raised in this essay, Rousseau appears as modernity's foremost theorist of externalisation as a social and individual pathology, and it is not accidental that he is also a key reference in the history of anarchism.

III. **Contra externalisation: Rousseau and anarchism**

Practices of externalisation generate societies in which members imprison themselves in the 'positions' in social and political hierarchies they create for themselves and others through mutual recognition. They sustain each other in a "second reality" (Voegelin 1990: 49; Shillabeer 2007), where they can be 'absent in relation' and indefinitely defer the confrontation with self and reality. While much creativity can go into the creation of such second realities, their ultimate effect is constraining, and hence members of society may eventually recognise, with Rousseau, that "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau 1973c: 181). Already in the *First Discourse* Rousseau offered an analysis of what it means to be 'absent in relation':

We no longer dare seem what we really are, but lie under a perpetual restraint; in the meantime the herd of men, which we call society, all act under the same circumstances exactly alike, unless very particular and powerful motives prevent them. Thus we never know with whom we have to deal; and even to know our friends

we must wait for some critical and pressing occasion; that is, till it is too late; for it is on those very occasions that such knowledge is of use to us. (Rousseau 1973a: 6)

While the *First Discourse* lamented how “we build our happiness on the opinion of others” (Rousseau 1973a: 29), the *Second Discourse* develops these themes and attempts to explore ‘inequality’ as a consequence of externalisation. Rousseau’s natural man, in contrast to Glaucon, would have been content in Plato’s “healthy city” because of the natural limits to his desires:

I see him [natural man] satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook: finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and, with that, all his wants supplied. (Rousseau 1973b: 52)

Natural men were strangers “to vanity, deference, esteem, and contempt” (Rousseau 1973b: 76) because they “quietly await the impulses of nature, yield to them involuntarily, with more pleasure than ardour, and, their wants once satisfied, lose the desire” (Rousseau 1973b: 78). Accordingly, natural man was “neither standing in need of his fellow-creatures nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps even not distinguishing them one from another” (Rousseau 1973b: 79). The natural equality resulting from man’s independence vanished as men “became accustomed [...] to making comparisons” (1973b: 89). As they live and work in greater proximity and contacts become more regular, they become conscious of each other’s presence and thus “[e]ach one began to consider the rest, and to wish to be considered in turn; and thus a value came to be attached to public esteem. [...] this was the first step towards inequality [...]” (1973b: 90). Rousseau thus uses the term ‘inequality’ in its broadest sense as referring to a ‘distinction of rank’ primarily based on esteem. In Rousseau’s usage of the term, inequality refers to the “taking into account of differences” (1973b: 110–111), to an awareness of differences. While the political and economic inequalities that later theorists would focus on are inevitably the endpoint of this process of differentiation, Rousseau’s ‘inequality’ has a much wider meaning. It refers to the process whereby men acquire a sense of self and others by comparing themselves with each other. To the extent that

this process ossified into a system of ‘ranks’, with higher ranks reflecting more esteem than lower ranks, and to the extent that positions of rank were ultimately secured in relations of mutual recognition, it became

[...] the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two totally different things; and from this distinction sprang insolent pomp and cheating trickery, with all the numerous vices that go in their train. On the other hand, free and independent as men were before, they were now, in consequence of a multiplicity of new wants, brought into subjection, as it were, to all nature, and particularly to one another; and each became in some degree a slave even in becoming the master of other men: if rich, they stood in need of the services of others; if poor, of their assistance; and even a middle condition did not enable them to do without one another. (1973b: 95)

As a result, “man must now [...] have been perpetually employed in getting others to interest themselves in his lot, and in making them, apparently at least, if not really, find their advantage in promoting his own.” This, in turn, rendered him “sly and artful in his behaviour to some, imperious and cruel to others [...]” (1973b: 95–96). From this process of comparing and measuring each other, there developed in man a “universal desire for reputation, honours, and advancement, which inflames us all [...]” (1973b: 112). The result is a feverish society, “an assembly of artificial men and factitious passions” (1973b: 115), in which this “desire of being talked about”, “this unremitting rage of distinguishing ourselves”, never gives us a moment’s respite (1973b: 112). In this society, people are driven by “rivalry and competition on the one hand, and conflicting interests on the other, together with a secret desire on both of profiting at the expense of others” (1973b: 96):

Civilized man [...] is always moving, sweating, toiling, and racking his brains to find still more laborious occupations: he goes on in drudgery to his last moment, and even seeks death to put himself in a position to live, or renounces life to acquire immortality. He pays his court to men in power, whom he hates, and to the wealthy, whom he despises; he stops at nothing to have the honour of ser-

ving them; he is not ashamed to value himself on his own meanness and their protection; and, proud of his slavery, he speaks with disdain of those, who have not the honour of sharing it. (1973b: 115)

Our desires thereby were no longer subjected to their natural limits; on the contrary, as it was now our ambition to ‘outdo’ each other, our desires became limitless. Now “it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two” and more (1973b: 92).

For Rousseau, politics is the means whereby this new situation acquires a degree of permanency. Society and law “bound new fetters on the poor, and gave new powers to the rich; which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the law of property and inequality, converted clever usurpation into unalterable right, and, for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery, and wretchedness” (1973b: 99). The people surrendered to the new system as they “judged it not inexpedient to sacrifice one part of their freedom to ensure the rest; as a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the rest of his body.” Thus, “all ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty [...]” (1973b: 99).

The strength of natural man was precisely that he never tried to outsource his power and ability because he had discovered “the advantage of having all our forces constantly at our disposal, of being always prepared for every event, and of carrying one’s self, as it were, perpetually whole and entire about one.” (1973b: 54) In other words, natural man did not externalise and thus preserved what was for Rousseau the distinctly human characteristic of “free agency” (1973b: 60). In stark contrast, modern man lives in the opinions of others; indeed it is from their judgement that he derives “the consciousness of his own existence” (1973b: 116):

[...] always asking others what we are, and never daring to ask ourselves, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity, and civilization, and of such sublime codes of morality, we have nothing to show for ourselves but a frivolous and deceitful appearance, honour without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness. (1973b: 116)

And precisely because our exteriors are deceitful appearance, we must rely on mutual recognition in order to supply them with the appearance of reality. Therefore, the ferocity of our “rage for distinction” is directly proportional to the chasm that exists between who we succeed in pretending to be and who we truly are.

Rousseau’s analysis in the *Second Discourse* directly refers to the section in the *Republic*, referred to above, in which Socrates describes how we, with the help of the medical profession, cosset disease by giving an objective reality to ills of our own making (Rousseau 1973b: 56–57). However, Rousseau is of interest to this essay not only because of his eloquent presentation of externalisation as the underlying dynamics of civilizational decline – indeed of civilization *as* decline – but also because of his influence on radical reformist and revolutionary movements, particularly socialism and anarchism in their many variants. Throughout the 19th Century it was common to refer to Rousseau as the “master”, “father” or “grandfather” of the socialists and other radical reformers of the time, who in turn were identified as the “disciples”, “sons,” or “grandsons” of Rousseau (Noland 1967: 33). In 1851, Proudhon acknowledged that the “authority” of Rousseau had “ruled us for almost a century” (Noland 1967: 35; Crowder 1991: 16). For a thinker like Proudhon, however, “authority” is an ambiguous notion and indeed while he could call Rousseau a “great innovator” and “the apostle of liberty and equality”, he could also occasionally express sentiments of revulsion and disgust: “Never did a man unite to such a degree intellectual pride, aridity of soul, baseness of tastes, depravity of habits, ingratitude of heart [...]” (quoted in Noland: 36–37). Godwin is generally more sympathetic towards Rousseau and acknowledged him as a major influence on the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, admitting that he “frequently quoted Rousseau in the course of this work.” However, in the very same footnote, he found space to express his reservations: “Rousseau, notwithstanding his great genius, was full of weakness and prejudice” (Godwin 1993: 273).

The relation between the anarchists and Rousseau is complex as different anarchists adopt different positions towards Rousseau. In fact, there is often little consistency in the treatment Rousseau receives in the writings even of individual anarchists. Godwin and

Proudhon are very much aware of his writings, and they discuss them explicitly in their works in many places. Sometimes the engagement with Rousseau amounts to positive influence, sometimes to negative reaction – with the former tending to predominate in Godwin, and the latter in Proudhon (Crowder: 17–18). Tolstoy idolised Rousseau in his youth and adopted similar views to his on education, compassion, and religion, even if he was critical of the notion of a ‘general will’ (Christoyannopoulos 2019). Kropotkin admired him for having been an eloquent defender of equality and human rights and for having thereby exerted a positive influence on the French Revolution (Crowder: 19). Bakunin too confirmed Rousseau’s influence on the Revolution but ultimately judges this influence to be malign. Still, at another time in his life, he declared that “in his faith in the eventual triumph of mankind over priests and tyrants he is at one with the ‘immortal Rousseau’” (Crowder: 19).

Paul McLaughlin suggested that, among all the *philosophes*, Rousseau “may have had the greatest influence on the development of anarchism” (McLaughlin 2007: 105). There are many reasons why the anarchists would have felt drawn to Rousseau, who was arguably the most radical thinker of his age. First, Rousseau’s notion of a realm of freedom as “a ‘natural’ order outside the artificiality of the state” (Crowder: 23) must have appealed to his anarchist readers. It is correct, of course, that this vision of stateless freedom also posed a problem in that it seemed to suggest that it was the rise of society itself that disrupted and ultimately irretrievably destroyed the possibility of man living at peace with himself, virtuous and free, and without government. Godwin, for example, was critical of Rousseau’s suggestion that statelessness would not be possible under modern conditions. Still, he was too endeared by the vision itself and, instead of abandoning it, simply reversed Rousseau’s scheme of history. The happy, virtuous, free anarchy was not a memory of the past, but a prospect for the future following the abolition of government and law.

Second, the text that caused the greatest problems for Rousseau’s anarchist readers was *The Social Contract*, because here Rousseau seems to subscribe to what was arguably the most influential justification of the state at the time, the social contract

tradition. Even Godwin, who felt so close to the sentiments and analyses provided in the *Second Discourse* and in *Emile*, noted that in Rousseau's political writings, "the unrivalled superiority of his genius appears to desert him" (Godwin 1993: 273). Moreover, a superficial reading of Rousseau's contract may give the impression that he, too, subscribed to the classic argument of the contractarians that freedom is pre-social and must be constrained by government in order to allow men to coexist in society. This critique, put forward also by Proudhon and Bakunin, fails to appreciate the subtlety of Rousseau's construction, which upon closer inspection can also be read as proposing precisely the kind of self-governing community that the anarchists were debating. After all, *The Social Contract* did not create a state separate from those it governed. In fact, the core principle of Rousseau's vision is the inviolability of moral self-direction as the key feature of freedom. It is in *The Social Contract* that Rousseau describes moral self-direction as the very essence of "being a man" (Rousseau 1973c: 186), and it is not impossible therefore that this work – least loved by anarchists – is the very source of what is perhaps the most fundamental of their premises. Accordingly, at the very start of the *Social Contract*, Rousseau explained that the work was meant "to inquire if, in the civil order, there can be any sure and legitimate rule of administration, men being taken as they are and laws as they might be," thus raising the key anarchist question as to whether government as such – not what form, or how much – is legitimate (McLaughlin 2007: 106).

Third, anarchists would also accept the basic tenets of Rousseau's analysis of modern society as a complex web of dependencies in which both the subservient and the dominant had become alienated from their true moral nature. The introduction of governments makes this structure permanent, and the resulting moral decline is pervasive to such an extent that mere reform is insufficient for freedom and virtue to be attained. A total transformation of society is required.

Rousseau had gone further than any other thinker in advocating two related positions: (i) freedom and agency, the defining features of human existence, are to be understood as moral self-direction (cf. Spaan 2011), and (ii) modern, civilized society is destructive of

moral self-direction because externalisation, which is the opposite of self-direction, is its very fabric. It is on these two fundamental positions that Rousseau's and the anarchists' outlooks converge. Thus, anarchists, too, can be read as theorists of externalisation. Godwin, for example, noted that "he that is not accustomed, exclusively to act upon the dictates of his own understanding, must fall infinitely short of that energy and simplicity of which our nature is capable." (Godwin 1993: 306) Looking specifically at the politics of national assemblies, he observes how men inescapably end up losing the autonomy of their decision-making:

Every man looks forward to the effects which the opinions he avows will produce on his success. Every man connects himself with some sect or party. The activity of his thought is shackled at every turn by the fear that his associates may disclaim him. (Godwin 1993: 307)

Indeed, "men who act under the name of society, are deprived of that activity and energy which may belong to them in their individual character. They have a multitude of followers to draw after them, whose humours they must consult, and to whose slowness of apprehension they must accommodate themselves." (Godwin 1993: 308) Thus, the politics of government, where the need to take binding decisions requires the imposition of a "fictitious unanimity," ultimately leads men to abandon the principle of self-direction and to pursue their self-interests in competition with others by making their decisions and actions dependent on the strategic requirements of the situation. Thus, before laws can be introduced, "numerous amendments have [to be made] to suit the corrupt interest of imperious pretenders" (Godwin 1993: 307). The result is a derailment, a loss of openness, a collective and individual inability to detach ourselves from the commotion of the world – to use Buber's term – and to look beyond our self-interests and the opinions of others. In other words, we become unable to 'apperceive':

The genuine and wholesome state of mind is, to be unloosed from shackles, and to expand every fibre of its frame according to the independent and individual impressions of truth upon that mind. How great would be the progress of intellectual improvement, if

men were unfettered by the prejudices of education, unseduced by the influence of a corrupt state of society, and accustomed to yield without fear to the guidance of truth, however unexplored might be the regions and unexpected the conclusions to which she conducted us? (Godwin 1993: 306–307)

IV. Mysticism, anarchism and anti-politics

Mystical *ekstasis* pierces through the ‘cloud of unknowing’, the fog of externalisation, and thereby restores our openness to reality, our being ‘present in relation’. The analogy between mysticism and anarchism is based on their convergence on a critique of externalisation, which is considered as the pathology – operating at an individual and social level – which undermines moral self-direction as the essence of our humanity. Thus, the modern state, as the ultimate manifestation of externalisation, *de-humanises*.

The thinker who brings these notions of mysticism, anarchism and the critique of politics together most clearly is, of course, Gustav Landauer. The influence of Meister Eckhart, the German mystic (c.1260–c.1328), on Landauer is well documented (e.g. Hinz 2000; Sauerland 1999). During his imprisonment in 1899/1900, Landauer spent considerable time translating some of Eckhart’s sermons; these translations were later published as a book (Landauer 1903). Joachim Willems suggested that since the encounter with Eckhart, mysticism assumed a *systemic* role in Landauer’s philosophical and political work, signifying a “decisive turn” in his thought (Willems 2001: 12). How mysticism was absorbed in Landauer’s political thinking is evident as early as 1901 in his essay *Anarchistische Gedanken über Anarchismus* [Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism] (Landauer 2010b), where he argues that the anarchic society can only be achieved through a mystic re-birth, an “inward colonization”: “Those whom I call true anarchists no longer deceive themselves; they have been able to remold themselves through the experience of a deep existential crisis; they can act in the way which their most secret nature demands.” (Landauer 2010b: 87) The anarchists, he continues, “will not kill anyone except themselves – in the mystical sense, in order to be reborn after having descended into the depths of their souls.”

(88) It was not enough to reject conditions and institutions: “we have to reject ourselves” in order “to become one with the world in a mystical union.”

What these men will be able to bring to the world will be so extraordinary that it will seem to have come from a world altogether unknown. Whoever brings the lost world in himself to life – to individual life – and whoever feels like a true part of the world and not as a stranger: he will be the one who arrives not knowing where from, and who leaves not knowing where to. To him the world will be what he is to himself. Men such as this will live with each other in solidarity – as men who belong together. This will be anarchy. (89)

Landauer’s path towards the anarchic community is via *Absonderung*, separation, a concept informed by Meister Eckhart’s *Abgeschiedenheit*. (Hoppen 2017, 2018) Eckhart’s concept refers to the detachment that prepares and effectuates the mystical *ekstasis*, the breaking through the commotion of the world. Landauer’s separation wants to capture the same movement, but highlights its importance in enabling individuals to live communally, away from the influences of authority, state and, indeed, politics:

And the state exists to create order and the possibility to continue living amid all this spiritless nonsense, confusion, hardship and degeneracy. The state, with its schools, churches, courts, prisons, workhouses, the state with its army and its police; the state with its soldiers, officials and prostitutes. Where there is no spirit and no inner compulsion, there is external force, regimentation, the state. Where spirit is, there is society. Where unspirit is, there is the state. The state is the surrogate for spirit.

The state, which is “nothing”, a “false illusion”, conceals this nothingness and, disguised as “nation”, becomes the “psychic equivalent to the intoxicating alcoholic spirits that have become the habitual poison of men living today”. (Landauer 1911) Since the late 1890s, Landauer described himself as an “anti-politician”: “I was never politically, only anti-politically engaged” (cited in Wolf 2010: 26). Anarchists, he wrote, “have no political beliefs – we have beliefs against politics” (Landauer 2010a: 79). Landauer’s anti-politics is commonly understood as a rejection

of formal politics, but the concept goes much further – what is at stake in Landauer’s symbolism is a ‘stepping out’ of politics altogether. Like *ekstasis*, anti-politics is the negation of a negation – and this negation cannot be achieved from within politics. Political change only perpetuates and reinforces the hegemony of the discourse and practice of politics. As politics presents itself as the solution to the problems it creates, it further strengthens its grip on life and further normalises externalisation: “politics is inherently antonymous to community” (Hoppen 2018: 86). Anti-politics, in Landauer’s understanding, is therefore defined in opposition to politics only in name; its reality is *sui generis*, referring to the evocation and unfolding of a community whose members are ‘present in relation’. The members of the true community, Landauer explains, will not aspire to order the world externally through politics, but they will find the world within themselves and become the world (Landauer 2010c: 100).

In the context of this essay, Landauer represents the oddity of an actually existing ‘ideal type’: his work, as an author and activist, exemplifies precisely the analogies between mysticism and anarchism explored previously, including the rejection of politics as encrusted externalisation. The historical singularity of this example, however, should not distract from the more general point we wished to develop in this essay: the orientation away from externalisation is a key feature of anarchist thought and practice, and it is in this orientation that the analogy between anarchism and mysticism is rooted, giving them analogous roles in political theory and theology respectively. A community in which members are ‘present in relation’ is anarchic. Anarchy thus does not refer to lawlessness and chaos, but to a particular kind of relationality, which springs forth from the ‘stepping out’, *ekstasis*, of the commotion of the world. Moreover, even if articulated in secular or atheist terms, and to the extent that it advocates the overcoming of externalising practices, anarchism has at its core a spiritual concern.

If we develop the analogy between mysticism and anarchism further, however, we may have to acknowledge that there are distinct limits to our ability to create such anarchic communities *by design*. Mystics emphasise that the stepping out of *ekstasis* cannot

be willed or forced. In particular, conventional politics is not a solution to the problem; on the contrary, as we noted, externalisation is the very essence of politics. It would be misleading and ultimately self-defeating, therefore, to present anarchism as a political philosophy – just as it is impossible to establish mysticism as a religious institution. These reflections leave us with the profound question of how indeed we *can* ‘body forth’ communities in which we can be ‘present in relation’. Many anarchists, including Landauer, were and are aware of the problem. It was a “crucial fallacy,” he noted, to think “that one can – or must – bring anarchism to the world.” Those “who want ‘to bring freedom to the world’ [...] are tyrants, not anarchists.” Indeed, “[a]narchy is not a matter of the future; it is a matter of the present. It is not a matter of making demands; it is a matter of how one lives.” (Landauer 2010b: 87). These notions are not too far away from Occupy’s “We make the path by walking” (taken from Antonio Machado’s poem *Caminante no hay camino*, 1912), and not unlike Occupy, anarchists may need to ponder the meaning and possibility of an *ekstasis* from politics.

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From Benign Anarchy to Divine Anarchy: A Critical Review of “Spiritual Anarchism”

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Rather than assuming that such a thing as “spiritual anarchism” exists (a union of two highly contested terms), this chapter critically examines whom the label has applied to, whom it could refer to, and how we might conceive its story. Beginning with a critique of subtle but significant legacies of colonialism inherent within contemporary terms such as “religion” and “politics” as well as “anarchism” and “spirituality,” this chapter moves from an overview of literature on “spiritual anarchism” (Sri Aurobindo, Peter Lamborn Wilson, etc.) to discussion of forgotten stories (Krishnamurti, Womanism, MOVE, etc.) and concludes with an eye toward future studies of “spiritual anarchist” praxis (Auroville, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.).

I. Introduction

Despite more than a century of usage and an apparent increase¹ in people who espouse some sort of blend between presumably “spiritual” and “anarchist” perspectives, the term “spiritual anarchism”

¹ In my search for discussions (rather than mere mentions) of “spiritual anarchism,” I found more examples in the last ten years than in the last 100 years combined (see Charts 1–3). However, through a casual online Ngram search of phrase frequency in English literature, I noticed that the early 1930s seemed to have ten times as much frequency of the phrase as today (perhaps due in part to the founding of the Catholic Worker movement or Sri Aurobindo’s publications).

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remains relatively obscure and understudied. Scholarship remains limited in at least three senses. First, while various writers have employed the term “spiritual anarchism” (often as if it had a self-evident meaning), no one seems to have ever attempted to chart the terrain—much less examine the term, its usage, or its possible usefulness. Second, those who mention “spiritual anarchism” typically emphasize texts, individual writers, and ideas rather than activism, practitioners, and collective praxis. Third, many groups and figures who might seem directly related to the topic of “spiritual anarchism” do not appear to have received much (or any) attention. In particular, we find a general tendency to downplay or overlook the roles of two cultures that have often overlapped with and provided inspiration for “spiritual anarchists”: stateless shamanic² societies and black liberation struggles. In this review, I aim to both provide a broad (albeit non-exhaustive) survey of usages of “spiritual anarchism” as well as critically imagine alternatives that point our gaze in directions where—thus far—the term has not.

In his monumental work, *Demanding the Impossible* (1992), Peter Marshall traced anarchism back thousands of years to Daoism and Buddhism.³ Along the way, he provided the first generic (as opposed to polemical) definition of “spiritual anarchism” (that I know of):

Spiritual anarchists see humans as primarily spiritual beings capable of managing themselves without the curb of external government. Most of them reject man-made laws in favour of a prior obligation to natural law or the law of God; some go even further to insist

² “Shaman,” originally a Siberian reference, remains a contested term (see, for example, Mayer 2008). I apply it here loosely rather than technically and simply point toward the type of decentralized and personal relationships of healers, visionaries, entertainers, and mediators that help regulate the stories that organize social life in stateless societies. Indigenous cultures vary greatly from Lakota to Sami, from Tonga to Hi’aiti’ihi (often called Pirahã). Not all of them share a role that neatly corresponds to that of a shaman (however one defines it) and no single term could adequately describe all such cultures.

³ Many discussions of “spiritual anarchism” mention Zen, Daoism, and/or quote Lao Tzu. For arguments of Daoism as non-anarchist, see Feldt (2010); For research on Daoism and anarchism see Rapp (2012). For anarchism and Zen Buddhism, see Galván-Álvarez (2017).

that in a state of grace no law, whether human or divine, is applicable. They generally assume that human impulses are fundamentally good and beneficent. Spiritual anarchism is not linked to any particular creed or sect, but its adherents all reject organized religion and the hierarchical church.⁴

Without dwelling on potential problems in the formulation (e.g., using an undefined “*spiritual* beings” to define “*spiritual* anarchists,” ambiguity of “state of grace,” etc.), tautology (e.g., “capable of managing themselves without the curb of external government”—isn’t that plain anarchism?), or assumptions (e.g., “They generally assume...” yet “they” refers to whom?), we can see two key elements inherent in Marshall’s definition that may help us understand why people ever use the term at all. First, if “spiritual” implies here a “prior obligation to natural law or the law of God” then it may add a “positive” element to counter anarchism’s “negative” opposition-based implication (“an-arch” = *against* rule). In this sense, obligations—like devotion—may feel empowering because they fill social functions and provide a clear focus for action, routine, ritual, etc. Second, in rejecting “organized religion and the hierarchical church,” it seemingly fills the same function as the term “spirituality” (as in “spiritual but not religious”) yet, in combination with “anarchism” also provides a nuance to traditional anarchist anti-clerical critiques (implying that “spiritual” approaches need not fall into the same traps as “religious” approaches). Connecting these two elements, we see the possibility of *voluntary* obligation as well as broad ambiguity: as “creedless” this definition could include atheists and, via “natural law,” could include deep ecologists.⁵

⁴ Marshall 2008: 6. Marshall did not specify whom he included or excluded while explaining “spiritual anarchism” as if it had one untested definition.

⁵ When Naomi Gross sought to identify the Swiss Brethren with “Spiritual Anarchism,” she cited the part of Marshall’s definition that bolstered her argument. The entire quote follows: “Spiritual Anarchists see humans as primarily spiritual beings capable of managing themselves without ... external government.... [They] reject man-made law in favour of ... the law of God” (2013: 18).

In *American Gurus* (2014), Arthur Versluis, without mentioning Marshall, offered a more narrow but similarly “self-evident” definition:

The term ‘spiritual anarchism’ ...is a much more extreme form of what we saw more than a century earlier in Transcendentalism, itself an individualistic sport from Protestantism. Here, religious individualism is taken perhaps as far as one could take it. ...Spiritual anarchism, as we will see in other instances as well, is fundamentally different from political anarchism...Typically, spiritual anarchism emphasizes the moment, and a limited space and time within which liberty can be realized. In *Zenarchy*, Thornley extols the virtues of ‘simply knowing that freedom is everywhere for those who dance through life, rather than crawl, walk, or run.’ For ‘what Zen has most to offer Anarchism is freedom here and now.’⁶

Here we see an emphasis on “freedom” and “liberty” without any reference to obligations. In contrast to Marshall, however, Versluis made it quite clear whom he thought of as the prototype for “spiritual anarchism”: Peter Lamborn Wilson aka Hakim Bey whom Versluis felt “brings together, more than any other figure, the many and varied aspects of spiritual anarchism, embodying them as no one else does.”⁷

Clearly, the proposed definitions of “spiritual anarchism” by Marshall and Versluis clashed yet I could find very little related debate. A few have rejected the term and/or that which it purportedly represented. The controversial book on the European development and global spread of anarcho-syndicalism, *Black Flame* (2009), dismissed “spiritual anarchism” (e.g., Tolstoy) outright because it “[is] not part of the anarchist tradition ...and arises from a misunderstanding of anarchism. ...There is only one anarchist tradition, and it is rooted in the work of Bakunin and the Alliance.”⁸ Christian anarchist scholar André de Raaij (2009) vehemently rejected the term “spiritual anarchism” to describe people like Gustav Landauer or Jacques Ellul because it “reflects current fashions and quests” possibly making “these anarchists

⁶ Versluis 2014: 123, 128.

⁷ Ibid: 146.

⁸ Schmidt and van der Walt 2009: 71.

being sold to the millions ...because it tastes of the idiocies of consumer society.”⁹

A few have argued about clashes between varieties of “spiritual anarchism.” In the early 1900s, Sri Aurobindo embraced the term but rejected what he saw as the “extreme” versions of “spiritual anarchism” in Tolstoy and Gandhi.¹⁰ National anarchist activist Jay Cypher (2014) not only embraced the term “spiritual anarchism” but described two subcategories “Spiritually Based Anarchism” (in which people create a community based on “shared spirituality and sustained by common bonds and experiences”) and “Anarchism as Spiritual Practice” (in which members of a “tribe” do not necessarily share the same “spiritual beliefs” and where “creating an intentional community is a spiritual act in and of itself”). Commenting on this online video presentation, commenter “J. Harris” rejected the entire presentation on grounds that anything associated with “National Anarchism” did not qualify as “spiritual anarchism” because it descended from Julius Evola and “spiritual racism/fascism” and “*real* spiritual anarchism” rejects “hierarchy and tradition.”¹¹

These squabbles may seem petty but, in regard to any term that gradually comes into use, they matter. They show the parameters of a term’s embryotic development. As Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams (2018) wrote in the previous volume: “How one defines key terms does, after all, determine what one analyses (and what not), and generally reveals one’s assumptions and preferences (implicit or explicit) about

⁹ Raaij 2009.

¹⁰ Varma 1990: 300.

¹¹ Emphasis added. See comments to Cypher (2014). National anarchists combine nationalism and anarchism and typically meet strong opposition from antifascists as did Cypher’s National Anarchist Tribal Alliance-New York (NATA-NY). Despite Cypher’s denial of racism, the broader National Anarchist Movement (NAM) apparently expelled NATA after a dispute about, among other things, whom one should stigmatize: Jews or Muslims. See Troy Southgate, “Important Message,” *National Anarchist Movement* homepage, 26 September 2016, <http://www.national-anarchist.net/2016/09/important-message.html>; For an anti-racist analysis of national anarchists, see Sunshine (2008).

what is being discussed.”¹² As scholars do not agree on how to define key terms such as “spirituality,” “religion,” “anarchism,” “state,” “justice,” or “violence,” the conjoining of “spiritual” and “anarchism” into “spiritual anarchism” both amplifies its ambiguity and the difficulty in uncovering implicit assumptions.¹³

With such a wide range of potential meaning, I shall restrict this discussion exclusively to “spiritual anarchism” as a term and, thereafter, critiques and ideas related to that. I shall ignore extensive material on “religious anarchism,”¹⁴ “mystical anarchism,”¹⁵ and even work that essentially discusses much of the same material that “spiritual anarchism” has referred to (i.e. work on the following topics and overlaps with many of the themes, concerns, and figures that one finds associated with “spiritual anarchism”: stateless societies,¹⁶ syncretistic struggle,¹⁷ Swedenborgian syndicalists,¹⁸

¹² Christoyannopoulos and Adams 2018: 1.

¹³ I place quote marks around words such as “spiritual,” “religion,” and “spiritual anarchism” to remind readers that these terms remain ideological, contested, and tentative categories.

¹⁴ In contrast to Marshall’s definition of “spiritual anarchism,” “religious anarchism” tends to refer to those who identify with an age-old organized (typically Abrahamic) tradition and/or who adhere to a particular creed such as Christian anarchists (Christoyannopoulos 2011; Foster 1997), Muslim anarchists (Crone 2000; Karamustafa 2006; Jean-Veneuse 2009; Kazmi 2014), Jewish anarchists (Shapira 2013; Magid 2017), or anarchist discussion of “religion” (Kennedy 2005; CrimethInc. 2013).

¹⁵ This includes a variety of “mystical anarchisms,” including millenarians of the Middle Ages (Cohn 1970), certain Russian Symbolists (Rosenthal 1977), a later Russian group in the 1920s also calling themselves “mystical anarchists” (Nalimov 2001), or various recent works that have propagated the term such as Critchley (2009) and Ladha (2015). For a “social anarchist” critique of “Mystical and Irrationalist Anarchism,” see Bookchin (1995).

¹⁶ See Barclay (1982) and MacDonald (2012).

¹⁷ See McNicholl (2018).

¹⁸ A seemingly improbable category, Ivan Aguéli (1869–1917) advocated Sufism, Swedenborgianism, and syndicalism and Helen Keller (1880–1968), a member of the International Workers of the World (IWW), also identified with Swedenborg’s “spiritual” teachings (Gauffin 1941; Keller 1998). For the record, Catholic priest Thomas Haggerty (also Haggerty) wrote the original preamble for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and theorized about its union structure (See “‘Father’ Thomas J Haggerty.” IWW homepage. 26 October 2011. <https://www.iww.org/>

prophetic resistance,¹⁹ decolonizing,²⁰ psychology and anarchism,²¹ liberation psychology,²² anarchy and the sacred,²³ anarcho-perennialism,²⁴ biographies of people sometimes labeled “spiritual anarchist,”²⁵ anarchist theology,²⁶ anarchist conflict-resolution,²⁷ pagan anarchism,²⁸ anarchistic “New Religious Movements,”²⁹ anarchism and Satanism,³⁰ anarchist abolitionists,³¹ sub-scenes of punk such as taqwacore³² or straight edge,³³ drop-out and psychedelic culture,³⁴ utopian/anarchist/mystical communes,³⁵ anarchist/mystical social order,³⁶ or any number of antinomian groups such as Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY),³⁷ Movement of the Free

history/biography/FatherHaggerty and “Father Thomas J. Haggerty’s Wheel.” *IWW* homepage. <https://www.iww.org/about/official/wheel>).

¹⁹ See McKanan (2011).

²⁰ See Forbes (2008).

²¹ See Fox (2011), Heckert (2013), and Lees and Cleminson (2015).

²² See Martín-Baró (1994) and Moane (2003).

²³ See Watson (1998) and Kursions (2005).

²⁴ Closely associated in modern times with Ivan Aguéli, René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Julius Evola and others, perennialist philosophy centers on belief in common eternal and esoteric truths underlying all world traditions. For anarcho-perennialism see Cudenec (2013).

²⁵ For *Angelic Troublemakers*, a biographical study of Henry David Thoreau, Dorothy Day, and Bayard Rustin, see Wiley (2014). For a biography of J. Krishnamurti, see Jayakar (1986); for early Sufi Rābi‘a al-Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra (c. 713–801), see Upton (1988).

²⁶ See Mazura (2017) and Knowles (2002).

²⁷ See Auerbach (1983).

²⁸ See Starhawk (1998) and Thompson (2016).

²⁹ E.g., the Earth People in Trinidad (Littlewood 2006).

³⁰ For Satanism and anarchism, see Faxneld (2012).

³¹ See Perry (1995).

³² See Fiscella (2012) and McDowell (2017).

³³ See Stewart (2017).

³⁴ See Goffman and Joy (2004).

³⁵ In particular, one prominent anarcho-vegetarian commune in the Swiss Alps named Monte Verità hosted visitors such as Rudolf Steiner and J. Krishnamurti (Green 1986) and Tenko Nishida founded the long-standing service-oriented anarcho-commune Ittoen (also Itto-en) in 1904 (Nishida 1983); For a broad study of anarchist and mystical communes, see Veysey (1973).

³⁶ See Amster (2003) for overview on social control in anarchist communities, including the Rainbow Family of Living Light and indigenous societies.

³⁷ See Keenan (2003).

Spirit,³⁸ or the Bāuls).³⁹ Finally, in order to avoid attributing the term to people who do not use it, I also excluded discussions that combine anarchism with Daoism, Zen, and “spirituality” but do not use the terms “spiritual anarchism/spiritual anarchist”⁴⁰

While this may sound like an extremely narrow terrain remaining, we might better picture that which “spiritual anarchism” has referred to by contrasting individualist and communal-collectivist variants. Taking one small step beyond the most individualist variants of “spiritual anarchism” which tend to emphasize autonomy, personal issues (drug use, sexuality, asceticism, etc.), magick,⁴¹ and/or mind expansion, we might find someone like punk vocalist GG Allin (1956–1993) who said (shortly before dying of a heroin overdose): “I believe that everybody’s the ruler of their own temple. If you don’t believe that you’re Jesus Christ or God or Satan, you’re selling yourself short. You can’t put any person before number one. Number one is you.”⁴² As per Versluis (“religious individualism [taken] as far as one could take it”), this resonates both with the slogan, “Nothing is true—Everything is permitted” popularized William Burroughs as well as Peter Lamborn Wilson/Bey’s conception of anarcho-monarchism and the “Imam-of-one’s-own-being.”⁴³ Burroughs notably shot and killed his wife, Joan Vollmer, presumably by accident, and Wilson/Bey used his idea of “self-rule” to both imply a “personal ethics which reaches unimaginably higher than any moral code” and advoca-

³⁸ See Vaneigem (1998).

³⁹ See Bhattacharya (1999).

⁴⁰ See Clark (1984), Moore (1988), and Murray (1992). Morris characterized Lao Tzu not as a mystic but as an anarchist writing, “he was indeed the first writer to express the libertarian socialist ideal” (1996: 51).

⁴¹ Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) coined the spelling “magick” which characterized an interpretation based on Nietzschean type of *will* in contrast to “superstitious” connotations. Chaos magicians and TOPY later adopted this spelling.

⁴² Gangloff 1993: 17. Not far from this, one might find the philosophical nihilism of “spiritual terrorist,” U. G. Krishnamurti (see, for example, “U. G. Krishnamurti” <https://people.well.com/user/jct/>).

⁴³ Wilson 1993a: 65, 74; Following on the heels of Nietzsche’s declaration “God is dead,” Crowley wrote, “Each one of us is the One God” (Crowley 1975: 4). For a Crowley-Discordian-Bey “genealogy,” see Greer (2013).

te adult sexual activity with pre-pubertal children.⁴⁴ As Michael Muhammad Knight put it, Wilson crafted “a child molester’s liberation theology” and published it “for an audience of potential offenders.” Helms (2004) surmised that Wilson/Bey’s most famous work *Temporary Autonomous Zones* aka TAZ (1985) essentially provided a cover for Wilson/Bey’s “paedophile apologies.”⁴⁵ TAZ also helped inspire various movements including Burning Man.⁴⁶ Therein lies one end of the individualist interpretation of “spiritual anarchism.”

At the other end of the spectrum we see a collectivist approach that tends to emphasize responsibility, connections, community, mediating, healing, solidarity, service, and a sense of oneness with all existence. One step beyond the edge of what people have labeled “spiritual anarchism,” we may find something like “natural anarchism” as advocated by patrice jones (2009): “It’s a false kind of freedom that depends on the separation of the individual from the community and its enveloping ecosystem. ...Liberation does not mean freedom from all constraint. Liberation means freedom from unjust or unnatural restraints. ...Thus the ultimate aim of natural anarchism is the restoration of the relationships severed by the state.”⁴⁷ Without mentioning “spirituality,” jones implied natural, justifiable restraints and echoed Marshall’s association of “spiritual anarchists” with “obligation to natural law” by declaring: “liberation is connection” looking to animals and nature for inspiration.⁴⁸ On the inner edge of what people have labeled “spiritual anarchist,” we find a pagan anarchist, author, and activist such as Starhawk whose vision sounds quite similar to that of jones:

⁴⁴ Wilson 1993a: 70.

⁴⁵ Helms (2004: 3). Versluis discussed Wilson/Bey’s “proclivity” for “love of boys” but added that it “is worth recognizing that cultural norms do differ” on this matter (2014: 144).

⁴⁶ Harvey 2013.

⁴⁷ jones 2009: 245–246; Or, as Forbes put it, if a person loses their hand, they still live but if they lose the sun, the plants, or the air, they die: “What is my real body? We are not autonomous, self-sufficient beings as European mythology teaches ...We are rooted just like the trees” (2001: 291).

⁴⁸ jones 2009: 245.

The mysteries are what is wild in us, what cannot be quantified or contained. But the mysteries are also what is most common to us all: blood, breath, heartbeat, the sprouting of seed, the waxing and waning of the moon, the turning of the earth around the sun, birth, growth, death, and renewal. To Witches, the cosmos is the living body of the Goddess, in whose being we all partake, who encompasses us and is immanent within us. ...But power-from-within is also akin to something deeper. It arises from our sense of connection, our bonding with other human beings, and with the environment. ...To connect, to build bonds of caring and community, to create structures of support that can nurture us and renew our strength, are powerful acts of resistance.⁴⁹

Starhawk co-founded the pagan Reclaiming Collective as well as women-led anti-militarism network Code Pink, and has led workshops in nonviolent resistance and Earth Activist permaculture courses.⁵⁰ As we see, both individualist and community-oriented wings of “spiritual anarchism” tend to identify “self” with the “Divine” yet they seem to mean different things by that assertion (or at least translate them into very different implications and applications). Thus, while people have used the term “spiritual anarchism” to refer to everything in between Allin/Wilson/Bey and Jones/Starhawk (as well as beyond that linear spectrum), no one has thus far studied it.

This chapter aims to address and discuss gaps in relevant scholarship as well as provide resources and ideas for new conversations. I do not, however, provide a comprehensive or rigorous study here. Instead, I offer these stories and findings as “conversation starters.” To these ends, I purposefully choose breadth over focus veering more toward encyclopedic than theoretical. Deviating from conventional structure, I provide cursory overviews (the resources) interwoven throughout this chapter with cri-

⁴⁹ Starhawk 1988: 6, 7 10, 84.

⁵⁰ Not without her own challenges, Starhawk faced critique from MaxZine Weinstein (2003) who complained about adulation of the “anarcho-goddess” Starhawk at pagan events and her complicity in that. While believing in “greater forces,” Weinstein felt that “spirituality” easily turns into “religion” and “seduces radical anarchists and creates an environment of repackaged religion under the guise of some supposedly liberating spirituality” (2003: 32).

tical reviews (ideas) in dialogue with—not just about—those who advocate some form of “spiritual anarchism.” I organize the chapter in the following sequence: introduction to the topic (Section 1: Introduction); discussion of conceptual framework and language (Section 2: Concepts and Language); overview of relevant terminology and development (Section 3: Terms and Background); general overview of the literature (Section 4: Material); closer look at selected material with consideration of racial whiteness (Section 5: Critical View: A Race for Anarchy?); presentation of overlooked figures (Section 6: Spirited Away: Forgotten Legacies), and finally a turn toward stories of practice/organization rather than ideas and writing (Section 7: Beyond Words: A Critical View of “Spiritual Anarchist” Praxis). We currently have no field of—or broad conversations—about “spiritual anarchism” but, if we did, what might they look like?

II. Concepts and language

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) insisted that asymmetric power relations ultimately corrupted both sides of a relationship.⁵¹ The very fact that I *can* write (in English no less) and publish texts marks my own asymmetrical position of power—while resisting power—in a world where a billion people cannot read and a tiny fraction participate in “expert”-based academia. I value diversity and inclusion yet while varieties of English continue to expand, hundreds of indigenous languages continue to die out or face extinction. In English, we have to work extra hard to see fundamental relationships and interdependence that come more naturally in Native tongues because we have words such as “religion,” “philosophy,” “politics,” “science,” and so on that divide the world, divide, knowledge, and divide people—unequally—from one another and the environment upon which we all depend. To help conceptualize underlying complexities, connections, and paradoxes I add a significant caveat to all apparent binaries here: rather than either/or, read both/and (while leaving space for neither/nor); rather than opposition, read complementarity; rather than

⁵¹ See Wollstonecraft (1792).

a neat “study” that “proves” a “thesis,” read sets of subjective observations and perspectives aimed to challenge assumptions, increase inclusion, and add to existing conversations about radical personal and social transformation. This caveat of admitted “messiness,” informed my (imperfect) choice to integrate some Native voices from (in the following order Oglala Lakota, Yankton band/ Standing Rock, Hopi, Yaqui, Klamanth, and Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) throughout this chapter rather than attempt to select a single one in the section on “Forgotten Legacies.”⁵² Native voices collectively share worldviews that fundamentally challenge the conceptual and practical underpinnings and ideologies of English and academic discourse which unconsciously affect all who partake. As Maia Ramnath wrote in *Decolonizing Anarchism*: “The fact is that every dimension of modernity as we know it was built on colonial history.”⁵³ Reconfiguring one term would entail reconfiguring the broader constellation of ideas in which it found itself embedded. As Timothy Fitzgerald (2007) has argued, the categories of “religion” and “religions”, not only form a basis for “the ideology of religious studies,” they also play a foundational role in constituting modernity and colonial consciousness: “We are not studying what exists in the world, but by reproducing religion and religions we are tacitly reproducing the whole rhetorical configuration.”⁵⁴ In this regard, “anti-religion” anarchists and religious studies scholars alike confirm colonial ideology by using these terms as if they apply universally. Cedric Robinson (1940–2016) went so far as to argue that European anarchists did not actually envision a new society but merely engaged in “rearranging the ideas of that bourgeois society.”⁵⁵ H. L. T. Quan wrote that, “despite its claim of heresy, anarchism in the West remains faithful and obedient to the ontologies and life-worlds that gave birth to it.”⁵⁶ Similarly, Russell Means (1939–2012), of the American Indian Movement (AIM), accused capitalist industry,

⁵² To a lesser extent I interspersed mentions of Unitarian Universalists with whom I affiliate.

⁵³ Ramnath 2011: 29.

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald 2007: 26.

⁵⁵ Robinson 1980: 215.

⁵⁶ Quan 2013: 125.

as well as “the so-called theories of Marxism and anarchism,” of “despiritualizing the universe.”⁵⁷

Most Native languages did not see a need to conceive of a “religion” or “spirituality” in order to describe their lives. Interestingly, the Chinese word “Dao” translates the “Way” and we hear this term among Native Americans. As told by Vine Deloria, Jr. (1933–2005):

Someone was telling me last night that when the Navajo went to the Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town last year, one of their elders said, “We don’t have a religion, but we do have a ‘way.’” That’s why you didn’t have religious conflict between tribes. You might have fought over everything else—women, horses, or buffalo—but not over religion. Each person, each group, had to do what their tradition told them to do.⁵⁸

While obeying “tradition” may sound overly restrictive, one gets an idea of such “restrictions” from the Hopi as told by Kendrick Fritz: “the Spider Grandmother did give two rules. To all men, not just Hopis. If you look at them, they cover everything. She said, ‘Don’t go around hurting each other,’ and she said, ‘Try to understand things.’...You learn to respect everything because you *are* everything”⁵⁹ Rather than focusing on belief, emphasis has resided on pragmatism. Lee Irwin wrote, Native American spirituality “is not so much about things or actions or quantifiable beliefs, but about the consequences of human decisions, the quality of life, the way things work, how life is valued and enhanced.”⁶⁰ With such justifiable restraints (recalling Jones), Native people did not need “freedom of religion” because they generally did not suppress beliefs.⁶¹ As Rebecca Tsosie wrote:

...most traditional Native societies did not separate their systems of thought into separate domains of “religion,” “philosophy,” and “science,” although their epistemologies contain all of those functions. To the contrary, many Native societies operate within a

⁵⁷ Means 1991: 72–73; Also see Barsh (1988).

⁵⁸ Smith 2007: 12.

⁵⁹ Heat-Moon 1999: 187.

⁶⁰ Irwin 1996: 310–311.

⁶¹ Also see Lindquist (2014: 87).

holistic understanding of the rules and responsibilities that govern the relations between people and all components of the natural world, whether human or non-human.⁶²

By imagining disciplinary categories (which Native people never had) and building institutions of research on those categories (imposed upon Natives through colonial occupation) European “Enlightenment” traditions embedded unconscious ideological commitment into the very fiber of supposedly “neutral” academic language and terminology. Ironically, technical sciences have advanced to the degree that English fails to describe the “reality” that quantum physics reveals. Physicist David Bohm (1980), a friend of J. Krishnamurti’s, sought to modify English (a form he called “rheomode”) in order to make it more similar to verb-based Native American languages that he saw as better suited to describe quantum mechanics (forces that *move* rather than “are”).⁶³

These perspectives may help explain some of this chapter’s idiosyncrasies: (1) As with “religion,” I do not assume here that words such as “freedom” or “history” can have non-ideological senses,⁶⁴ (2) I try to speak here of *stories* and translate “religious belief” or “ideology” as *life-organizing stories* and “religion” or “politics” as *life-organizing practices*, and (3) Except when quoting others, I have avoided use of the verb “to be” (which “allows us to play God using the omniscient ‘Deity mode’ of speech,” oversimplifies messy questions of “identity,” and ascribes transient reality a static character).⁶⁵ With this conceptual foundation and

⁶² Tsosie 2012: 1138.

⁶³ On a related note, see *Blackfoot Physics* by Peat (2002).

⁶⁴ The English word “history” refers to a common language term for “past events,” personal life story, as a Eurocentric academic discipline, and as a linear-oriented system of bureaucratic records and documentation using the mythical birth year of Jesus as the center of chronology. For critical views of “history,” see Christian (2005) and Fuglestad (2005). The English word “Freedom,” refers to a dominant social value with mythic implications (people kill and die for it) yet remains ambiguous, contradictory (always tied to an “unfreedom”), and unnecessary (traditional stateless societies had neither enslavement nor prisons yet no word for “freedom”). For a decolonizing of “freedom,” see Fiscella (2015: 130–276).

⁶⁵ Kellogg and Bourland 1991: 42; Bourland refers to English without forms of “to be” as E-Prime.

appreciation for some limitations and impact of English language bias, we proceed now to terminology.

III. Terms and background

This section shall address some fundamental terms related to “spiritual anarchism” beginning with its constituent components and ease toward an overview of early and current uses of the term.

“Anarchism” has elicited a variety of interpretations. This includes reluctant anarchists who oppose government for pragmatic reasons but do not necessarily oppose *all* government as a matter of principle⁶⁶ and also includes reluctant statist who may regard the state as wrong in principle but do not necessarily oppose government expansion in practical terms.⁶⁷ Finally, it has also included people who simply organize with other people non-hierarchically.⁶⁸

The term “spiritual” has a similarly wide range. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005) traced it from the Latin *spiritus* (breath of life) to the individualization of the term which ostensibly began with Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuits) in the 1500s and, in particular, Madame Guyon in the 1600s. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, writers, speakers, and activists such as Swami

⁶⁶ See, for example, Patricia Crone’s (2000) discussion of “reluctant anarchists” such as the Najdiyya and certain Mutazilite ascetics within early Islam. Though they preferred to have a righteous caliphate, circumstances led them to advocate anarchism.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Kate Soper’s interview with Noam Chomsky who has both advocated anarchism and supported expansion of the federal state or Kropotkin and other anarchists’s “reluctant statism” when they supported war against Germany in 1916 and received critique from Errico Malatesta who lambasted them as “pro-government anarchists” (Soper 1998; Malatesta 1977: 248).

⁶⁸ Similarly, Barclay distinguished between anarchy (“the condition in which a society is stateless,” i.e., traditional indigenous societies) and anarchism (“the socio-political theory developed largely in nineteenth-century Europe which reject all forms of domination”) (2002: 105). Broad understandings of anarchism include Mohammed Bamyeh’s view of anarchy as the “de facto practice of everyday life” and David Graeber’s suggestion of “endless examples of viable anarchism... from a klezmer band to the international postal service” (Bamyeh 2010: 61; Graeber 2004: 40).

Vivekananda, D. T. Suzuki, and Helena Blavatsky (co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875) popularized Anglophone interest in Eastern mysticism and the practice of “spiritualism” (communication with the dead) similarly spread during this period.

Descendants of enslaved Africans (like Natives) had European conceptions of “spiritual” diversity forced upon them:

Thrust into the bowels of New World terrorism, her inferior status caused her at times to abort her old life-affirming notions of self and spirituality, and to adopt debilitating ones. She was now subjugated to the European’s wants, desires, and ways of life. His puritan mindset, proslavery rhetoric, anti-African ideology, biblical text, and colonial laws served to deaden her precolonial sense of selfhood and seal her subjugation.⁶⁹

With Muslims, Christians, and Animists forced to live together through enslavement, “spirituality” for African Americans morphed into an interfaith practice “that collectively sustained and empowered them in times of crisis. ...It reconnected them to God, the spirit world, land, nature, and each other.”⁷⁰

During the 1800s, “spiritual” developed a noun form as African Americans “learned the Christian language of their oppressor(s), reinterpreted and subverted that language, and creatively communicated that subversion in song.”⁷¹ This could entail blending archetypes from previous traditions with new ones. By “envisioning God and Christ as tricksters and usurpers,” African Americans made “a way out of no way” and “used their religious and spiritual convictions to subvert White, racist, and patriarchal hegemony; ...agitate for social justice; and maintain a sense of community.”⁷² For many people, “spirituality” relates to anything from choir to cooking, from gardening to resistance.

By the 1970s, the term “spiritual” could appear without any association of a “spirit world” such as in the second Humanist Manifesto of 1973 which stated: “The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine ‘spiri-

⁶⁹ Harrison 2009: 54.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 208–209.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 200.

⁷² Mattis and Jagers 2001: 523.

tual' experience and aspiration."⁷³ The term "spirituality" today often connotes what "spiritual anarchism" implied 100 years ago except, of course, framed in positive terms: "The goal is not to defer to higher authority, but to have the courage to become one's own authority."⁷⁴ This appears relevant because, in the United States alone, an increasing number of people (already 17 million by 2012) identify as "spiritual but not religious" (a term popularized by AA and Twelve-Step programs).⁷⁵

The first instances that I could find of any variant of "spiritual anarchism" appeared in newspaper articles in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These mentions of "spiritual anarchism" implied or denoted things as varied as atheism,⁷⁶ pacifism,⁷⁷ Theosophy,⁷⁸ absence of moral direction,⁷⁹ lawless libertinism,⁸⁰ rejection of biblical authority,⁸¹ and the dismal state of London cultural life in the 1920s.⁸² It often bore a negative connotation as in *Mysticism* (1911) where Evelyn Underhill insisted that the "view which regards the mystic as a spiritual anarchist receives little support from history; which shows us, again and again, the great mystics

⁷³ Gina Allen et al. *Humanist Manifesto II*, 1973. <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto2/>

⁷⁴ Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 4.

⁷⁵ Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, "Nones' on the Rise," 9 October 2012. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> Accessed 27 October 2014.

⁷⁶ A letter to the editor reads: "atheism is anarchism, in the spiritual realm" in the *Blue-Grass Blade*, Springer 1908: 15.

⁷⁷ Krishnamurti 1944: 1.

⁷⁸ A "Dr. Coues" stated that members of the Theosophical Society "are to the spiritual world ... what the Chicago anarchists are to the political world... They are the spiritual anarchists ... If they were numerous enough they would create disorder and confusion, and play sad pranks in society" (*Evening Star* 1889: 11).

⁷⁹ According to the *British Medical Bulletin*, "Without this loving despotism of the parents, the child turns towards spiritual anarchism, becoming a law unto himself, and missing the two primary 'goods' of human life—control of self and consideration of others" (1947: 249).

⁸⁰ Weltin 1956: 382.

⁸¹ A "Reverend Omer" stated: "In the divine government, if every citizen were allowed to erect his own standard of duty, we would soon run into a state of spiritual anarchy" (*St. Louis Republic* 1902: 10).

⁸² Banks 1930: 38.

as faithful sons of the great religions.”⁸³ The first instance that I have found of a public advocate for some form of “spiritual anarchism” appeared in the semi-autobiographical novel *El Árbol de la Ciencia* (1911) by Pío Baroja (1872–1956) where the main character “was inclined to a spiritual anarchism, based on kindness and piety, with no practical solution.”⁸⁴ The earliest instance I found of “spiritual anarchist” to describe someone positively appeared in 1914 where Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912) posthumously used the term to describe Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882).⁸⁵

Around the same period, Sri Aurobindo Ghose (also Ghosh, 1872–1950) created perhaps the first explicit and specific articulation of “spiritual anarchism” as an ideology.⁸⁶ Aurobindo wrote “the perfectly spiritualised society will be one in which, as is dreamed by the spiritual anarchist, all men will be deeply free, and it will be so because the preliminary condition will have been satisfied.”⁸⁷ Using “Nature” as a guideline, Aurobindo felt that humanity ascended through “spiritual” stages corresponding to individualism/democracy, then socialism, and finally anarchism.⁸⁸ He saw both revolutionary and state force as necessary until the final stage when reason would rule. Probably with Tolstoy and Gandhi in mind, he critiqued “impossible self-abnegation” and “asceticism” which impoverished life and ignored the “many real and valuable gains” of “civilization.”⁸⁹ Yet, as Vishwanath Varma (1976) observed, Aurobindo did not emphasize “spiritual anarchism” but rather saw it as a byproduct of a “spiritualized society.”⁹⁰

⁸³ Underhill 2002: 95–96.

⁸⁴ 1911: 55 (translation my own); Baroja had described himself as “a liberal radical, an individualist and an anarchist” and an enemy of first “Church” and then “State” in that order (Baroja 1920: 219).

⁸⁵ She wrote, “None who are familiar with the thought of Emerson can fail to recognize that it is spiritual Anarchism” (de Cleyre 1972: 145).

⁸⁶ Aurobindo published his ideas related to this as early as 1915–1918 in a series of articles later printed as books in *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1919) and *The Human Cycle* (1949).

⁸⁷ Aurobindo 1997: 259.

⁸⁸ Ibid: 193.

⁸⁹ Ibid: 219.

⁹⁰ Varma 1976: 300–304.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) figures as an early promoter of some form of “spiritual anarchism” through his use of similar terms as early as the 1920s. Like Aurobindo, he saw concentrated power as a necessary stage before ultimately attaining “divine Anarchy” and this bothered him.⁹¹ Yet, the anarchic goal, however distant, remained important and intimate: “Anarchy of the Spirit alone is the true Freedom.”⁹² Yet in contrast to those who saw inner change as a precursor to social change, Du Bois saw the reverse and maintained that “individual equality and the free soul is impossible” without first establishing an essentially socialist society that guarantees “equality of opportunity.”⁹³ In David Haekwon Kim’s (2004) summary of Du Bois’s position: “there can be no spiritual freedom or anarchy without political freedom or anarchy.”⁹⁴ Despite seeming to differ from Aurobindo in his emphasis on external change as a prerequisite for internal change, their views seem similar. Du Bois, however, did not develop the theme, nor did he have—as Aurobindo did—a woman like Mirra Alfassa (founder of Auroville) who would put those ideas into practice.

Within anarchist contexts, “spiritual anarchism” and “anarchist spirituality” seem to have necessarily implied a rejection of the state. Yet whatever type of “spiritual anarchist,” they all seem to reject the authority of church and state in determining beliefs or behavior. Beyond that, they often espouse some sort of sanctification of “self” (defined individually or collectively), a general reverence for nature, conceptions of existential oneness, external social change as intertwined with internal personal change, and an emphasis on immediate experience and/or behavior and a critique of language limitations. In other words, contemporary use of “spiritual anarchism” does, however ambiguously, seem to refer to a certain terrain of ideas and practices wherein people typically view change as both “internal” and “external” and/or identify the self with the divine. If, then, “spiritual anarchism” serves as a useful term in some sense we can examine how some

⁹¹ Du Bois [1928] 1995: 283.

⁹² Du Bois cited in Kim (2004: 69).

⁹³ Kim 2004: 67–69.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 68. For a development of Du Bois’ thought, especially in regard to his limitations on gender, see Griffin (2000).

have used it, how they have not used it, and imagine how we *could* use it.

IV. Material

This section shall provide a broad overview of various instances in which the term has appeared in order to capture a bird's eye view of how people have treated the term. The first list includes all people whom I found designated "spiritual anarchist" by someone other than themselves. The second list includes every piece I could find that specifically addressed the topic of "spiritual anarchism" in one way or another. After presenting material in this section, we have a better grasp of what people have already said in order to make preliminary assessments about patterns (if any) and also to discuss what patterns did not appear.

Concerning people whom observers have described as "spiritual anarchist," I found the following:⁹⁵ Lao Tzu,⁹⁶ Leo Tolstoy,⁹⁷ Henry David Thoreau,⁹⁸ William Godwin,⁹⁹ William Blake,¹⁰⁰ William Lloyd Garrison,¹⁰¹ Robert Anton Wilson (RAW),¹⁰² Peter Lamborn Wilson (PLW),¹⁰³ William Burroughs,¹⁰⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson,¹⁰⁵ Walt Whitman,¹⁰⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu,¹⁰⁷ Max Stirner,¹⁰⁸

⁹⁵ List compiled primarily through Internet and database searches.

⁹⁶ Fox 2001: 19–20.

⁹⁷ Cannon 2014.

⁹⁸ Canby 1929: 789.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Wilson 2002. Marshall wrote that Blake (1757–1827) saw humans as interdependent with nature and "went on to reject all moral rules and man-made laws" (Marshall 1944: 22). Marshall described him as "visionary anarchist" yet clearly sees Blake as both "spiritual" and "anarchist" (confirmed via correspondence with author 16 February 2019).

¹⁰¹ Boitani 1979: 218.

¹⁰² Versluis 2014: 136.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*: 140.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*: 104.

¹⁰⁵ Žižka-Marušiaková 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell 2015; Sarracino 1974: 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ueno 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson 1918: 4.

Friedrich Nietzsche,¹⁰⁹ Henrik Ibsen,¹¹⁰ Alan Clements,¹¹¹ Remy de Gourmont,¹¹² Pío Baroja,¹¹³ Abiezer Coppe,¹¹⁴ Jacob Frank,¹¹⁵ Henry Corbin,¹¹⁶ Henry Miller,¹¹⁷ Henry Wright,¹¹⁸ Henry “Harry” Hay,¹¹⁹ Ivan Illich,¹²⁰ Robert Ingersoll,¹²¹ Gustav Landauer,¹²² Charlie Chaplin,¹²³ Martin Buber,¹²⁴ Mattias Gardell,¹²⁵ Gary Snyder,¹²⁶ John Scotus Eriugena,¹²⁷ Oliver Cromwell,¹²⁸ Shakespeare,¹²⁹ Aleksandr “A. A.” Meier,¹³⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev,¹³¹ Rudolf Steiner,¹³² Jiddu Krishnamurti,¹³³ Keshub Chandra Sen,¹³⁴

¹⁰⁹ Goodway 2011: 157; Iliopoulos 2014: 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Pignataro 2003: 20.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Gleaves 1971.

¹¹⁴ Levy 1995: 141.

¹¹⁵ Peter Lamborn Wilson described the neo-Sabbatean Jacob Frank in Poland as “spiritual anarchist” in Akers et al (2012).

¹¹⁶ Ben Chasny cited in Riley (2017).

¹¹⁷ Sarracino 1974.

¹¹⁸ Whyte 2012: 83.

¹¹⁹ Hay co-founded Radical Faeries. Wilson 2002.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Voorsanger 1913: 249.

¹²² Newman 2010: 11. Landauer’s name often appears in these contexts. For more on his life and work, see Hoppen (2017), Landauer (2010), and Maurer (1971).

¹²³ Zein 2016: 6–7.

¹²⁴ Magid 2017: 58.

¹²⁵ Höjer 2007.

¹²⁶ Mazura 2017: 34; Ueno (2016: 153) claimed that Snyder had used the term “spiritual anarchism” in his essay “Buddhist Anarchism” (1961). I cannot however find evidence of that in any version that I have seen. For more on Snyder’s approach to anarchism and spirituality, see Taylor (2005).

¹²⁷ Eagleton 2010: 25.

¹²⁸ Harrison 1908: 149.

¹²⁹ Beadle 2015: 47.

¹³⁰ Iliopoulos 2014: 73.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Barnes 2005: 17; Also see Preparata (2006).

¹³³ Gopal 1995: 96.

¹³⁴ Rambachan 1994: 27.

Swami Nirmalananda,¹³⁵ Sri Aurobindo,¹³⁶ Osho,¹³⁷ Mohandas Gandhi,¹³⁸ and, three of the few women associated with the term, Starhawk (Miriam Simos),¹³⁹ author Anaïs Nin,¹⁴⁰ and the British suffragette Dora Marsden.¹⁴¹ On a few occasions, authors have described “Hindus”¹⁴² or “shamans”¹⁴³ in general as “spiritual anarchists.” Others have attributed the label to movements such as early Christians,¹⁴⁴ Anabaptists in general,¹⁴⁵ Tantra,¹⁴⁶ Swiss Brethren in particular,¹⁴⁷ New Age circles,¹⁴⁸ certain Russian Symbolists,¹⁴⁹ American Discordians,¹⁵⁰ and Dadaism.¹⁵¹

The following charts organize all of the essays, articles, books, lectures,¹⁵² and blogs that I could find that have explicitly discussed “spiritual anarchism” or “anarcho-spirituality.” In order to retain a semblance of focus, I have restricted this list to those

¹³⁵ Martin 1999.

¹³⁶ Chakraborty 1997.

¹³⁷ Marshall 2010: 530, 746 citing Stewart Edwards, “Spiritual Anarchism,” *Bulletin of Anarchist Research* 21 July 1990: 26. (I have not yet acquired the original source that Marshall cited).

¹³⁸ Badrinath 2016: 42; Also, see Stallings-Ward comparing Gandhi and Durruti (2011).

¹³⁹ Amster 2012: 4.

¹⁴⁰ Fitch 1993: 200.

¹⁴¹ Clarke 1996: 50.

¹⁴² “The Hindu has been a spiritual anarchist, his faith being intensely personal and individualistic” (Mohammada 2007: 79); Also, see Khalfaoui 2009: 85. Sri Aurobindo referred to India’s Golden Age as one of “spiritual anarchism” (Ghosh 2011: 45).

¹⁴³ Lindquist 2004: 87.

¹⁴⁴ Jenson and Wilhite 2010: 81.

¹⁴⁵ Walker 2013: 57.

¹⁴⁶ Dowman 1985: 3.

¹⁴⁷ Gross 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Cuda 2017: 82–83; Citing Bamyeh’s definition of anarchism, Cuda wrote: “New spirituality groups can be categorized as forms of anarchism” that “are organized outside of traditional religion, ‘voluntarily through various institutions, groups and informal networks, which form a theater of non-state oriented methods of collaboration [and] mutual aid’” (2017: 93).

¹⁴⁹ Hellman 2018: 20. Also see Rosenthal (1977).

¹⁵⁰ Greer 2013: 183.

¹⁵¹ Fernée 2014: 28.

¹⁵² I have included recorded public lectures but not online videos/podcasts sans audience. I made one exception with Herve from Los Angeles who identified as homeless.

that included a variant of “spiritual anarchism” (alt. “anarchist spirituality,” “anarcho-spirituality,” etc.) in the heading of their presentation or at least use the phrase repeatedly in their talk or text. The more that a presenter performed research, spoke descriptively, tried to present more than one perspective, and provided the listener/reader with sources (footnotes, bibliography, etc.), the more likely I would categorize their work as *formal* (Chart 1). The less they did, the more likely I would categorize it as *polemical* (Chart 3). As a spectrum, I placed those with a blended approach in the middle (Chart 2).

In the first list (above the three charts) of 46 individuals labeled “spiritual anarchist,” we see skewed ethnic representation through an abundance of white male writers (including four Henrys and six Williams/William’s sons aka Wilsons), eight Asian names appeared (six of those from India), and no indigenous peoples, Central or

Chart 1. Formal presentations of “spiritual anarchism.”

Author/ Speaker	Year	Title	Format/ Length	Central references or concerns
1.1 Vishwanath Prasad Varma	1960	Spiritual Anarchism: Tolstoy, Gandhi and Aurobindo	Book chapter subheading/ 5 pages	Aurobindo’s pro-technology and anti-ascetic “spiritual anar- chism” versus the “spiritual anarchism” of Tolstoy and Gandhi
1.2 Edwin Gleaves	1971	Hemingway and Baroja: Studies in Spiritual Anarchism.	Article/ 13 pages	Pío Baroja, non-activist anarchism
1.3 Carmen Sarracino	1974	Henry Miller, Spiritual Anarchist.	Ph.D. dissertation/ 119 pages	Henry Miller, Zen, Thoreau

(Contd.)

Chart 1. *(Continued)*

Author/ Speaker	Year	Title	Format/ Length	Central references or concerns
1.4 Peter Marshall	1992	Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism	Book/818 pages ¹⁵³	Daoism, Zen, Blake, Osho, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave
1.5 Jana Žižka- Marušíaková	2012	Spiritual Anarchy in Emerson	Masters thesis/ 68 pages	Emerson, Daoism, Zen, Stoics, Transcen- dentalists
1.6 Arthur Versluis	2014	Dogmas, Catmas, and Spiritual Anarchism	Book chap- ter/8 pages	Discordians, Burroughs, RAW, Thornley, Benares, Snyder, Beatniks, magic, marijuana, Zen
1.7 Arthur Versluis	2014	Spiritual Anarchy: Tantra and Islamic Heterodoxy	Book chap- ter/8 pages	PLW/Bey, tantra, TAZ
1.8 Alexei Anisin	2019	Spiritual anarchism	Subheading in article/ 3 pages	Nonviolence, Ahimsa, Tolstoy, Berdyaeu, Dorothy Day, Chris Crass, Gandhi, anarchist spiritual transformation

¹⁵³ Less than a page of his deals explicitly with the term “spiritual anarchism” yet Marshall views many of the topics covered throughout the book (Daoism, Zen, Blake, Osho, etc.) as falling under into the category.

Chart 2. Semi-Formal/Polemical presentations of “spiritual anarchism.”

Author/Speaker	Year	Title	Format/Length	Central references or concerns
2.1 Peter Lamborn Wilson	1993b	Caliban’s Masque: Spiritual Anarchy and the Wild Man in Colonial America.	Book chapter/ 22 pages	On colonial America when “European vagabonds transmuted themselves into Noble Savages,” Thomas Morton of Merry Mount, Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, Quakers, Ranters, Freemasonry
2.2 Chakraborty, S. K.	1997	From Intellectual Anarchism to Spiritual Anarchism	Journal editorial/ 2 pages	Aurobindo
2.3 Peter Lamborn Wilson	2002	Spiritual Anarchism.	Public lecture/ 1 h. 56 min. (includes 35 min. Q&A)	Blake, pre-civilization societies, Illich, antimomian Christians, Moorish Science Temple, narrating the past, tech-critique, etc.

(Contd).

Chart 2. (Continued)

Author/Speaker	Year	Title	Format/Length	Central references or concerns
2.4 <i>Fifth Estate</i> (Sunfrog aka Andrew Smith), Max Cafard [aka John Clark], Snyder, Weinstein, etc.)	2003	Theme title: the spirit of Anarchy. Article titles: "Spiritual Anarchism: Topics for Research," "Anarcho-spirituality and its Discontents," "Da(o) Da(o) Spirituality," and others.	Journal theme/ Ca. 32 pages	Buddhist Anarchism, Dada, Daoism, Zen, Starhawk, Blake, PLW lists a variety of antinomian groups
2.5 Erik Davis	2010	Nomad Codes: Adventures in Modern Esoterica.	Book	PLW/Hakim Bey, psychedelics, Burning Man
2.6 Naomi Gross	2013	A Historical Comparison of Anabaptism to Anarchism: To What Extent Do the Swiss Brethren Embody the Ideals of Spiritual Anarchism?	Article/ 7 pages	The Swiss Brethren (early Anabaptist movement)
2.7 Jay Cypher (aka Jamie O'Hara)	2014	Anarchy as Spiritual Practice	Workshop presentation/ 1 h. 18 min.	PLW, national anarchism, ritual, self-sufficiency, Native American traditions, Jung, Eliade, mystical traditions, Moorish Science, Five Percenters, Rastafaris, Mayan Zapatismo, etc.

2.8 Derrick Broze, John Vibes, and Davi Barker ¹⁵⁴	2015	The Conscious Resistance: Reflections on Anarchy & Spirituality	Online book/ 117 pages	Anarchism in Daoism, shamanism, psychedelics, African/Asian/American indigenous traditions, Buddhism, and Islam, etc.
2.9 Patrick Cannon	2016	Martin Buber & Leo Tolstoy: Two Examples of Spiritual Anarchism.	Journal article/ 3 pages	Buber, Tolstoy, Landauer, Bakunin, Emma Goldman
2.10 Toshiya Ueno	2016	Deleuze and Guattari and Buddhism: Toward Spiritual Anarchism through Reading Toshihiko Izutsu	Book chapter/ 26 pages	Izutsu, Deleuze, Guattari, Zen, (unspecified types of) shamanism
2.11 Waldo Noesta	2019	Introduction to Spiritual Anarchism	Blog article/ ca. 12 pages	Catholic anarchist Ammon Hennacy, Alan Watts, Angela Davis, Quakerism, Utah Phillips

¹⁵⁴ In 2018, Broze, who identifies as anarcho-capitalist or “an-cap,” gave a presentation at the annual an-cap “Anarchapulco” gathering, a hugely understudied phenomena that has attracted the likes of ex-Republican congressman Ron Paul, rapper Eric July, punk vocalist Mark Passio, Green Party politician Cynthia McKinney, theorist of elites-as-alien-lizards, David Icke, and, oddly enough, anti-capitalist rapper Immortal Technique who performed there in 2019. Derrick Broze, “Why Are All The Anarchists so F*cked up?” Anarchapulco 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mefQ8i-3cw> Posted 2 July 2018 by The Conscious Resistance.

Chart 3. Polemical presentations of “spiritual anarchism.”

Author/Speaker	Year	Title	Format/Length	Central references or concerns
3-1 Martinito, Mr.	2008	What is Spiritual Anarchism?	Blog post/ Ca. 2 pages	Advocating “spiritual” individualism
3-2 Saint Faust	2008	The Magician as Spiritual Anarchist.	Online document/ 8 pages	Magick, Gnostics, Hakim Bey, TAZ, Crowley, freedom, sex
3-3 Wylden Freeborne	2011	Towards an Anarchist Spirituality	Blog article/ Ca. 4 pages.	Joseph Campbell, Alan Watts, pre-Christian spirituality, unspecified shamanism, civilization critique
3-4 Nickleberry	2011	ASCM and Anarchist Spirituality	Blog article/ Ca. 1 page	Australian Student Christian Movement, Catholic anarchists
3-5 Morten Tolboll	2014	The Matrix Conspiracy Part 1.	Online document/ 3-13 pages	“Philosophical globetrotting,” idleness, Zen, Taoism, anti-Self Help industry, pseudo-skepticism, Krishnamurti
3-6 Herve	2015	Spiritual Anarchism	Video/ 2 min. 30 sec.	Quakers, proposal of Twelve-step program for recovery from “religion,” “Religious authorities of all stripes are a coercive authority over individuals’ spiritual rights.”
3-7 Travis Encix	2017	Why I am a Spiritual Anarchist?	Blog article/ Ca. 1 page	“Spiritual nomadism,” Buddhism, Daoism

3-8 A. Wretch	n.d. ca. 2017	The Chronicles of Anarchy	Online document/ 1,145 pages	Gnosticism, psychedelics, Zodiac, shamanism, magick, Crowley, anti-capitalism, Daoism, oneness, anarchism, tantra, “balance between social justice and PC Fascism”
3-9 <i>Otherworlds Review</i>	2018	Review #7: Spiritual Anarchism	Blog article/ Ca. 8 pages	Remembering, Anna Campbell (1991-2018) ¹⁵⁵ and Kirsten Brydum(1983-2008), ¹⁵⁶ activism, CrimethInc. Daoism, “acknowledging the divinity in others and oneself.”
3-10 Erica Crooks	2019	Spiritual Anarchism: Living in an Anarchist Society/ 5D Earth	Blog post/ c. 3 pages ¹⁵⁷	Law of Attraction, Transgender, heyoka, ¹⁵⁸ combining New Age and anarchism, 5D Earth, anti-bullying
3-11 Anna Ronan	2019	Anarchism as a Spiritual Practice	Booklet/10 pages	Dao, <i>The Tao of Pooh</i> , Libertarian Socialism

¹⁵⁵ Campbell, a member of IWW, died while fighting alongside the Kurdish YPG against ISIS and Turkish forces.

¹⁵⁶ Brydum, anarchist organizer, authored an unpublished text entitled “Spiritual Anarchism” which Otherworlds discussed.

¹⁵⁷ I selected one article but Crooks has at least three more blogs with “spiritual anarchism” in the title, all essentially covering the same themes listed. See <http://officialericcrooks.blogspot.com/2019/07/spiritual-anarchism-living-in-anarchist.html>

¹⁵⁸ Lakota trickster figure. Crooks identified as a “heyoka empaths” and claimed distant Native ancestry but could not remember which tribe.

South Americans, Middle Easterners, Africans, or anyone from the African diaspora.¹⁵⁹ We see a skewed gender representation with three of the 46 as white women (no women of color). Similarly, in regard to movements, several movements labeled “spiritual anarchist” seemed white-dominant (Dadaism, Anabaptism, and Symbolism), two originated in India, and only in one instance, shamanism, did the term apply to an indigenous tradition.

Although most of the names have acquired renown through their writing rather than activism, in my subjective and open-to-question view, one might see at least half of the forty-six as engaging in activism or organizing work of some kind, yet only fifteen of thirty-five white males seem inclined in this direction, all six of the Indian males, and two of the three white females engaged in extensive activism.¹⁶⁰ Also, note that many of the people labeled “spiritual anarchists” did not reject the state on principle (Nin, Cromwell, Aurobindo, Ingersoll, etc.) indicating that the term has sometimes implied broad definitions of “anarchism.”

In the second list (Charts 1–3), of 30 presentations, we find no ethnographic or qualitative studies of “spiritual anarchist” practice. Yet two (1.8 and 2.6) seemed to clearly focus on group practice more than individual writers and their ideas: Gross (2.6) looked at Swiss Brethren practices while Anisin’s study on nonviolent activism concluded: “No spiritually committed anarchists have been observed to engage in violent dissent or ... advocating violent actions.”¹⁶¹ In my highly subjective assessment,

¹⁵⁹ To clarify, I see race as a social construction (superstition) that powerfully influences social life and I drew these assessments based on popular racial norms to expose the racial dynamics that tend to grant greater attention to people seen as “white men.”

¹⁶⁰ While tentative and subjective, I categorized the following as engaged in notable activism or organizational work, founding organizations, campaign work, civil disobedience, etc: Garrison, RAW, PLW, Coppe, Frank, Wright, Hay, Illich, Ingersoll, Landauer, Chaplin, Buber, Gardell, Cromwell, Steiner, Sen, Nirmalananda, Aurobindo, Osho, Krishnamurti, Gandhi, Starhawk, and Marsden.

¹⁶¹ Anisin 2019: 391; Ambiguities, however, remain. Discussions of Aurobindo (1.1 and 2.2) may focus on ideas but Aurobindo’s aim toward practice ultimately manifested in the creation of Auroville. Weinstein’s (2.4) one-page piece focused personal experiences of group practice, PLW/Bey (2.1, 2.3, and 2.4) and, building on his work, Cypher (2.7),

eight of them seemed to lean in a communal/collectivist direction and/or emphasize some form of activism, social practice, and/or organization,¹⁶² twelve seemed to lean toward individualism and/or emphasized writers, ideas, theory, and/or cognitive transformation,¹⁶³ and thirteen seemed to fit neither category comfortably.¹⁶⁴

Here, too, we can see an overrepresentation of whites as authors/presenters, three from Asia (two from India), and none from any Native or African background or perspective. We also see a form of segregation in that mostly Indian writers addressed Aurobindo and the other group of largely (or wholly) white writers generally ignored him and his work.¹⁶⁵ No presentation in Chart 1 gave any attention to either Krishnamurti, Native Americans, or African/African diaspora-based groups as “spiritual anarchists.” In the next charts, two quoted Krishnamurti (3.5 and 3.8).¹⁶⁶ Shamanism and Native Americans also garner some (not extensive) attention in Charts 2 and 3, in least eight instances¹⁶⁷ and we found a slight increase of attention to Africans/African diaspora with discussion of Moorish Science Temple (2.3 and 2.7)¹⁶⁸ and

discussed a wide variety of group practices in cursory sketches making them more difficult to categorize here in regard to practice.

¹⁶² See 1.8, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.9, and 3.11.

¹⁶³ See 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 3.1, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8.

¹⁶⁴ See 1.1, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.11, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.11.

¹⁶⁵ Marshall gave Aurobindo a paragraph (1992: 529). Versluis mentioned Aurobindo twice in his book but not in relation to “spiritual anarchism” and likewise for Tolboll. I have seen only one anarchist studies scholar, Brian Morris, give any notable attention to Aurobindo (1996: 108–111).

¹⁶⁶ Inspired by Krishnamurti’s assertion that “Truth is a pathless land” and his conception of “aleness,” Tolboll devoted an entire section of his book to Krishnamurti (2014: 19–26); Wretch quoted Krishnamurti as stating “it is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society” (n.d.: 71).

¹⁶⁷ 2.1, 2.10, 2.3, 2.7, 2.8, 3.3, 3.8, and 3.10.

¹⁶⁸ The Moorish Science Temple (MST) appears repeatedly in Wilson/Bey’s work. In the early 1900s Noble Drew Ali (1886–1929) re-named/re-claimed African Americans as “Moors” and re-interpreted Jesus to mean “justice.” He founded the Moorish Science Temple which spread its teachings through a new scripture: *The Circle Seven Koran* (no relation to the Quran) in the years immediately prior to the founding of the Nation of Islam by W. D. Fard. In 1986 Wilson revived a defunct white beatnik “branch” of Moorish Science named the Moorish Orthodox Church

brief mentions of “Bwiti people of Africa” and their use of the plant Iboga plant (2.8).¹⁶⁹

Only Cypher (2.7) discussed Fiver Percenters¹⁷⁰ and Rastafaris, noting that the former broke down “ISLAM” as “I Self Lord And Master,” and “ALLAH” as “Arm Leg Leg Arm Head” (references to the self as God).¹⁷¹ In regard to Rastas, Cypher acknowledged them as a decentralized group fighting an oppressive state (Babylon) with degrees of self-sufficiency and they engage in “reclaiming and redefining language based on their spiritual views.”¹⁷²

Finally, Waldo Noesta (2.11) quoted black liberation scholar Angela Davis’s revision of the Serenity Prayer: “I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I’m changing the things I cannot accept.”¹⁷³

As with the first list, most—but not all—of the presentations advocated a rejection of the state as well as church authority.

(see Knight 2012: 20–23; 87–92). The MST shared commonalities with the Ahmadiyya, Rosicrucians, Theosophical currents, Freemasons such as the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles Mystic Shrine (Black Shriners), and, in name at least, the Moorish Zionist Temple founded in 1899. For more on MST, see Curtis (2009), Nance (2002). For black Freemasonry (a major influence on the MST and later the Nation of Islam) see Sesay (2013).

¹⁶⁹ Broze and Vibes (2015: 48) referred (in passing) to the Bwiti tradition in Gabon in regard to the psychotropic Iboga plant. So did Wretch who also mentioned the Somali xeer system of conflict resolution (n.d.: 425, 85).

¹⁷⁰ Also known as the Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE).

¹⁷¹ Promoting an egalitarian and antiauthoritarian interpretation of Islam via Nation of Islam (NOI) teachings, Five Percenters similarly reject the idea of a “mystery God” in the sky. They re-named Harlem “Mecca” and Brooklyn “Medina,” they avoid pork, and yet, unlike the NOI, they adamantly reject the label of “Muslims”—in favor of “Gods” (Knight 2007). Five Percenters have developed a complex interpretational system called the Supreme Alphabet and Supreme Mathematics, which they use to build on tradition with new interpretations, essentially co-creating doctrine in participatory democratic gatherings reminiscent of the Viraśaivas of twelfth century India where men and women would share poetry together in meeting halls and co-create group doctrine (Schouten 1991: 4).

¹⁷² Cypher 2014. Indeed, the Rasta term “I-and-I” means both “we” and “God.” As Edmonds noted, for Rastas the “locus of authority is in each individual” (2003: 71).

¹⁷³ Noesta 2019.

If exclusively white and Asian people have used the term “spiritual anarchist,” that may help explain why we have never heard the term “anarchist spiritual” to refer to African American spirituals. Frederick Douglass said he would “bow to no priests either of faith or of unfaith,”¹⁷⁴ yet I have yet to see anyone declare him a “spiritual anarchist.” This, in light of a range from Shakespeare to Anaïs Nin and from Cromwell to Ingersoll, begs the question as to who does *not* qualify. Dynamics of whiteness and structural racism seem to play a role in perception of the term but they do not fully explain “spiritual anarchism’s” apparent boundaries: I could not find anyone having ever described two well-known white men, Noam Chomsky and William James, as “spiritual anarchist.” With the former a prominent anarchist who has advocated “spiritual transformation”¹⁷⁵ and the latter a forerunner of contemporary “spirituality” who advocated anarchism,¹⁷⁶ one might think they would qualify. While exploring such questions lies beyond the scope of this chapter, we can take at least take a closer look at how some racial dynamics seem to have related to “spiritual anarchism.”

V. Critical view: a race for anarchy?

Tensions between people of color and white anarchists have long persisted in various forms.¹⁷⁷ “Spiritual anarchists” have proven no exception. Adopting ideas from Indigenous peoples, African Americans, or “heretical” Islam—even “respectfully”—does not come without complications. Looking back we can see a long-term pattern of stolen words and distorted tales. Innocent Onyewuenyi argued that, “what we call Greek or Western Philosophy is copied from indigenous African philosophy of the ‘Mystery System.’ All

¹⁷⁴ Aptheker 2001: 77.

¹⁷⁵ Chomsky supported Rosa Luxemburg’s call for “spiritual transformation” (Chomsky 2013: 46).

¹⁷⁶ William James wrote in 1900: “I am becoming more and more an individualist and anarchist and believer in small systems of things exclusively” (Coon 1996: 81).

¹⁷⁷ E.g., Lagalisse (2011) and Hahn (2014: 124).

the values of the mystery system were adopted by the Greeks and Ionians who came to Egypt to study.”¹⁷⁸

As white Freemasons took inspiration from Islamic and Middle Eastern cultures, the Founding Fathers drew from Native Americans as they imagined and conceived new forms of governance. Two primary examples shall illustrate some tensions in contexts of “spiritual anarchism”: the literary blackface and orientalism of Wilson/Bey and Burroughs. Let’s start by looking at two quotes:

[D]ue to self-detrimental mental programs that have been installed in you by your parents, family, society, school, religion, consensus reality, etc. you have been limited and disabled.

— Hakim Bey, *Secret of Secrets*, 2011.

What mysticism really tries to surmount is false consciousness, illusion, Consensus Reality, & all the failures of self that accompany these ills.

— Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.* 1985/2003.

The two quotes seem to reference a single author and both mention “consensus reality” yet appearances deceive. How? Quite simply: two different people currently write under the name “Hakim Bey.” The first Hakim Bey, author of *Secret of Secrets*,¹⁷⁹ appears African American, self-identifies as a Moor, and has membership in the Moorish Science Temple. The second Hakim Bey (PLW) appears European American, self-identifies as an anarchist, and, after working for the government of the Shah of Iran, returned to his native New York and revived the Moorish Orthodox Church (a somewhat Discordian-like white beatnik network of Noble Drew Ali enthusiasts). As Knight stated, “people often speak of the ‘black Hakim Bey’ and the ‘white Hakim Bey’ as though they’re oppositional twins in some cosmic dualism.”¹⁸⁰ By writing *T.A.Z.* under that pseudonym, Wilson gave readers the image of a black man precisely because the name evokes the Moorish Science Temple (where members typically adopt the last name “Bey” or

¹⁷⁸ Cited in King 1999: 29.

¹⁷⁹ Written under the name Moorpheus H. B. (2011).

¹⁸⁰ Knight 2012: 70.

“El”). By borrowing the color and assumed authenticity of blacks, this male white gained street credibility and performed a symbolic coup by firing the imagination of readers who might otherwise have found an identical text by “Peter Lamborn Wilson” less inspirational. Furthermore, the words, “Hakim” (“wise”) and “Bey” (“prince”), have very different implications in relation to race in the United States. When a black man takes a name of prestige, he acts to re-capture a sense of dignity, humanity, and prestige that whites had stolen from him and his ancestors. Whites (especially from the upper middle-class) who call themselves “wise princes” build upon a racial foundation of prestige and skin privilege created through theft, exploitation, and colonialism.

In another example, William Burroughs and Brion Gysin popularized the phrase “Nothing is true—everything is permitted” (hereafter NITEIP) which has appeared in mainstream cultural contexts such as the TV series *True Blood* and the computer game *Assassin’s Creed*. It seems to offer universal license for any activity. Burroughs attributed the phrase to the last words of the famous head of the Assassins, Hasan-i Sabbah, and, through his fictional writing, Burroughs built up his own mythology around Sabbah. In Wilson’s words: “‘Nothing is true; everything is permitted.’ This was the teaching of Hasan-i Sabbah, the first Grand Master of Alamut, called the Old Man of the Mountain.”¹⁸¹

Miles (2000), Geiger (2005), and later Knight (2012) falsely described NITEIP as the result of a “cut-up experiment” by Burroughs.¹⁸² Supposedly Gysin and Burroughs had rearranged or simply taken the words from a chapter heading in Betty Bouthoul’s (1936) book on the Assassins and haphazardly connected it to Hasan-i Sabbah’s dying words. The story fails on several counts. First, Bouthoul used the exact phrase “Nothing is true; everything is permitted” (“*Rien n’est vrai, tout est permis*”) both as chapter title *and* in the text claiming that Hasan-i Sabbah spoke it as his dying words.¹⁸³ Burroughs and Gysin simply took the phrase and story directly from Bouthoul without any creati-

¹⁸¹ Wilson 1988: 56.

¹⁸² “Cut-up” = the cutting up text and rearranging the words. See Geiger (2005: 145–148) and Knight (2012: 18).

¹⁸³ Bouthoul 1936: 196.

ve input. Nietzsche had also used the phrase (“*Nichts ist wahr, Alles ist erlaubt*”) decades earlier yet both he and Bouthoul seem to have taken the phrase from an 1818 book in Bouthoul’s bibliography by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall who used variations of the phrase to describe the philosophy of the Assassins but he neither attributed the phrase directly to Hasan-i Sabbah, did not use quote marks, nor cite any source for the phrase.¹⁸⁴ It seems that von Hammer-Purgstall interpreted the Ismailis; Nietzsche popularized this interpretation; Bouthoul embellished it and placed the phrase in Hasan-i Sabbah’s dying mouth; Gysin and Burroughs popularized the phrase in the U.S. (and mystified their own behavior with smoky clouds of Eastern exoticism). This mystique served not only to justify raw individualism but also disguise their own relationships to colonialism and racism.¹⁸⁵ The disguise worked so well that biographer Miles could list “all of the hideous personages” of Burroughs, including “Hassan-i-Sabbah” and “an old Southern nigger-killin’ sheriff” without mentioning any racial implications.¹⁸⁶

By taking the reader through the gradual steps of this narrative construction I hope it clarifies how passive acceptance of “white people’s words” combined with orientalist manipulations both objectifies and distorts colonized cultures and—in Wollstonecraft’s terms—corrupts both sides of the asymmetrical relationship. From Quakers’ problematic and paternalistic relationship with Native Americans¹⁸⁷ to complex ways in which Freemasons both created interfaith community centers based to some degree on mutual aid and also primarily served white people (including Unitarians and Universalists such as Thomas Starr King, Thaddeus Mason Harris, and Hosea Ballou as well as anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin and occultist Aleister Crowley),

¹⁸⁴ Thanks to Jeff B. Taylor at Vanderbilt University who conducted this research and supplied details through correspondence: “Origins,” <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/jefftaylor/publications/origins/>

¹⁸⁵ For more on Orientalism and how white Occidentals have a long tradition of shaping and distorting images of the East, see Said (1979) and King (1999).

¹⁸⁶ Miles 2000: 184–185.

¹⁸⁷ Milner 1982.

race has affected social justice struggles.¹⁸⁸ While the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) organizes according to a congregational polity akin to Bakunin's federalism and act as pioneers of social justice, they too have struggled with racism in their membership and institutions.¹⁸⁹ Even an anarchist such as John Collier helped entrench colonialism when he helped shape the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the U.S. government.¹⁹⁰ More recently, the anarchic and largely white Rainbow Family of Light, also called Rainbow Nation, came into conflict when they planned to gather 8,000–20,000 people in Black Hills, South Dakota in 2015 and a Lakota group, United Urban Warriors Society, viewing the land as sacred, ardently opposed the plan. Two Lakota activists complained that “the Rainbow Family has no leaders, and no one is really accountable.”¹⁹¹ Michael Muhammad Knight came into conflict with Five Percenter when he accused Lord Jamar of homophobia. Knight ended his identification as a Five Percenter and framed his departure as a result of sexism and homophobia among Five Percenters (both of which he knew of when he joined). He accompanied his farewell essay with a pink and lavender version of the Five Percenter's logo, the Universal Flag, to which a QueenAishah Intelligence responded “looks like you an agent[.] your determined idea was never to learn because if it was you would do just that and stay in your lane[.] not turn around and slander the Nation take the flag and disrespect the people that made it.”¹⁹² Tensions appear even in close relationships. Across

¹⁸⁸ For prominent Unitarians and Universalists as Freemasons, see Sala (2000). For Bakunin as Freemason, see Lagalisse (2018: 297). Crowley additionally admitted working as an agent for the British state (Spence 2000: 361).

¹⁸⁹ For Bakunin's outline for anarchist federation, see Dolgoff (2002). For racism and the UUA, see Morrison-Reed (2011). For UUs and anarchism, see Dewey (2004). For an anarchist UU approach to challenging racism, see Crass (2001).

¹⁹⁰ Hauptman 1983.

¹⁹¹ Briquet 2015. Ultimately, both sides seemed divided on the question and less than 1,500 “Rainbow warriors” showed up with minimal confrontations.

¹⁹² See Knight 2013 plus comments.

chasms such as racial divides, we can at least begin with acknowledging the violence of silence.

VI. Spirited away: forgotten legacies

With much focus on individual white writers, focus on people of color and activist groups has fallen by the wayside. While impossible to address all such cases, this section briefly covers J. Krishnamurti, Earth First!, Womanism, MOVE, and indigenous peoples.

Discussions of “spiritual anarchism” in general have largely ignored J. Krishnamurti’s tremendous, long-term, and widespread influence. Aside from his literature, videos, and recordings, Krishnamurti’s legacy continues on in the schools that he founded. Furthermore, many anarchists and activists over the years have taken his message to heart. In 2005, the journal *Green Anarchy* published an anonymously written text on Krishnamurti’s philosophy (alongside references to Daoism, William Blake, and Dadaism). For the author, one of Krishnamurti’s most important contributions entailed his emphasis on challenging authorities in our “internal environment,” the presuppositions that unconsciously direct us. After all, “if ‘spirituality’ is synonymous with self-awareness, then those that don’t seek it are all mad as hatters. ... all robots, and sleepwalkers.” The author concluded with quotes from Krishnamurti such as:

Friends, why don’t you worship a cloud? Why don’t you pray to the man who is labouring in the fields, or take delight in shadows cast on tranquil waters? While you are worshipping in an enclosed shrine, Life dances in the street and escapes you. If you do not test your strength by throwing away your crutches, how can you know your integrity, your vitality? ...and enjoy that which creates all things.¹⁹³

The author did not mention (and perhaps did not know) that other anarchists have discussed Krishnamurti’s work. Krishnamurti influenced a wide range of people from writers such as Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, Marshall Rosenberg, Alan Watts, and Timothy Fitzgerald to activists such as the Black Panthers, martial arts le-

¹⁹³ Krishnamurti quoted by *Green Anarchy* (2005: 13).

gend Bruce Lee, Osho, and the founders of the anarchist commune Beeville in New Zealand.¹⁹⁴ At one point in time, an anonymous editor surreptitiously cut and pasted his words into an apocryphal text supposedly documenting a debate between W. D. Fard (founder of the Nation of Islam) and Albert Einstein in 1933.¹⁹⁵

As early as 1931 the feminist Maria Lacerda de Moura wrote in *Estúdios* that Krishnamurti had influenced her.¹⁹⁶ In 1935, Krishnamurti critiqued war, nationalism, and “religion” through seven lectures in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and Brazilian anarchist press covered his talks positively.¹⁹⁷ According to Mendiola, in 1936, a Spanish vegetarian named Celestino García avoided “politics” and studied Krishnamurti. He and a friend attempted to evade participation in the Spanish Civil War yet ultimately consented to serve in the Bakunin battalion without bearing arms.¹⁹⁸ In 1960 the newspaper of the syndicalist AIT/CNT in exile, *Solidaridad Obrera* published an article by J. Tato Lorenzo, co-founder of the Hermandad Universal Anarquista, where he discussed Krishnamurti’s teaching on ending exploitation and balancing reason and emotion through experimentation: “Find your own path and rise forth. ...Belief is the wealth of the ignorant.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Black Panther David Hilliard stated, “we lived by some of the Eastern philosophies of Krishnamurti. Vegetarianism was a big thing in our BPP. Our school was vegetarian [and] children were on a vegetarian diet.” “The Satya Interview with David Hilliard,” 2004. <http://satyamag.com/apro4/hilliard.html>). Bruce Lee created a new martial arts style, Jeet Kune Do, based on Krishnamurti’s teaching (O’Regan 2005). Osho’s commune Rajneeshpuram named a lake after Krishnamurti (Carter 1990: 10). For his influence on Rosenberg, see Rosenberg (2003: 28). Inspired in part by Krishnamurti, members of the Beeville commune (1933–1973) in New Zealand lived a vegetarian and pacifist lifestyle, engaged in direct action (such as the refusal to pay “war taxes”), regularly served time in jail for refusing military service, and once even broke a fellow member out of prison (Sargisson and Sargent 2004: 33–35).

¹⁹⁵ Aside from Krishnamurti (1970: 129), the text also lifted liberally from Sikh and Christian Scientist sources. For a more detailed discussion, see Fiscella (2015: 361–363).

¹⁹⁶ Queluz 2018.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Mendiola 2015: 12. (Thanks Santiago Gorostiza!)

¹⁹⁹ Lorenzo 1960: 1. Translation from Spanish my own. Supposedly anarchists associated with the individualist anarchist journal *Iniciales* also

In his 1973 work on communes, Laurence Veysey wrote: “Emma Goldman thought it was worth devoting half a page of *Mother Earth* to a scornful account of Krishnamurti’s first arrival in America as the announced Theosophical avatar.”²⁰⁰ However, Goldman’s text appeared in 1913. Krishnamurti (barely 18 at the time) did not arrive in the U.S. until 1922. Nor did the article mention Krishnamurti’s name or seem to know anything about him. It stated: “It is fortunate that this time the Savior of the world is to be a real Yankee. Were he—God forbid—a foreigner, he would in all probability fall into the hands of the Immigration Bureau and be deported, so that the millions of Americans would be robbed of salvation and be doomed to eternal hell-fire.”²⁰¹ Later, *Road to Freedom*, a follow-up journal to *Mother Earth*, quoted Krishnamurti positively in 1930.²⁰² In 1952 Henry Miller described Krishnamurti thusly:

His career, unique in the history of spiritual leaders, reminds one of the famous Gilgamesh epic. Hailed in his youth as the coming Savior, Krishnamurti renounced the rôle that was prepared for him, spurned all disciples, rejected all mentors and preceptors. He initiated no new faith or dogma, questioned everything, cultivated doubt (especially in moments of exaltation), and, by dint of heroic struggle and perseverance, freed himself of illusion and enchantment, or pride, vanity, and every subtle form of domination over others. ... “You seek truth,” he says again, “as if it were the opposite of what you are.”

“*Man is his own liberator!*” Is this not the ultimate teaching? ... He has often been referred to as “the World Teacher.” If any man living merits the title, he does. But to me the important thing about Krishnamurti is that he imposes himself upon us not as a teacher, nor even as a Master, but as a *man*.²⁰³

studied Krishnamurti’s work yet I do not have documentation to verify this.

²⁰⁰ Veysey 1973: 45–46. Based on Veysey, Lagalisse repeated this information (2018: 307).

²⁰¹ *Mother Earth* 1913: 196. Thank you to Candace Falk at the Goldman Papers for digging up this source!

²⁰² Veysey 1973: 49.

²⁰³ *Ibid*: 153, 159.

Miller's depiction neatly captured a contradiction behind the allure and drama of Krishnamurti's seemingly egalitarian message: it depended upon the elite status that he rejected. In demolishing that glamorous pedestal he settled for a more modest one but he never lived an adult life without a pedestal.

For others who have spoken a similar message, attention has not come so easily. Especially when they have translated those ideas into action. We find, for example, very similar starting points of Oneness with nature in womanism, Earth First!, and The MOVE Organization who turned these basic premises into a pragmatic call to defend animals and Mother Earth from assault by humans. Alice Walker, inspired by Zen (among other things), wrote:

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.²⁰⁴

A womanist: "Loves the Spirit ...Loves struggle. ...Loves herself. *Regardless.*"²⁰⁵ Walker, who has expressed support for MOVE, wrote: "Certainly I don't believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God."²⁰⁶ Not only does womanism embrace diverse DIY "spiritualities," it involves an inclusive and broad-based "struggle against oppression based on race, gender, and class."²⁰⁷

Although given a name recently, one can trace the intersectional essence of womanism much farther back. For example, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911), an orphan who grew up to write and speak as one of the country's foremost authors and abolitionists. Historian LaRese Hubbard described Harper as "one of the most important figures in African American intellectual history" and a "womanist *sani-baat*, a Wolof word and Senegalese

²⁰⁴ Phillips 2006: xx. At least one scholar, Jessica Sadr, has noticed that "natural anarchism and ecowomanism share conceptual and practical similarities for addressing ecological degradation and remedying uneven relationships between humans and non-human life" (2013: 18).

²⁰⁵ Walker 1983: xii.

²⁰⁶ Ibid: 265.

²⁰⁷ Vanessa Sheared cited in Razak (2013: 221).

concept of ‘voice throwing’ [meaning] a disruptive and self-affirming insertion of women’s voice in spaces and discourses which would exclude or silence them.”²⁰⁸ Harper called for “[e]arnest, self-sacrificing souls” who would make their mark and not allow “blood stained government” to buy their loyalty.²⁰⁹ When living in Philadelphia, she attended both the white First Unitarian Church and the black African Methodist Episcopal Church where she taught Sunday school class. In response to racism in the suffragette movement, she teamed up with Harriet Tubman²¹⁰ and others to found the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 (reaching 100,000 members by 1924).²¹¹ With the slogan “Lifting as we Climb,” the NACW “built schools, ran orphanages, founded homes for the aged, set up kindergarten programs, and formed agencies in New York and Philadelphia to help female migrants from the South find jobs and affordable housing.”²¹²

According to Nash, Dave Foreman, white co-founder of the generally anarchist eco-activist group Earth First!, “liked to say that ‘I’m operating as part of the wilderness defending myself,’ and that monkeywrenching was ‘self-defense on the part of the Earth.’”²¹³ Another environmental activist described “spirituality” as knowing “what the trees are saying. ...It has [convinced me we are not] separate from each other, and from the rocks, and everything else.”²¹⁴ With these perspectives various Earth First! and animal liberation activists have committed acts of sabotage to prevent companies from “developing” land and killing or incarcerating animals. Bron Taylor described tactics of Earth First! and animal liberation activists as including tree spiking, sinking whaling ships, hunt sabotage, and arson attacks against trucks, research laboratories, ski lodges, or meat factories. Often however

²⁰⁸ Hubbard 2012: 68, 74.

²⁰⁹ Schulster 2010: 1138.

²¹⁰ For more on Tubman, whom Monica J. Evans called “that most prominent of outlaw women,” see May (2014); Evans cited in Jones (2009: 239).

²¹¹ Now called the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC).

²¹² Rubiner 1996.

²¹³ Nash 1989: 196.

²¹⁴ Taylor 2010: 97.

“self-defense on the part of the Earth” has entailed less confrontational methods. In December 1997, a vegan activist named Julia “Butterfly” Hill climbed a giant redwood (dubbed “Luna” by Earth First! activists) in order to save the tree from logging. She spent two years living atop the tree, enduring winter storms and frostbite, yet “drawing strength from the tree” and only coming down “after negotiating an agreement with the logging company that left Luna standing as well as a two-hundred foot buffer of surrounding trees.”²¹⁵ She said she could feel the tree crying when the company had cut down trees in the vicinity. Graham Innes buried himself in a road up to his neck in order to hinder a company from cutting down trees. He described how, during this period, he felt an “awareness of a hitherto unknown connection—Earth bonding [when the Earth’s] pulse became mine, and the vessel, my body, became the vehicle for her expression.”²¹⁶ In 2012 the *Earth First! Journal* published three pages by and about The MOVE Organization.²¹⁷ Here we could read, for example, Phil Africa writing from prison:

I just wanted to show some appreciation for the work yall do. It does us all good to see people out there with the courage to stand up for what’s Right against this rotten system. ...People need to realize that when they take a stand for what’s Right it is for Themselves they are fighting for. People must realize that there is Nothing more important than LIFE/NATURE. ...To quote JOHN AFRICA: “THE EARTH IS FOOD, WITHOUT EARTH THE SEED IS DEAD, WITHOUTH THE SEED THE EARTH IS DEAD, WITHOUT FOOD ALL LIFE IS DEAD FOR IT AIN’T THE CABBAGE THAT IS THE FOOD, IT IS THE LIFE IN THE CABBAGE THAT KEEP YOU ALIVE. EARTH IS LIFE, THE CABBAGE IS EARTH, WHEN YOU EAT THE CABBAGE YOU ARE EATIN’ THE SOIL JUST A[S] SURELY AS YOU ARE DRINKIN’ YOUR BREATH WITH EVERY SWALLOW OF WATER WHEN THIRSTY” ...end quote
LONG LIVE JOHN AFRICA!²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Taylor 2010: 94.

²¹⁶ Ibid: 95.

²¹⁷ For a comparison of MOVE’s significance in legal studies and their relative exclusion from religious studies, see Fiscella (2016).

²¹⁸ Africa 2012: 12. Particular spellings and emphasis in original.

John Africa founded the MOVE Organization in Philadelphia in the early 1970s. Based on the principle of the absolute unity of life, members lived communally and strove to end all violence (including pollution, racism, prisons, and war). Rejecting trash collection, they put their food scraps on their yard and attracted large numbers of roaches and rats. Defending these “vermin” against pesticide probably made MOVE the first activist group to defend the rights of insects.²¹⁹ After a period of weekly study sessions of the teaching of John Africa, MOVE began protesting zoos, pet stores, and the local Board of Education. Confrontations with police left a MOVE infant dead in 1976, a police officer dead in 1978, nine MOVE members serving 30–100 year sentences, and a 1985 bombing of their home by police which killed eleven people (including five children) and left 250 people homeless.²²⁰ Survivor of the bombing Ramona Africa has long served as spokesperson for MOVE’s continuing activities. Now, MOVE members have raised a generation of urban home-schooled sober youth who express deep concern for animals and nature.

How differently would we think of MOVE and John Africa, a black man, if people would come to believe (correctly or falsely) that his parents who arrived in Philadelphia from Georgia in the early 1800s had Cherokee background? Would these principles of oneness with life, rejection of technology, and harmony with nature somehow seem more ...natural?

Not only do the values of Krishnamurti, Earth First!, womanism, and MOVE resonate with one another, they resonate too with indigenous peoples who seem to, by and large, match or surpass criteria to which the terms “spiritual” and “anarchist” often seem to apply. Native societies resolved conflicts and crime

²¹⁹ Jain ascetics, of course, have avoided killing insects for hundreds of years yet have not, as far as I know, actively defended insects’ *rights*. MOVE and Jains struck a prophetic chord: scientists now assess that corporate pollution, pesticides, and habitat devastation threaten a third of insect species and the entire eco-system of Earth along with them. See technical meta-study at Sánchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys (2019) and popular science overview in *The Guardian* by Carrington (2019).

²²⁰ Boyette and Boyette 1989; Two MOVE members, Merle Africa and Phil Africa, have died in prison. The rest of the “MOVE 9” served 40–42 years in prison before exiting on parole 2018–2020.

without formal law or incarceration,²²¹ provided integrated and inclusive forms of psychotherapy,²²² and they typically organized without state, police, homelessness, standing armies, great wealth disparities, and largely in sustainable relationship with sacred environment.²²³ Furthermore, many Native peoples have had more than two genders and/or allowed transition between them.²²⁴ As seen recently in Standing Rock and other places, many Native Americans/First Nations people continue to challenge corporate and settler state power.²²⁵

Clearly, more than ample material has existed in excluded contexts for people to have potentially characterized them as “spiritual anarchist.”

VII. Beyond words: a critical view of “spiritual anarchist” praxis

This section imagines what studies of “spiritual anarchism” might look like if they examined actual groups and practices. I selected two institutions, Auroville and Twelve-Step programs/Alcoholics Anonymous because (a) I had a degree of familiarity with them as well as access to research on them, (b) they both constitute early pioneers in “spiritual anarchist” contexts; and (c) they both captured my personal interest as groups that created new life-organizing stories and practices designed to heal relationships to self and society. Although I only provide a sketch rather than an actual study, this may hopefully inspire closer examination of these groups and many others.

Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973), a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, founded perhaps the largest “spiritual anarchist” commune in the world: Auroville, a “cluster of ecovillages” in southern India with more than 1,500 residents stewarding 3,000 acres of land.²²⁶ Alfassa founded Auroville on February 28, 1968 in southern

²²¹ E.g., Okulski (2017).

²²² E.g., Lindquist (2014).

²²³ E.g., Barclay (1982).

²²⁴ E.g., Gilden (2006).

²²⁵ E.g., Gilio-Whitaker (2019).

²²⁶ Mueller 1990: 111.

India. Asked by an interviewer about the type of organization that she hoped to see in Auroville, the Mother answered: “a divine anarchy.”²²⁷ Today, members run Auroville as a network of eco-villages consisting of more than 2,000 residents. Their website states that “there are no leaders as such; each person is responsible for the collective becoming of Auroville” and also “The bulk of Auroville’s administration is carried out by autonomous and non-hierarchic working groups.”²²⁸

Yet, Auroville, as studied by Joukhi (2006) and Namakkal (2012), also exemplifies a group of well-intentioned colonists. The members of Auroville initially viewed their Tamil neighbors with great respect. Yet Aurovilians’ respect for the locals also assumed that the Tamil would understand the magnificent project of Auroville as superior to their own existing lifestyle and Tamil traditions. Due to cultural differences and economic disparities, the initial vision of absorbing the local populace into Auroville gave way to a sense of resignation. Instead of joining Aurovilians as equals, the local Tamil worked as servants and provided cheap labor for the Aurovilians who, by and large, did not come from the local region (many came from Europe, the U.S. or northern India) and they did not speak Tamil.

The creation of Auroville, a Western utopia, in India, a site of Western colonial expansion, reproduced colonial institutions, specifically those of race, class, and nation, thus maintaining continuity between the colonial and the postcolonial periods that the architects and visionaries behind Auroville had explicitly hoped to avoid.²²⁹

In Jukka Jouhki’s words: “It seemed as if the Aurovillian ideal of ‘unity in diversity’ meant unity in *Western* diversity.”²³⁰ This “anti-colonial colonialism” (as Namakkal termed it) stemmed from the structural institutions of the global economy and the classes and peoples that it privileged even if the members of Auroville aimed to abolish that system. As far as I can tell, Aurovilians still struggle

²²⁷ Anonymous 1977: 28.

²²⁸ See www.auroville.org

²²⁹ Namakkal 2012: 62.

²³⁰ Jouhki 2006: 186.

with the issue even while they have made progress. In addition to outreach programs, they have begun teaching Tamil to children in Auroville schools.²³¹ Despite setbacks and difficulties, they have persevered. From their humble beginnings, for example, in a largely barren terrain, they planted approximately 2 million trees in their first 30 years alone.²³²

Today with “inhabitants from about 40 different nations” Auroville consists of “nearly 100 communities of varying sizes” and “has nearly two dozen schools, a number of research institutes, cultural centers, a seed bank, forests and sanctuaries, appropriate technology and renewable energy centers, and many commercial units.”²³³ Among the features that have contributed to Auroville’s success, one resident stated ten “essential ingredients” including “commitment to being willing servitors of the divine (in a philosophical rather than religious sense),” a “sense of humor that usually manifests in bizarre forms of self-criticism,” and “a refusal to believe in impossibilities.”²³⁴

Bill Wilson aka Bill W. (1895–1971) and Robert Smith aka Dr. Bob (1879–1950) founded Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in Akron, Ohio in 1935 and in 1939 published the “Twelve Step program” which millions of people have used to address various types of addictions.²³⁵ AA/Twelve Step programs have meetings organized across the world but reject all forms of coercive organization. They lack both membership lists and leaders (rejections made explicit

²³¹ For more on Auroville, see Minor (1999), van den Akker and Lipp (2004), and Vengopal and Kumari (2010).

²³² Mueller 1990: 111.

²³³ *Ibid.*: 112.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*: 113. Watson (1998: 172–174) also noted Native use of humor in overcoming dualism.

²³⁵ The twelve steps include: admit powerlessness in relation to addiction; believe a “higher power” could help; decide to turn one’s life and will over to that higher power; perform moral self-inventory; openly admit wrongdoing; feel ready for “God/higher power” to remove the defects; make such a request; make a list of people wronged and feel prepared to make amends; make amends; continue self-inventory and admit when wrong; use prayer and meditation to ask for direction and strength to follow through; having completed the previous steps, spread the message. See Kurtz (1979) and AAWS (1957).

in Tradition Nine that guides AA groups).²³⁶ Participants identify themselves only by their first name (hence, the “anonymous” aspect of AA). Bill W. described AA as a “benign anarchy.”²³⁷ At its core, it functions as a form of decentralized mutual aid for people in need. Mark Andersen, co-founder of the straight edge punk activist collective Positive Force, described Twelve Step programs such as AA as “a powerful model ...with their use of personal inventories, amends-making, and service.” Andersen continued:

In our hierarchical, profit-driven health care system, where doctors can almost assume the role of God, such groups represent a radical alternative. Rotating leaders, no fees involved, the “sick” helping one another, with only the loosest of structures—what more profound refutation of our present system could there be? Even the word “God” is left for each person to define for themselves, or to even reject outright, should another word like ‘greater power’ seem preferable. In their way, these meetings, autonomous except in matters affecting other Twelve Step groups, seem strikingly like anarchy in action. They begin with an admission of powerlessness over some aspect of life, but only in order to harness a deeper, broader power. The aim of the process is a small but very real liberation, one that can help clear the way for larger transformation.²³⁸

²³⁶ Tradition Nine of the Twelve Traditions states: “A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.’ ...Neither its General Service Conference, its Foundation Board, nor the humblest group committee can issue a single directive to an A.A. member and make it stick, let alone mete out any punishment. ...It is clear now that we ought never to name boards to govern us, but it is equally clear that we shall always need to authorize workers to serve us. ...If nobody does the group’s chores, if the area’s telephone rings unanswered, if we do not reply to our mail, then A.A. as we know it would stop. ...Tradition Nine ... discloses a society without organization, animated only by the spirit of service—a true fellowship.” Thanks to Elena Metcalf for pointing this out to me years ago. For AA and spirituality see Kelly and Greene (2014) and Westermeyer (2014).

²³⁷ AAWS 1957: 225; Butler (2010) even wrote a book bearing this title. Butler credited AA’s decentralized and non-partisan approach with its massive success in establishing itself throughout Ireland.

²³⁸ Andersen 2004: 124.

In another sense, its pragmatic inclinations and lack of critique of the state and state violence as such, has (unsurprisingly perhaps) led to collaborations with the state. Hence, although ostensibly a purely voluntary enterprise, the state can force prisoners into attending an AA program.²³⁹ Nonetheless, Twelve Step programs have led to discernable changes in many people's lives. Al Smith (1919–2014), a Native American who had grown up without contact with the Klamath tradition of his parents eventually succumbed to alcoholism but recovered through AA. Therein he began to rekindle his ancestral ties and a relationship with, in his words, “a God that I didn't even understand.”²⁴⁰ When employers fired his work colleague for using peyote, he stood up for him and attended a Native American Church ceremony involving peyote. His legal defense of peyote use went all the way to the Supreme Court. Though the case lost, it led to a popular uproar that culminated in a 1993 congressional act to rectify it, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA).

Whereas the “benign anarchy” of Twelve-Step programs/AA does not threaten the status quo per se, it can create important spaces for mutual aid, DIY education, self-organization, and healing within nation-state contexts. Whereas the “divine anarchy” of Auroville does not necessarily threaten the status quo either, the acquisition of land, creation of egalitarian organization via (semi-)permanent communal living can enable mini-versions of new egalitarian societies. Figure 1 illustrates that each of them have their corollaries in other contexts and may potentially combine in an infinite number of constellations.

In Twelve-Step's “benign anarchy,” we find an egalitarian approach that empowers its members to cooperate horizontally toward healing themselves and personal relationships. In Auroville's “divine anarchy,” the group tends toward both healing and building a new society alongside personal development. Both revealed promise for social transformation as well as, recalling Wollstonecraft's observation about asymmetric power relations, complicity with existing power structures. Both examples seem to

²³⁹ Peele, Bufe and Brodsky (2000).

²⁴⁰ Epps 2001: 19.

	Structural type of “spiritual anarchism”	Possible manifestations
Individual association	Benign anarchy	Twelve-step programs; anarchist affinity groups; co-counseling communities; study circles
Community organization	Divine anarchy	Egalitarian eco-villages; leaderless communes; tribal organization
Other areas (global, national, nomadic)	Combination	Bakunin’s federative system; Unitarian Universalist Association; Eco-village network; global trade unions; international DIY networks

Figure 1. Benign Anarchy and Divine Anarchy.

suggest that whether a “benign anarchy” or a “divine anarchy,” all attempts to heal, repair, build, and sustain egalitarian communities today do so in relation to the complexities of power disparities, inequalities, and violence of governments, class, and race.

VIII. Conclusions?

In this chapter, I have addressed a notable gap in research by scanning uses of “spiritual anarchism” and, in particular, noted Marshall’s broad definition of “spiritual anarchism” that left space for (unspecified) collective-oriented groups and obligations to “natural law” or “God’s Law” in contrast with a definition by Versluis which associated the term very specifically with the individualistic “freedom”-focused white Beatnik writers and Peter Lamborn Wilson/Hakim Bey. Second, I discussed racial dynamics concerning the latter group. Third, I addressed voices largely excluded from “spiritual anarchist” discourse (including Krishnamurti, Earth First!, womanism, MOVE, and indigenous peoples) to provide potential counter-prototypes. Finally, with the examples of Auroville and Twelve-Step programs/AA, I offered a sketch of a praxis-based study of “spiritual anarchism.”

Initially, “spiritual anarchism” caught my attention because it seemed to often point in directions that interested me (i.e., social and eco-justice work, radically revising dominant language and life-organizing stories, challenging patterns of violence inwardly and outwardly, building community, etc.). I don’t know that we need a single term for all of that. But, if some people use “spiritual anarchism” to refer to those (and many other) things, it may warrant studying what people do with it and if the term continues to provide a function for thinkers, activists, and organizers as a means of harmonizing personal and social struggles then it may also warrant decolonizing.²⁴¹

In a discussion about the need to include Indigenous perspectives in interspecies thinking, Kim TallBear (2011) mentioned her skepticism toward the idea of beginnings. She argued that, along with the word “origin,” we “should dump that word ‘genesis’ from our scientific vocabulary” because such terms obscure the actual dynamics of “different pieces” forming to “make a new kind of whole.” Life, as we know it, offers no “discrete beginning,” so unless “we are talking about the Big Bang, we probably should not use these terms.”²⁴²

One could perhaps say something similar about the idea of endings. This several thousand-word journey ends where it began: with an awareness of the limitations of words. Which terms should we use when we speak and when we study? This chapter ends with a respect for the unknown and a willingness to listen. What happens if we look closer at the ways people relate to terms like “spirituality” and “anarchism” and what do these relations say about larger societal challenges? What impact does the exclusion of women and people of color from discourse have on the emphasis of individualism and “freedom” versus connection to community and “justice”? This chapter ends with an attempt to shift focus from life-organizing stories toward life-organizing practices in that terrain

²⁴¹ Or, if people choose a new term altogether, why not choose a verb (like *daoing*?—but less awkward—in reference to the Dao) or, in a nod to Russell Means’ opposition to colonial despiritualizing of the universe, *respiritualizing*?

²⁴² TallBear 2011.

where questions morph into experiments. Perhaps, in scratching the surface, this chapter may spark conversations.

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Anarchism and religion have historically had an uneasy relationship. Indeed, representatives of both sides have regularly insisted on the fundamental incompatibility of anarchist and religious ideas and practices. Yet, ever since the emergence of anarchism as an intellectual and political movement, a considerable number of religious anarchists have insisted that their religious tradition necessarily implies an anarchist political stance.

Reflecting both a rise of interest in anarchist ideas and activism on the one hand, and the revival of religious ideas and movements in the political sphere on the other, this multi-volume collection examines congruities and contestations between the two from a diverse range of academic perspectives.

The third volume of *Essays in Anarchism & Religion* includes five essays focusing on particular individuals (Abraham Heyn, Leo Tolstoy, Herbert Read, Daniel Guérin and Martin Buber), one essay on the affinities between mysticism and anarchism, and one surveying the vast territory of 'spiritual anarchism'.

In a world where political ideas increasingly matter once more, and religion is an increasingly visible aspect of global political life, these essays offer scholarly analysis of overlooked activists, ideas and movements, and as such reveal the possibility of a powerful critique of contemporary global society.

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