



The Conquest of Bread

Peter Kropotkin

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Peter Kropotkin was born a Russian prince whose father owned 1,200 serfs. As he aged, he came to hate the inequality in his society, and renounced his royal title. He was imprisoned and spent decades in exile for his views, which he has laid out in this book. He points out the flaws inherent in feudalism and capitalism, and how our current economic system creates poverty and scarcity even though there are enough resources for everybody, and outlines a better system based on people working together as a society.

The Conquest of Bread Details

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From Reader Review *The Conquest of Bread* for online ebook

Alice Farmer says

At times Kropotkin's writing can become tedious, not because it's incomprehensible, just because he's being longwinded at times in attempting to elucidate properly and show properly how the Anarcho-Communist society would work. Productive forces he outlines in the book are great, and it's even greater now because of how far technology has progressed; I truly believe we are on the brink of possible full automation in our societies, but we unfortunately will not get there until we either have a revolution or get a Universal basic income in (as then people can step away from work, and automation will push forward. I feel like what Srnicek's ways for accelerationism could lead to some coolish fully automated collectivist style society or it could become the space society from WALL.E where the corporations rule us).

Ted says

Anarchism: The name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfying of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.

This is how Kropotkin defined anarchism in 1905, for the 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

biography and introduction

Peter Kropotkin. Russian prince, geographer, and outstanding anarcho-Communist writer. Raised as Imperial Cadet, later a cavalry officer; studied mathematics and geography. In 1872 visited Switzerland and joined the anarchist International Workers Association. Imprisoned for agitation in Russia in 1874. Escaped from jail and moved through England, Switzerland, and France (where he was imprisoned for five years). Then settled in England, where he wrote *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* and *The Great French Revolution 1789-1793*.

Returned to Russia after the February Revolution.

(Adapted from glossary entry for Kropotkin in Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*)

When I looked through several books I have that deal with anarchism directly or indirectly, I found *The Conquest of Bread* (CoB) mentioned more often than any of Kropotkin's other writings. As an example, in Colin Ward's book *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* he notes that the Mexican peasant revolutionary Emiliano Zapata was "made literate" by the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon, through reading and discussing this book with him.

Before getting into the book, here's a list of some of Kropotkin's works, taken from Rudolf Rocker's bibliography in *Anarcho-Syndicalism Theory and Practice*.

1. *Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles* (1891)
2. *The Conquest of Bread* (1892)
3. *The State: Its Role in History* (1898)
4. *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1899)
5. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899)
6. *Modern Science and Anarchism* (1900)
7. *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902)
8. *The Modern State* (1912)
9. *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1924)

Of these, all but #8 can be easily obtained even today, a century and more after Kropotkin wrote them. Here on Goodreads, *Conquest of Bread* has been rated by over 1800 readers; #7 by over 1300; #5 by about 400; a couple not on the list by about 300. All others are near 100, or fewer. Thus I would venture to say that the book here reviewed is Kropotkin's most widely read book, at least in the 21st century.

organization and main ideas

A list of chapters, with a few comments.

I Our Riches.

- Introduces the idea that the immense riches of the contemporary world are the result of the labor of countless workers in the past, and that they thus belong to all people now living, not to simply those who hold title to them.

II Well-Being for All

III Anarchist Communism

- What is meant by this, and how it differs from Communalism

IV Expropriation

- Why an anarchist revolution must expropriate things from those who claim "ownership" of things.

V Food

VI Dwellings

VII Clothing

- These three chapters lay out the reasons, methods, and justifications by which the common people may, on their own initiative and action, provide the essentials of food, dwellings, and clothing to all

VIII Ways and Means

- Why the current system will not and cannot supply for all

IX The Need for Luxury

- By no means will items of "luxury" be no longer available in an anarchist society. There will be ample opportunity for workers to engage in production and distribution of such items for all who want them.

X Agreeable Work

- How it can come about, because of great increases in productivity in modern times, that no one will be

forced to work as wage-slaves now do. **Women will benefit** as they will no longer be forced to work only in the home, as even less than a wage-slave.

XI Free Agreement

- Arguments for, and examples of, the way in which free agreements among groups of people can effect the benefits which, some claim, can only be provided with a *State* which dictates. **The State is not needed.**

XII Objections

- How the objections urged against an anarchist society can be met

XIII The Collectivist Wages System

- Why it must come to pass that people in an anarchist society no longer be subject to different wages, depending on the type of work they do.

XIV Consumption and Production

- The correct way to analyze Political Economy. Rather than a description of "facts", it should be a *science*: "The study of the needs of mankind, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy."

XV The Division of Labor

- With modern methods of agriculture and production, each citizen need contribute a modest number of hours each week to work shared by all, to produce the essentials. Beyond that, each can choose to devote effort to what interests them, be it art, science, the production of luxuries, or nothing at all.

XVI The Decentralization of Industry

- The concentration of particular industries as the *specialization* of certain peoples, countries, areas, is unnecessary and counterproductive in the modern world.

XVII Agriculture

- This chapter is a detailed accounting of the acreage and human hours required, using modern agricultural methods, to allow the three and one-half million citizens of the two departments (Seine, Seine-et-Oise) round Paris, with their 1,507,300 acres, to produce all the corn and cereals, milk, cattle, vegetables and fruit that the population requires. Chiefly interesting for the way that Kropotkin argues for the self-sufficiency of such a population, and the amount of the land left over for houses, roads, parks, and forests.

Anarchist Communism & common inheritance

Kropotkin's use of "Communism" is not to be confused with what we think of when we consider the Soviet and Chinese systems of the twentieth century; rather, he is using the term in the manner coined by the French philosopher Victor d'Hupay in 1777. d'Hupay defines this lifestyle as a "commune" and envisions that its members "share all economic and material products among themselves, so that all may benefit from everybody's work". That is, "Communism" for Kropotkin is *organization and living by the principles of the commune*. Or, as Kropotkin himself says, it is "Communism without government – the Communism of the Free. It is the synthesis of the two ideals pursued by humanity throughout the ages – Economic and Political Liberty."

Kropotkin returned to Russia after the Revolution. He was not particularly happy with what he observed, but was of an age that he felt precluded him from attempting to actively engage in what was going on. Here is a

link to a first-hand account of a meeting that he had in 1919 with Lenin.

<https://www.bolshevik.info/meeting-le...>

"Anarchist Communism" is the title of the third chapter of CoB. Kropotkin contrasts this idea with that of "the Collectivists". These are the followers of the other major anarchist theoretician of the second half of the nineteenth century, Mikail Bakunin (1814-1876), who is taken as the founder of "collectivist anarchism". The aspect of Bakunin's system that disturbs Kropotkin here is "that payment proportional to the hours of labor rendered by each would be an ideal arrangement... suffice it to say here, leaving ourselves free to return to the subject later [which he does, particularly in XIII The Collectivist Wages System], that the Collectivist ideal appears to us untenable in a society which considers the instruments of labor as a common inheritance. Starting from this principle, such a society would find itself forced from the very outset to abandon all forms of wages."

And what of "common inheritance"? This is an idea that Kropotkin brings up again and again. Introduced in chapter I Our Riches, he returns to it in chapter III:

In the present state of industry, when everything is interdependent, when each branch of production is knit up with all the rest, the attempt to claim an Individualist origin for the products of industry is absolutely untenable. The astonishing perfection attained by the textile or mining industries in civilized countries is due to the simultaneous development of a thousand other industries, great and small, to the extension of the railroad system, to inter-oceanic navigation, to the manual skill of thousands of workers, to a certain standard of culture reached by the working class as a whole – to the labours, in short, of men in every corner of the globe.

The Italians who died of cholera while making the Suez Canal, or of ankyloses in the St. Gothard Tunnel, and the Americans who were mowed down by shot and shell while fighting for the abolition of slavery, have helped to develop the cotton industry of France and England, as well as the work-girls who languish in the factories of Manchester and Rouen, and the inventor who (following the suggestion of some worker) succeeds in improving the looms.

How, then, shall we estimate the share of each in the riches which ALL contribute to amass?

The property, factories, machines, farmland, roads, railways, buildings, housing, which have been financed, developed, manufactured, built by the toil and efforts of countless workers, inventors – many compensated richly for their capital contributions, vast numbers of others, particularly those who actually **did the work, expended the effort** given a pittance (even nothing) by which they could barely sustain themselves and their families ... all these things must be looked up as the common inheritance of those alive today, not as the *property* of the descendants of those who have already been compensated to an unjust extent.

No need for government

Men do not need to be told by social or political higher ups how to live, how to solve problems that require more than simply personal attention – there are ample examples of free associations of men and groups of men that have made significant decisions on how an important enterprise can be organized, and this has always been done simply through discussion, bargaining, and coming to an agreement on what would in fact benefit everyone concerned to the best extent.

This idea is explored most fully in XI Free Agreement. Kropotkin tells how the European railway network

came into being through free agreements between the scores of separate companies that had developed small pieces of the system, then connected them together, established routes and schedules, figured out how to allow freight to move over the entire network without having to unload and reload at company "boundaries" – all without the intervention of any Central authority or State Agency.

He goes through many other examples of things that have been organized by free agreement of people who simply saw a need for something to be done, and did it: the way that the Dutch settled questions of canal access; the similar way that shipowners settled question of boat access along the Rhine; the establishment of the British Lifeboat Association, manned and financed by volunteer seamen; and the founding, staffing, organization, and activities of the Red Cross.

On revolutionary failures

1871 the Paris Commune

In this instance, which is discussed in both the Preface which Kropotkin wrote in 1913, and in different chapters of the original book, the beginning of the end occurred when groups of the revolutionaries separated off to make decisions which they deemed needed to be made FOR THE PEOPLE. Kropotkin insists that THE PEOPLE do not need this, that they will make the correct decisions for themselves.

The "decision makers" begin to argue about what needs to be done, what rules and regulations need to be effected and put into place, and meanwhile ... **the people STARVE** because their immediate daily NEEDS (which are of course provided for the decision makers in their own privileged ways) are completely disregarded. These self-appointed decision makers will provide the people, not with the food, clothing, and shelter that they need, but with EDICTS THEY MUST OBEY.

And so goes another failed revolution.

something that occurred to me

Despite the fact that we in the 21st century live in a world very different from that of the late 18th century, there is much that Kropotkin urges that seems to have application today. Particularly, with various contemporary movements (such as the Transition movement), which emphasize localized aspects of society, more support for local businesses, local food production, CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), local banking, and so forth ... and then with the possibilities of society coming apart at the seams at some future point ... Much of what Kropotkin says may be extremely applicable in some future.

A book to be passed on into that future. Very highly recommended.

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Previous review: Freedom From Fear

Random review: Greek Mathematics *classic history, Thomas Heath*

Next review: The Fall *sorry to say, ...*

Previous library review: Anarchism *VSI*

Next library review: Nations and Nationalism *Hobsbawm*

Edward says

Introduction & Notes, by David Priestland

Further Reading

--The Conquest of Bread

Notes

Londi says

Anarchist utopia...

Manolo says

1/10, como libro para aprender a hacer pan es bastante malo.

Pero como discusión dirigida a las masas (bien por Kropotkin) de los fundamentos del comunismo libertario es muy bueno. El ensayo se nutre de la teoría económica marxista y hace uso de conceptos como el de valor (cantidad de trabajo social promedio que queda condensada en una mercancía), el valor de uso o la plusvalía sin hacer referencia explícitamente a ningún académico. Lo cual me parece genial, porque en la época las gentes a las que más podría nutrir el libro no tenían educación formal y enterrarlas en referencias académicas sería perder la partida antes de empezar.

Los dos argumentos principales de Kropotkin son:

1. Los pueblos, al contrario de lo que sugiere el modelo malthusiano, pueden generar recursos más rápido de lo que pueden consumirlos. En efecto, una cantidad pequeña de trabajadores pueden abastecer a una cantidad mucho mayor de personas. El pan (esto es, los medios materiales que harían posible la revolución) no sería problema. Y como otros marxistas han sugerido (véase Lafargue en *El derecho a la pereza*), el empleo de máquinas aceleraría tanto la producción de mercancías que un uso correcto haría posible que la cantidad de trabajo manual fuese relativamente pequeña. Esto es de perogrullo, pero si algo ha cambiado desde que se publicaron estos trabajos ha sido la tecnología, y es conveniente tenerlo en cuenta.
2. La clase obrera se autoabastecería siguiendo sus propias motivaciones. Un bien con una demanda relativamente escasa (saxofones, combustible para cohetes, lo que sea) significaría que un grupo relativamente reducido e interdisciplinar de personas trabajarían en su producción. Mientras tanto, los bienes de uso general (papel, destornilladores, café, grapadoras) involucrarían que un grupo aún mayor de gente pusiese en juego su fuerza de trabajo, y ni siquiera hasta el punto en que hoy esto es cierto: no sería necesaria la superproducción. Bastaría con saciar las necesidades.

Kropotkin también hace frente a las posibles críticas a su teoría: que la gente es vaga y que no trabajaría sin un incentivo. Ofrece como razonamiento que encontrarse en una situación de abastecimiento suficiente es un incentivo poderoso. Quedan muchos temas por tratar y críticas por contestar (y en ésto la gente no se corta: como con el feminismo, cualquiera es bueno para echar abajo la teoría en la que han trabajado cientos de individuos). Pero la base queda suficientemente bien descrita como para seguir añadiendo andamiaje conceptual.

Notas: el libro se hace cargo de discutir la factibilidad de una sociedad anarcocomunista, pero no habla tanto sobre *por qué* dirigir esfuerzos en ese sentido. Menciona un par de veces eso de que plusvalía = robo y tal, pero para una mejor introducción al ideario anarquista en este sentido véase El ABC del comunismo libertario, de Alexander Berkman y Emma Goldman.

Subrayados:

Cada máquina tiene la misma historia: una larga serie de noches en blanco y de miseria; de desilusiones y de alegrías, de mejoras parciales halladas por varias generaciones de obreros desconocidos que han añadido a la invención primitiva esas pequeñeces sin las cuales permanecería estéril la idea más fecunda. Aun más: cada nueva invención es una síntesis resultante de mil inventos anteriores en el inmenso campo de la mecánica y de la industria.

Sean Mccarrey says

This book was thoroughly disappointing, especially after reading *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, which was an incredible book. This book however, was pretty much a 279 page rant about what a perfect society would look like, and what was wrong with the industrialized world at that time, rather than how these things could realistically be achieved. One reason for this is, as Kropotkin points out, was that these anarchist ideals could be achieved rather easily once some great revolution had occurred. Humanity only need to catch a glimpse of some efficient anarchist organization and they would fall in line. It's strange then, that Kropotkin gives example after example of where anarchist principles already exist in organizations of that period, be it the Red Cross, various communes, the British Life Boat Association, Russian peasant communes, the Royal Society of Zoology, etc. I wonder if these organizations were so well founded, and it would only take humanity glimpsing them during a period of revolution, why then, did the French not turn to anarchism in 1793, 1848, or 1871? For that matter, with the Soviets of the Russian Revolution that decided things in consensus, and ran their factories and farms efficiently without outside intervention, particularly of the State (such as the Kronstadt sailors), why was anarchism so easily defeated by state-sponsored Communism? The answer lies in the fact that people are fully engrossed in the systems that they are a part of. Just because the oppressors and their tools are shattered does not mean that people stop thinking in certain manners and change towards whichever way the wind blows. Humanity is cultured and steeped in systems of capitalism, and state run systems, to the point where are very cities are designed upon the premise of the good of the state, as Kropotkin points out. Why then, would he expect people to readily abandon that system when they have had little education to the contrary, and even if they do try to change the status-quo they will be unfamiliar with the systems of anarchism until they are fully educated in them. This can be seen in the case of Occupy Wall Street. And in Occupy Wall Street one can see why his simplistic prognosis for revolution being a sudden and necessary cure-all failed. While organizers of the movement in various cities did attempt to make some form of change, they were often stymied by a lack of knowledge of their own consensus system (General Assembly), and that made it all too easy for those with enough will to wreck havoc on the organizational structure, especially when no one involved even seemed to be aware that the movement was fundamentally anarchist (at least outside of New York). So when I read Kropotkin's ideas about a

spontaneous committee arising to address the cities need for food and supply, I do have to laugh. In reality, this would become so complicated, even if it did happen there would surely be so much infighting among organizations and power players that nothing of value would have gotten done. Kropotkin himself must have seen this system fall apart during his last days in the Russian Revolution.

I wish this book would have been better, but as it stands, it is a lot of pie-in-the-sky BS.

Tinea says

Uplifting, light, and truly enjoyable! While I stand by an earlier assertion that best way to learn about anarchism nowadays is through radical permaculture ecologists and intersectional women of color feminists, I was surprised to find The Conquest of Bread is really worth reading, too. In terms of your old white European male anarcho-communists, Kropotkin is the go-to guy; I'd put him ahead of Emma Goldman for timid students of anarchist theory, since he focuses more on practicalities and vision of the future while she brings instead critique of the present and passionate calls to arms. Feel free to skim the pages of statistics and outdated examples Kropotkin uses to support his hypotheses.

According to Kropotkin, the means to conquer bread is permaculture: intensive, small-scale, urban, soil-building, ecologically efficient agriculture based on an scientific assessment of "what are the needs of all, and what are the means of satisfying them"-- steps one and two an ecological design process. He calls for doing the least amount of work necessary to meet material needs (echoed in the present by both anarchists and permaculturalists), with all participating in labor so that that everyone may have free time and energy to pursue passions like science, art, music, writing, etc etc etc, the enjoyable productivity that Kropotkin reminds us so many people take up when they have time freed from draining work weeks. The aim, in his words, is to "Produce the greatest amount of goods necessary to the well-being of all, with the least possible waste of human energy." Elegantly efficient.

There are other lessons in here. Kropotkin argues in favor of free association and diversity and decentralization of production, and against coercion and centralized authority, always with examples and evidence to support his claims, but also always with a heartfelt uplifting of human creativity, inclinations toward kindness and mutual support, and general respect for the mass of people being competent and able. Finally, he argues for "the need for luxury." It is this acknowledgement of the importance of happiness that I think makes Kropotkin and anarchism so much more embedded in reality than other social theories, including capitalism's pursuit of competitive self-interest. We want bread but we want roses too-- Kropotkin says start there, with our needs and desires, and then figure out the best means of meeting them.

[For the (A) book club]

Marts (Thinker) says

Kropotkin highlights his observations of existing economic systems and a decentralisation of such particularly capitalism and elements of feudalism. He shows how such systems though claiming to be ideal actually encouraged continued poverty and resources scarcity. He also mentions that some revolution must occur in order for there to be change...

As stated in his opening, "The human race has travelled a long way, since those remote ages when men fashioned their rude implements of flint and lived on the precarious spoils of hunting, leaving to their children for their only heritage a shelter beneath the rocks, some poor utensils—and Nature, vast, unknown, and terrific, with whom they had to fight for their wretched existence..."

He closes with the following, "Inspired by a new daring—born of the feeling of solidarity—all will march together to the conquest of the high joys of knowledge and artistic creation.

A society thus inspired will fear neither dissensions within nor enemies without. To the coalitions of the past it will oppose a new harmony, the initiative of each and all, the daring which springs from the awakening of a people's genius.

Before such an irresistible force "conspiring kings" will be powerless. Nothing will remain for them but to bow before it, and to harness themselves to the chariot of humanity, rolling towards new horizons opened up by the Social Revolution."

The Conquest of Bread is available from Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23428/...>

Brandon Rapozo says

I now know how to find bread

James says

This was an interesting book that I picked up wanting to learn more about Kropotkin himself. The approach that he represents might be best described as anarcho-communist, but this is not entirely pie in the sky. He sets out reasonable assumptions and describes how to fulfill them. It does require a paradigm shift (ie look at need rather than production and a we're all in this together from the perspective of a lifeboat viz. you don't ask for the qualifications of the fellow boaters, you just give them oars), or, perhaps the best phrase is -- revolution of the mind -- but the book is well-written and forward thinking particularly from the vantage point of 1917!

I did quite love the book, but some of the specifics, that made sense at the time, are from such a foreign world, and with the information so dated, that it is not a satisfying top to bottom experience.

Peter Neiger says

Kropotkin's "The Conquest of Bread" is rightfully a classic of anarchist literature. This book was the first of the "classic" anarchists that I've actually read and I found it rather illuminating. In my social circle, the words "communist" and "socialist" are so toxic that few people actually read communist authors to understand what they are actually advocating, which is unfortunate. In some ways, most people are socialist to some degree, it is just a matter of how far away from the individual you extend your tribe. Some people only extend it to their immediate family, while others want to extend it to all humanity (and beyond).

If people read more of these classics they might realize that we have more in common than we realize and that there is a lot of disagreement within communist circles. Kropotkin identified as a communist but had serious problems with Marx and other "state" communists. Kropotkin's view of government is very similar to that of modern libertarians and others who are skeptical of concentrated power.

Despite dying when Abraham Maslow was only a teenager, Kropotkin seems to have tapped into Maslow's hierarchy of needs. His focus on providing society with bread, clothing, and shelter in order to maximize human happiness and increase productivity echoes in Maslow's works, and bears a striking resemblance to conversations in modern times around a Basic Income Guarantee. In fact, much of the conversation and discussions in this book are still being had today and it seems the more things change, the more things remain the same. I'm not sure if that is a good thing or a bad thing. Despite amazing technological advances in the last 150 years, the same fight is being had and many people are still living impoverished. Even if you don't agree with Kropotkin's economic viewpoints (and I certainly don't on several occasions) I can understand the frustration with the current system and how his utopian view could inspire people. And, considering he views the state as the primary problem, I probably have more in common with him than not.

My book is littered with underlined passages and writing in the margin. I wish I would have taken more notes while reading it, because I feel there is a lot more to be said.

leo says

FULLY AUTOMATED LUXURY COMMUNISM

Yann says

Pierre Kropotkine, aristocrate russe ému par l'injustice des sociétés européennes d'il y a un siècle livre dans ce livre ses réflexions quand aux solutions qu'il imagine pour soulager la misère des classes ouvrières, lors de cette première mondialisation économique.

La hauteur de ses aspirations morales, la justesse et la mesure dont il fait preuve le font grandement estimer, quoique l'on puisse éprouver quelques dissentiment sur tel ou tel point de ses analyses. Il ne perd jamais de vue la finalité de l'amélioration de tous les hommes et femmes, sans tomber dans le piège de l'esprit de vengeance, de soif de pouvoir et de destruction. Il prend le temps de répondre aux contradictions les plus communes qui pourraient lui être opposées.

On notera néanmoins des remarques injustes à l'égard d'Adam Smith, lequel s'inquiétait effectivement des risques d'abus relatifs la division du travail, dans "La richesse des nations", contrairement à ce qu'avance imprudemment l'auteur.

Joshua says

[Read online at http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_...]

Treads some of the same ground as "Fields, Factories and Workshops", definitely worth a read. Again, Kropotkin impresses me with his prescience about so many of the issues that we grapple with today. What follows below is less of a review than it is a collection of quotations:

As a frequent teacher of thermodynamics, I appreciated (and will attest to) his statement that the field was first really "invented" by the engineers, and only turned into a "science" after the fact. Kropotkin states this in eloquence with statements like: "Not until thousands of steam-engines had been working for years before all eyes, constantly transforming heat into dynamic force, and this force into sound, light, and electricity, could the insight of genius proclaim the mechanical origin and the unity of the physical forces."

"Science and industry, knowledge and application, discovery and practical realization leading to new discoveries, cunning of brain and of hand, toil of mind and muscle--all work together. Each discovery, each advance, each increase in the sum of human riches, owes its being to the physical and mental travail of the past and the present. By what right then can any one whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say--This is mine, not yours?"

It seems that his criticism is as valid today. While our elected officials bemoan 'unemployment', clearly our society has no shortage of 'work' to be done to create a just and bountiful society: "The result of this state of things is that all our production tends in a wrong direction. Enterprise takes no thought for the needs of the community. Its only aim is to increase the gains of the speculator. Hence the constant fluctuations of trade, the periodical industrial crises, each of which throws scores of thousands of workers on the streets."

Kropotkin even touches upon what we would now consider "patent reform": "All things are for all. Here is an immense stock of tools and implements; here are all those iron slaves which we call machines, which saw and plane, spin and weave for us, unmaking and remaking, working up raw matter to produce the marvels of our time. But nobody has the right to seize a single one of these machines and say, "This is mine; if you want to use it you must pay me a tax on each of your products," any more than the feudal lord of medieval times had the right to say to the peasant, "This hill, this meadow belong to me, and you must pay me a tax on every sheaf of corn you reap, on every rick you build."

All is for all! If the man and the woman bear their fair share of work, they have a right to their fair share of all that is produced by all, and that share is enough to secure them well-being. No more of such vague formulas as "The Right to work," or "To each the whole result of his labour." What we proclaim is THE RIGHT TO WELL-BEING: WELL-BEING FOR ALL!" "

And this resonates with me: "Enough! We have enough coal and bread and raiment ! Let us rest and consider how best to use our powers, how best to employ our leisure."

Kropotkin on Hackerspaces!: "At St. Petersburg, if you are pursuing an invention, you go into a special laboratory or a workshop, where you are given a place, a carpenter's bench, a turning lathe, all the necessary tools and scientific instruments, provided only you know how to use them; and you are allowed to work there as long as you please. There are the tools; interest others in your idea, join with fellow workers skilled in various crafts, or work alone if you prefer it. Invent a flying machine, or invent nothing--that is your own affair. You are pursuing an idea--that is enough."

"In a word, the system is this: no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scarce or apt to run short."

"But we expect more from the Revolution. We see that the worker compelled to struggle painfully for bare existence, is reduced to ignorance of these higher delights, the highest within man's reach, of science, and especially of scientific discovery; of art, and especially of artistic creation. It is in order to obtain these joys for all, which are now reserved to a few; in order to give leisure and the possibility of developing intellectual capacities, that the social revolution must guarantee daily bread to all. After bread has been secured, leisure is the supreme aim."

Kropotkin on the end of newspapers as a business (a proto-blogger?): "Literature and journalism will cease to be a means of money-making and living at the cost of others. But is there any one who knows literature and journalism from within, and who does not ardently desire that literature should at last be able to free itself from those who formerly protected it, and who now exploit it, and from the multitude which with rare exceptions pays it in proportion to its mediocrity, or to the ease with which it adapts itself to the bad taste of the greater number?"

Nick Klagge says

Reading this book was a strange experience for me. From what I had read about Kropotkin before picking up the book, I had expected I'd really like it--critique of capitalism, Communism without the state, warm and fuzzy anarchism. But while I thought Kropotkin made a number of incisive points, I came away from CoB feeling wholly unconvinced. Part of it may be the 100+ year time gap: Kropotkin writes for a society that is largely organized around agriculture and industrial manufacturing, and while of course those things are of course still important today, it just seems clear that he's writing about a very different time and place.

My first issue with Kropotkin's proposals centers around violence. The bedrock of his anarchist program is expropriation--the invalidation of the institution of private property and the seizing of all property by the people. He begins by making a pretty cogent argument for why property is theft, centering around the idea that the vast quantity and variety of human efforts going into any one item are such as to make it absurd for a single person to pretend to "rightful ownership" thereof. Therefore, he argues, it is only right that the people should expropriate property from its present claimants. Yet he is extremely vague about the nature of such expropriation, and in particular doesn't give attention to the fact that it would likely require a great deal of violence and killing (no doubt bringing about the demise of many workers as well as capitalists). I think this is an extremely important point for any expropriationist to take seriously. After all, it would be a completely plausible position to say that all property is theft, and yet that violence to expropriate it is not justified. In this sense Kropotkin refuses to count the cost, or to consider the implications of the fact that his ideal society would be born in blood.

My second issue with CoB is that I think Kropotkin provides a very weak moral foundation for his society. Even if we agree with him that capitalism and property are unjust institutions, what then? The alternative vision that he provides is still very much painted from the perspective of homo economicus--a society that minimizes work (which is disutility, natch) and studies "the needs of humanity, and the economic means to satisfy them." Here I turn to a passage from Alasdair MacIntyre on Aristotle, quoted by Stanley Hauerwas (all my favorite dudes!) in this excellent 2010 interview with Wunderkammer magazine (<http://wunderkammermag.com/arts-and-c...>

"...from an Aristotelian standpoint, it can never be right to weigh preferences in such a way that everybody counts for one and nobody for more than one. And it would be a fundamental mistake to try to maximize the

satisfaction of the preferences of all the members of a given society.”

Hauerwas glosses MacIntyre as referring to the practice of weighing vicious and virtuous desires equally. As Hauerwas goes on to say, the position that MacIntyre is critiquing (which implicitly advantages pleonexia) stands at the heart of modern economic rationality--but I would argue that it also stands at the heart of Kropotkin's anarchist program. It's true that the needs that Kropotkin emphasizes--food, clothing, shelter--are hardly open to reasonable critique, but nonetheless I think that any system that focuses wholly on the fulfillment of "needs" without giving attention to the construction of those needs is dangerously incomplete. (cf. "parasitic liberalism" thesis)

I have not given up on anarchism as a subject of intellectual inquiry and am looking forward to reading Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is Within You" and Ellul's "Anarchy and Christianity."
