

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# Economy

Deric Shannon

Deric Shannon  
Economy  
2018

*Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach* (edited by Benjamin Franks, Nathan Jun & Leonard Williams), chapter 10, pp. 142-154.

Online at [taylorfrancis.com](http://taylorfrancis.com).

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

2018



# Contents

Abstract . . . . .	5
Defining and Critiquing Capitalism . . . . .	7
Post-Capitalism . . . . .	13
Mutualism . . . . .	15
Collectivism . . . . .	17
Communist Anarchism . . . . .	19
Bread . . . . .	21
References . . . . .	23

- Price, Wayne. 2006. "Malatesta's Anarchist Vision of Life After Capitalism." The Anarchist Library. Accessed October 2, 2015. [https://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Wayne\\_Price\\_Ma](https://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Wayne_Price_Ma)
- Rocker, Rudolf. 2004 [1938]. *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Shannon, Deric, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos. 2012. "Anarchist Economics: A Holistic View." In *The Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics*, edited by Deric Shannon, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos, 11–39. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Spannos, Chris, ed. 2008. *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Spannos, Chris. 2012. "Examining the History of Anarchist Economics to See the Future." In *The Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics*, edited by Deric Shannon, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos, 42–63. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Stirner, Max. 1845. "The Ego and His Own." The Anarchist Library. Accessed October 2, 2015. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/>
- Wilbur, Shawn P. 2013. "The Anatomy of the Encounter." *Contr'un*. Accessed October 3, 2015. <http://libertarian-labyrinth.com>
- Wilbur, Shawn P. 2015. "Property and Theft: Proudhon's Theory of Exploitation." Accessed September 11, 2015. [www.mutualism.info/2015/08/18/property-and-theft-proudhon](http://www.mutualism.info/2015/08/18/property-and-theft-proudhon)

- Goldman, Emma. n.d. "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For." Anarchy Archives. Accessed October 3, 2015. [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/goldman/aa](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/goldman/aa)
- Goldman, Emma. 1908. "What I Believe." Anarchy Archives. Accessed October 3, 2015. [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_A](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_A)
- Gordon, Uri. 2007. "Anarchism and Political Theory: Contemporary Problems." The Anarchist Library. Accessed September 11, 2015. [http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Uri\\_Gordon\\_and\\_Political\\_Theory\\_\\_ContemporaryProblems.html](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Uri_Gordon_and_Political_Theory__ContemporaryProblems.html).
- Guillaume, James. 1971 [1876]. "On Building the New Social Order." In *Bakunin on Anarchy*, edited by Sam Dolgoff, 356–379. New York: Vintage.
- Kropotkin, Peter. 2002 [1892]. *The Conquest of Bread*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Malatesta, Errico. 1984. *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*. Edited by Vernon Richards. London: Freedom Press.
- Malatesta, Errico. 2005. "Anarchy." In *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*, edited by Daniel Guérin, 355–364. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Marcutti, Enzo. n.d. "Renzo Novatore." Translated by Stephen Marietta. The Anarchist Library. Accessed October 1, 2015. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/renzo-novatore-t>
- Marx, Karl. 1977 [1859]. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- McKay, Iain. 2008. *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 1. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- McKay, Iain. 2012. "Laying the Foundations: Proudhon's Contribution to Anarchist Economics." In *The Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics*, edited by Deric Shannon, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos, 64–78. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Novatore, Renzo. 1924. "Toward the Creative Nothing." The Anarchist Library. Accessed October 1, 2015. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/renzo-novatore-t>

## Abstract

This chapter gives a broad outline of anarchist analyses of economy, or the way that anarchists tend to define and critique capitalism. It also provides a sketch of anarchist positions on post-capitalism, which are tied to questions of how anarchists define and critique capitalism and develop practices in opposition to it. In the past, some anarchists would advocate for an "anarchism-without-adjectives", perhaps most famously advanced by thinkers such as Voltairine de Cleyre, to indicate a tolerance for many visionary (and strategic) differences. Similarly, there have been (and are) anarchists who advocate for specific proposals. The chapter discusses some major proposals in detail: Mutualism; collectivism; and (anarchist) communism. It concludes with the author's own argument about how people might create some tenuous agreements about economy, particularly if we focus on a human need like food.

---

We are free, truly free, when we don't need to rent our arms to anybody in order to be able to lift a piece of bread to our mouths.

*Ricardo Flores Magón*

Over a century ago, the great Russian prince-turned-anarchist, Peter Kropotkin (2002 [1892]), wrote an exposition of what he called "anarchist communism," with access to food central to his polemic.<sup>1</sup> This was a work of analytical *political* economy – a piece of analysis that locates economics within larger relations of power, recognizing that economic processes cannot be coherently abstracted from the rest of social life,

---

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter are borrowed from past work (Shannon, Nocella, and Asimakopoulos 2012).

particularly for Kropotkin, the state. As Rudolf Rocker (2004 [1938], 11) succinctly put it, “the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power,” recognizing that “exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression.” Like Karl Marx’s (1977 [1859]) work before him, Kropotkin’s theory was also a *critique* of political economy, which can be read as a suggestion that humanity might not be consigned to economy, that we might create a life of abundance where we are no longer governed by need, nor coerced to produce.

This makes introducing anarchist approaches to economy difficult. If one takes Kropotkin’s view (among many others), we might say that at least some anarchists reject *economy*. The task, then, wouldn’t be so much to outline an anarchist method to economy, but rather our rejection of it. But anarchism is a diverse anti-capitalist tradition, and Kropotkin’s (version of) anarchist communism is one among a variety of perspectives within the anarchist tradition, some of which are *explicitly* advancing alternative political economic arrangements in opposition to capitalism, others who are (perhaps reluctantly) content to be subordinated to scarcity and/or the need to have some form of coercion to labor, provided those social relationships reflect a pattern that can be ethically judged as necessary, non-hierarchical (which advances larger questions around the organization of coercion), reciprocal, or some other set of values that reflect the anti-authoritarian spirit that gives life to anarchist ideas and practice.

Therefore, in this chapter, I attempt to give a broad outline of anarchist analyses of economy, or the way that we tend to define and critique capitalism. I also provide a sketch of anarchist positions on post-capitalism, which are tied to questions of how we define and critique capitalism and develop practices in opposition to it. I finish with my own argument about how we might create some tenuous agreements about economy, particularly if we focus on a human need like food.

We have the temerity to declare that all have a right to bread, that there is bread enough for all, and that with this watchword of *Bread for All* the Revolution will triumph.  
(Kropotkin 2008, 97)

My suggestion is that we take Kropotkin seriously, that we center food access in our theory and our practice. This might be a way forward for many tendencies to find some commonality (and even, perhaps, commensality). Perhaps we can work toward the conquest of bread together and debate the particulars of economy along the way. In this, we might allow ourselves space for debates as well as cooperation while fulfilling a need that is fundamental to being human. The spirit of anti-authoritarianism, after all, no doubt rests more comfortably in a stomach that is not empty and in need.

## References

- Albert, Michael. 2012. “Porous Borders of Anarchist Vision and Strategy.” In *The Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics*, edited by Deric Shannon, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos, 327–343. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Albert, Michael, and Robin Hahnel. 1991. *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century*. New York: South End Press.
- Anarcho. 2009. “The Economics of Anarchy.” Anarchist Writers. Accessed October 2, 2015. <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarch>
- Bakunin, Mikhail. n.d. “The Capitalist System.” Anarchy Archives. Accessed September 9, 2015. <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/>
- Dolgoff, Sam. 1971. *Bakunin on Anarchy*. New York: Vintage.

to close this chapter with an argument of my own. That is, I think that food ties us together in unique ways. For one, we require it. Secondly, food is an object that provides people with meaning and a sense of identity and community. Finally, food brings us together socially, perhaps best illustrated with the term “commensality.”

Food, being a human *need*, is also central to any understanding of economy. That is, one reading of economy is that it “is needed for production, consumption, and allocation of the material means of life to serve both simple and complex human needs” (Spannos 2012, 43). Food is necessary for human life, even in its most basic form. It makes sense, then, to center food in any anarchist analysis of economic life.

Perhaps Kropotkin was on to something a bit more than just espousing anarchist communism in his *Conquest of Bread*. Like Magón, the anarchist-formerly-known-as-Prince centers food access in his polemic:

Be it ours to see, from the first day of the Revolution to the last, in all the provinces fighting for freedom, that there is not a single man who lacks bread, not a single woman compelled to stand with the weariful crowd outside the bake-house-door, that haply a coarse loaf may be thrown to her in charity, not a single child pining for want of food. It has always been the middle-class idea to harangue about “great principles” – great lies rather!

The idea of the people will be to provide bread for all. And while middle-class citizens, and workmen infested with middle-class ideas admire their own rhetoric in the “Talking Shops,” and “practical people” are engaged in endless discussions on forms of government, we, the “Utopian dreamers” – we shall have to consider the question of daily bread.

Along the way, I hope to be fair to the anarchist tendencies that I attempt to sketch here. But it might help readers contextualize this piece to mention that I’m largely sympathetic to Kropotkin’s arguments and consider myself a part of the communist anarchist tradition, rooted as it is in a desire to abolish economy rather than create some liberatory version of it. Nonetheless, Kropotkin stood on the shoulders of giants and it is not clear that there is a developing line from earlier anarchist engagements with economy to his position.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this sketch, and any such attempt, will be incomplete. It also might make some sense to point out that anarchists reject representation, so this chapter is also not an effort to claim *the* anarchist position on economy, but rather an endeavor to give voice to some and, no doubt, miss some things along the way.

## Defining and Critiquing Capitalism

Anarchists have a long and proud history opposing capitalism. One would be hard-pressed to make the case that anarchism could exist without an opposition to capitalism as *foundational* to it. As a practice, an ethic, and/or a theory developed in opposition to hierarchical society, the basic elements of capitalism, private ownership protected by states and the wage relation (i.e. being able to *rent* another person and extract value from her labor), fundamentally contravene anarchism’s anti-authoritarianism. Mikhail Bakunin (n.d.) puts this concisely when he writes:

What is property, what is capital in their present form? For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by

---

<sup>2</sup> McKay (2012) offers an argument that *does* put forward the notion that anarchist communism was a part of the full development of earlier anarchist economic ideas.

the State, to live without working. And since neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilized by labor – that means the power and the right to live by exploiting the work of someone else, the right to exploit the work of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both ... [P]roperty owners and capitalists, inasmuch as they live not by their own productive labor but by getting land rent, house rent, interest upon their capital, or by speculation on land, buildings, and capital, or by the commercial and industrial exploitation of the manual labor of the proletariat, all live at the expense of the proletariat.

Indeed, a basic function of capitalism is to create and enforce the hierarchical arrangement of property through the organized violence of the state, existing alongside authoritarian “social dynamics which are generated, reproduced and enacted within *and* outside this apparatus” (Gordon 2007). Capitalism is, then, incompatible with anarchism, despite some misguided rhetorical attempts to fuse the two (predominantly in the United States under the banner of a historically disfigured “libertarianism”). But there is not shared agreement among anarchists on what exactly the defining features of capitalism are. To account for analyses and debates among anarchists, one might describe and analyze capitalism in terms of the following broad features (some of which may not be exclusive to capitalism, depending on how we define it): wage labor/exploitation, private property, markets, class society, and states.

Wage labor/exploitation is one of the basic constituent parts of capitalism. In order to access the social product, as illustrated by Bakunin above, workers must rent themselves

loosely federated together, eventually developing into a free communism, actuated by a solidarity of interests. There can be no freedom in the large sense of the word, no harmonious development, so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination of personal conduct.

Kropotkin (2008, 195) was particularly adamant about this: “The Revolution will be communist; if not, it will be drowned in blood, and have to be begun over again.”

Some contemporary inheritors of anarchist communism are the relatively small platformist federations, organized around the Anarkismo website, or the anarcho-syndicalist groups affiliated with the International Worker’s Association, which includes the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, famous for its historical role(s) during the Spanish Civil War. There are also insurrectionary communist anarchists who reject the formal organizations of platformists as well as the union form espoused by anarcho-syndicalists. The contemporary website, libcom.org, is a libertarian communist website, with engagements with both anarchist and Marxist writings with a large user base and huge repository of information hosted within its domain, as well as an active discussion forum. And there are contemporary egoist and individualist communists, some post-left anarchists, and an assortment of individuals and groups who are for the abolition of political economy, but would not refer to themselves as “communists” for a variety of reasons.

## **Bread**

I opened this chapter with a quote by the Mexican revolutionary anarchist, Ricardo Flores Magón. Here he describes liberation as a practice tied to a basic human need: food. I want



definitions, but much of the early communist anarchist theory was written in reaction to the collectivist wages system.

Communist anarchists typically argue against any form of currency or remuneration. In Kropotkin's (2008) view, this was a wrong-headed idea from the start and one that could possibly lead to the re-development of capitalism:

In fact, in a society like ours, in which the more a man [sic] works the less he is remunerated, this principle, at first sight, may appear to be a yearning for justice. But it is really only the perpetuation of past injustice. It was by virtue of this principle that wagedom began, to end in the glaring inequalities and all the abominations of present society; because, from the moment work done was appraised in currency or in any other form of wage; the day it was agreed upon that man would only receive the wage he could secure to himself, the whole history of State-aided Capitalist Society was as good as written; it germinated in this principle.

(195)

Kropotkin's (2008, 194–195) view presented a single way forward for a post-revolutionary society that has “taken possession of all social wealth, having boldly proclaimed the right of all to this wealth – whatever share they may have taken in producing it will be compelled to abandon any system of wages, whether in currency or labour-notes.” Goldman (1908) also suggested a process of creating communism that precluded commercial processes:

To make this a reality will, I believe, be possible only in a society based on voluntary co-operation of productive groups, communities and societies

out for a wage. The value produced under capitalism by workers, minus whatever wage the capitalist(s) pays, is then expropriated by capitalists in the form of surplus value – this process is exploitation. Some anarchists refer to this set of relationships as “wage slavery” to point out a historical continuity between *owning* another person and what is, essentially, *renting* another person. Not only do anarchists oppose wage labor and exploitation on the grounds that they are unfair, but these things are also against the material interests of working people and create a social relation of domination between the boss and the worker (which Bakunin so eloquently describes above). Many anarchists argue that the wage labor relation is the defining aspect of capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

This social relation (exploitation) is made possible by private property. Typically, anarchists define private property as property that allows for long-term absentee ownership. This is often juxtaposed with what is referred to as *personal property* or *possessions*, or forms of ownership that are defined by *occupancy* and *use*. This leaves plenty of room for disagreement about how we draw lines around use and occupancy, but it also visibilizes a social relation between persons and things that emerged from the historical context of the processes of accumulation that led to the development of capitalism. The notion that one can “own” a home, or better yet, a workplace, across the ocean, perhaps on another continent, without ever having to see it, occupy it, or use it, while charging rents or expropriating the value produced by workers within that location is not some eternal phenomenon. It is specific to capitalism and its development and those social relationships need not be permanent.

Another element of capitalist society as we know it is market relations. Generally, and likely because in dominant narra-

---

<sup>3</sup> See work by Shawn P. Wilbur (2015) for examples of interesting contemporary comments on Proudhon's theory of exploitation.

tives Marxian economics are juxtaposed with capitalist models, we are told that for allocation we have a choice between central planning and markets. Anarchists, however, have often argued for decentralized forms of planning and some have suggested that we might have anti-capitalist, socialist markets.<sup>4</sup> This was a part of what was originally proposed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, among other workers who saw strategic advantages in cooperative enterprises – a market socialism in which self-managed worker-owned firms would exchange in a market regulated by an “agro-industrial federation” on the basis of reciprocity.

Anarchists point out that these economic arrangements led to the development of class society. While we are often told that we are all equals under the law or that we all have equal power through voting, anarchists point out that these claims (which serve to justify and naturalize capitalist society) are absurd. Rather, we do not live in a society of equals. We live in a society of *classes* – with different material interests. The ruling class in capitalist society has an interest in maintaining capitalism while the rest of us have an interest in smashing capitalism and ending our own exploitation. McKay (2008), like many anarchists, argues for a two-class analysis with the following taxonomy:

*Working class* – those who have to work for a living but have no real control over that work or other major decisions that affect them, i.e. order-takers. This class also includes the unemployed, pensioners, etc., who have to survive on handouts from the state. They have little wealth and little (official) power. This class includes the growing service worker sector, most (if not the vast majority) of “white collar” workers as

---

<sup>4</sup> See <http://mutualist.org/> for some modern examples of mutualist theory.

they do socially valued work longer or more intensely or under worse conditions.” This is where we might see the descendants of collectivism in some ways. However, for advocates of parecon, it is typically not seen as a transitional phase into a full communism of free consumption, but an end unto itself, which differentiates it from Bakunin’s theory.

## Communist Anarchism

Communist forms of anarchism are the dominant tendency among anarchists (for those who identify with a particular economic tendency). Strategically, communist anarchists (sometimes referred to as anarcho-communists, anarchist-communists, or libertarian communists – with each of those terms, at times, connoting some strategic and theoretical differences) typically see a need for a revolutionary break with capitalism. Some envision, like Bakunin, this being a series of grand revolutionary events enacted by an organized working class. Others, however, see anarchism and communism more as processes than end goals, and often advocate for insurrectionary moments that would, perhaps, coalesce into revolutions.

Libertarian communists advocate for the social ownership of productive property (and, in some cases, its destruction) and distribution on the basis of need or, perhaps better stated, an end to ownership and property relations altogether (i.e. the abolition of property). This anarchist communism argues for economic visions organized around the principle “From each according to ability, to each according to need,” though the details of how to realize this objective are certainly debatable. Added to this, “communism” is also a contested term with a variety of meanings, both historically and contemporarily. This makes for a category that is difficult to pin down with simple

items ... produced by collective labor will belong to the community. And each member will receive remuneration for his [sic] labor either in the form of commodities ... or in currency. In some communities remuneration will be in proportion to hours worked; in others payment will be measured by both the hours of work and the kind of work performed; still other systems will be experimented with to see how they work out.

(361)

Where communities used currency, it would be used to purchase items from the collective market.

And yet Sam Dolgoff (1971, 159) said of Guillaume that he “saw no difference in principle between collectivism and anti-state communism. The collectivists understood that full communism would not be immediately realizable. They were convinced that the workers themselves would gradually introduce communism as they overcame the obstacles, both psychological and economic.”

Thus, in this way, the idea of remuneration was not seen as an end in Bakunin’s collectivism, but rather a transitional phase into a system of “full communism,” presumably where norms of remuneration would be done away with. The term “collectivism” is still widely in use among anarchists, who often distinguish between collectivism and communist anarchism on the basis of debates over remuneration and distribution.

Contemporarily, there are few anarchists who advocate for collectivism, as such. But some of these concerns over remuneration can be seen as some anarchists advocate for participatory economics (or “parecon”), a non-market libertarian socialism developed by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel (1991) and also advocated by Chris Spannos (2008) and the Organization for a Free Society. Albert (2012, 330) writes that “citizens should have a claim on society’s economic product that increases if

well as traditional “blue collar” workers. Most self-employed people would be included in this class, as would the bulk of peasants and artisans (where applicable). In a nutshell, the producing classes and those who either were producers or will be producers. This group makes up the vast majority of the population.

*Ruling Class* – those who control investment decisions, determine high level policy, set the agenda for capital and state. This is the elite at the top, owners or top managers of large companies, multinationals and banks (i.e. the capitalists), owners of large amounts of land (i.e. landlords or the aristocracy, if applicable), top-level state officials, politicians, and so forth. They have real power within the economy and/or state, and so control society. In a nutshell, the owners of power (whether political, social or economic) or the master class.

(185)

However, not everyone fits neatly into these broad categories. And some radicals, anarchists included, argue for the existence of a third class. Some refer to this as “the middle class,” “the coordinator class,” “the techno-managerial class,” and so on. This is typically used to highlight the existence of people with a high degree of social power – often directly over working people – such as high-paid lawyers, tenured professors at elite institutions, and so on. This class is sometimes conceived as having their own sets of material interests, in opposition to the ruling class and the working class, and sometimes conceived as having similar interests as workers, but being placed above them in capitalist society due to their social power.

We might juxtapose this anarchist class analysis with sociological analyses of class that often split society into a lower (or “under”) class, working class, lower middle class, upper mid-

dle class, and upper class. These popular sociological analyses are typically rooted in a Weberian analysis of power and one can certainly point to structural advantages that some workers have over others, cultural differences, and the like. However, in terms of *ruling* and *owning* society, this kind of broad-range sociological analysis of class can serve to mystify more than explain. Even a better-paid worker with more prestige than her counterparts, in some cases even in the same workplace, is still exploited and controlled by her boss at the end of the day.

Finally, anarchists point out that the social relations in capitalist society are protected and maintained by states. As the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta (2005, 356) notes, we are taught that the state is “the representative ... of the general interest: it is the expression of the rights of all, construed as a limit upon the rights of each” and that states are “moral ... endowed with certain attributes of reason, justice.” Anarchists point out that actually the state protects property relations, allowing for the existence of private property. A workplace can be owned and maintained and the workers exploited only through the organization of violence to stop them from simply taking the workplace and running it themselves. While in contemporary capitalism, ownership has become more convoluted and diffused throughout society than during Malatesta’s time, it is still the state and its organized, legitimated violence that allows for buildings filled with shelves of food to exist largely untouched – except by consumers – with beggars directly outside asking for money to buy food!

Again, this is an attempt to break down capitalism to its basic and constituent elements: wage labor/exploitation, private property, markets, class society, and states. But this short descriptive analysis misses much. One might consider, for example, value production as central to capitalism, money or some other circulating medium of exchange, pricing mechanisms, and other possible essentials. Examining its fundamental constitution is important because capitalism is a resilient system,

Society.<sup>6</sup> Many of these modern mutualists, particularly those at the Center for a Stateless Society, have altered features of Proudhon’s arguments in key ways, influenced by the American individualists like Benjamin Tucker and Josiah Warren. Some of the aforementioned groups see anti-statists working together across broad economic spectrums – some of whom are socialist, others who advocate for forms of capitalism and could not therefore properly be called “anarchists.” And there seems to be a split among contemporary mutualists, with people like Wilbur<sup>7</sup> arguing for a return to original source materials by Proudhon (whose ideas are still being translated into English). Under this lens, mutualism is a social science rooted in reciprocity, rather than a set of prescriptive political economic ideas.

## Collectivism

Collectivism is most often associated with Bakunin, who referred to himself as a “collectivist” to distinguish his theory from state-communists. While mutualism is often interpreted as a reformist and gradualist strategy that would try to *overgrow* capitalism over a long period of time, Bakunin saw a need for a revolutionary rupture with capitalism. Bakunin argued for a revolutionary movement that would expropriate property, socializing it.

Collectivism, then, begins with the assumption of social ownership of productive property. The product of labor, however, would be gathered into a communal market. Bakunin’s friend, James Guillaume (1971 [1876]), when outlining Bakunin’s vision called for a society where

---

<sup>6</sup> See such websites as <http://mutualist.blogspot.com/>, <http://libertarian-labyrinth.blogspot.com/>, <http://c4ss.org/>, and <http://all-left.net/>.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, this series on Proudhon’s ideas as a social science, [www.mutualism.info/2015/08/29/new-series-proudhons-social-science/](http://www.mutualism.info/2015/08/29/new-series-proudhons-social-science/).

banks and credit associations as a way to socialize productive property and allow for a form of dual power for workers, particularly through the use of low-interest loans, charging only the necessary interest to pay for administration. Proudhon argued for mutualism not only as a post-capitalist vision, but also as a strategic orientation stressing the need to build alternative economic relationships in the here-and-now that would eventually replace capitalism.

As Proudhon sketched it out, wage labor and landlordism would be abolished in a reciprocal arrangement of society. Ownership claims would be based on occupancy and use. Therefore, all workers would have access to their own means of production – most organizing into cooperative, non-hierarchical firms. These self-managed firms would exchange in a market, regulated by a grand agro-industrial federation. Many mutualists have argued that these firms would function in ways similar to worker cooperatives contemporarily, but without some of the pressures of operating in the context of a capitalist and statist society. Further, rather than capitalists expropriating surplus value from workers, workers would keep or trade those products that they produce. This would mean that distribution in a mutualist society would be “by work done, by *deed* rather than need. Workers would receive the full product of their labour, after paying for inputs from other co-operatives” (Anarcho 2009). This is an important distinction, particularly as anarchists who advocate for communism argue for forms of distribution by *need* and parts of the debates over anarchist ideas about post-capitalism are centered on the distribution of the things that we produce.

Perhaps some of the most visible contemporary proponents of mutualism are Kevin Carson, Shawn P. Wilbur, or groups like the Alliance of the Libertarian Left or Center for a Stateless

often changing forms in order to recuperate struggles against it. In what is perhaps one of its most insidious characteristics, capital’s drive for accumulation has, at times, meant creating commodities out of rebellion, generating release valves for struggles against its inexorable search for growth and profit and its commodification of human life and desire, as well as the non-human world that we live with(in). Understanding these constitutive elements, then, is an absolute necessity for those who wish to undo capitalism.

## Post-Capitalism

It is not easy to pen a section on anarchist ideas about what a post-capitalist society might look like for a number of reasons. For one, many anarchists reject visionary or generative thinking, preferring instead a politics of negation. This is particularly true of anarchist tendencies inspired by nihilism and individualism. The infamous nihilist anarchist, Renzo Novatore (1924) explains:

Consequently, anarchy, which is the natural liberty of the individual freed from the odious yoke of spiritual and material rulers, is not the construction of a new and suffocating society. It is a decisive fight against all societies – christian, democratic, socialist, communist, etc., etc. Anarchism is the eternal struggle of a small minority of aristocratic outsiders against all societies which follow one another on the stage of history.  
(*quoted in Marcutti n.d.*)

Anarchy, conceived under these terms, is not so much about creating an anti-capitalist society, but resisting society as such, a line of tension that runs across a wide variety of anarchist egoist, nihilist, and individualist thinking, perhaps, in many

ways, exemplified by Max Stirner (1845), who inspired Novatore, Emma Goldman, and many others.

Similarly, many anarchists are suspicious of visionary arguments and blueprints for the future, seeing anarchism as a conscious creation of the dispossessed and not a future that can be written within the context of the present. As Goldman (n.d.) put it:

Anarchism is not, as some may suppose, a theory of the future to be realized through divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions. The methods of Anarchism therefore do not comprise an iron-clad program to be carried out under all circumstances. Methods must grow out of the economic needs of each place and clime, and of the intellectual and temperamental requirements of the individual.

Following this, some anarchists would eschew labels and “hyphenations” like “anarchist-communism,” tending to refer to their preference simply as “anarchy,” or at times not to refer to a preference at all. Still others assume that visionary arguments are authoritarian, a method of conceiving a new society *without* the participation of those people who (will) compose it. In this way, the idea of a positive and visionary politics can be read as vanguardist and presumptive.

There is also a strong tradition of revolutionary pluralism in anarchism. In the past, some anarchists would advocate for an “anarchism-without-adjectives,” perhaps most famously advanced by thinkers such as Voltairine de Cleyre, to indicate a tolerance for many visionary (and strategic) differences. Similarly, there have been (and are) anarchists who advocate for specific proposals, but see a need for a deep humility and commitment to pluralism in terms of vision. Malatesta (1984) provides one of the best examples of this, as he advocated for anarchist-communism, yet stated:

One may, therefore, prefer communism, or individualism, or collectivism, or any other system, and work by example and propaganda for the achievement of one’s personal preferences, but one must beware, at the risk of certain disaster, of supposing that one’s system is the only, and infallible, one, good for all men [sic], everywhere and for all times, and that its success must be assured at all costs, by means other than those which depend on persuasion, which spring from the evidence of facts.

*(28–29, quoted in Price 2006)*

Undoubtedly, this is also reflective of anarchist suspicion of visionary arguments and blueprints for a future society.

Nonetheless, one can identify strands of post-capitalist thinking by anarchists. These various positions can easily be found among contemporary anarchists, though often using different terms (and sometimes, advanced by thinkers who are not anarchists). This method of adoption might itself be reflective of anarchist pluralism, where contemporary anarchists often argue for any number of mixes of these arrangements or, at times, take on anti-state political economic ideas outside of the anarchist tradition. Typically, the three major proposals are referred to as mutualism, collectivism, and (anarchist) communism.

## Mutualism

Proudhon was an advocate of a form of market socialism that many people refer to as “mutualism.”<sup>5</sup> Mutualism, according to this view, is an anti-capitalist model that sees mutual

---

<sup>5</sup> See work by Wilbur (2013) for a contrary read of Proudhon’s mutualism, as an “anarchist encounter” rather than a set of political economic ideas.