‘Anarchy Brown’

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‘Authorities’ in one’s academic discipline are always difficult to imagine as social revolutionaries or even reformists. That is true with many of our predecessors whom it is common to identify with colonial anthropology. But most of these were by no means political reactionaries, either for their period or for later ones. Such was the case with Radcliffe-Brown who was influenced by an important current of revolutionary thought in the nineteenth century, going back to even earlier times.

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown was born in Birmingham on 17 January 1881 of modest ‘yeoman’ stock. His father died when he was young leaving his mother much worse off with three children to raise. He himself went to various secondary schools and eventually won a scholarship in Moral Sciences (Philosophy and Psychology) to Trinity College, Cambridge. Reading psychology he came under the influence of the psychologist-anthropologist, W.H.R. Rivers, who had accompanied Haddon’s 1898 expedition to the Torres Straits north of Australia, as the result of which he became much attracted to anthropology. Radcliffe Brown, or Brown as he was known at the time before he attached his mother’s maiden name by deed poll in 1926, became Rivers’ first student in anthropology. As a promising scholar, he obtained funds to do fieldwork in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal (1906–1908), returning to Cambridge to write up his research where he was awarded a Fellowship at Trinity.

During this time he was known as ‘Anarchy Brown’ since he was a self-confessed anarchist and a follower of Kropotkin. Perhaps he came across his works through his courses in philosophy, perhaps because the writings of anarchists and socialists were much in the air at the turn of the century when he was growing up and were likely to appeal to someone who had made his way up from a poor background into the world of the bourgeoisie. Prince Peter Alexeivich Kropotkin (1842–1921) was a Russian geographer, author and revolutionary who like his father had had a privileged education, reading especially the works of the French Encyclopaedists and about French history. In Russia during the years 1857–1861 he came under the influence of liberal literature. But he was made to enter the army, joined a Cossack regiment and was sent to the Far East where he explored Manchuria. In 1867 he returned to St. Petersburg and entered the University. There he decided it was important to diffuse knowledge among the masses and joined the revolutionary party with this in mind. In 1872 he left for Switzerland and became a member of the International Workers Association in Geneva, but found its socialism not sufficiently advanced for his tastes. So he studied the programme of the more violent Jura association

and became an anarchist. On his return to Russia he took an active part in spreading nihilist propaganda. In 1874 he was arrested and imprisoned but escaped two years later and went to England. In 1877 he was in Paris to help with the socialist movement; in Switzerland he edited a revolutionary newspaper, *Le Révolté*, and published various pamphlets. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 the activities of exiled revolutionaries came under closer supervision and he was expelled from Switzerland, going first to London, then to France where he was arrested, tried and sentenced to five years imprisonment because of his membership of the IWA under a special law passed on the fall of the Commune in 1871. As the result of agitation on his behalf in the French Chamber he was later released and returned to London. Because of this widespread activity, his great influence on intellectual life in Western Europe is not surprising. Most important in this was his best known work, *Mutual Aid, a Factor in Evolution* (1902) but he also wrote *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1900) as well as books on anarchism and the State. *Mutual Aid* was from one point of view anti-Darwinian and directed against its individualistic approach to society; instead of the survival of the fittest, he stressed cooperation but of a libertarian kind. He was equally against Marxism, like most anarchists. After the Revolution of 1917 he returned to Russia and was welcomed back. But his version of 'anarchistic communism' was quite at odds with the centralised state of the Bolsheviks, whose coming he greeted with the words 'This buries the Revolution'.

What did anarchism mean at this time? Its aim was not chaos, as we often assume in common parlance (though this may have been included among its means), but life in a society 'without government — harmony being obtained not by submission to law, nor by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups'. Anarchists were socialists who rejected 'State socialism' as well as capitalist individualism, seeing the State as maintaining monopolies and promoting capitalism. Rejecting both the State and centralised parliamentary systems, they opted for decentralisation and for 'an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international — temporary or more or less permanent — for all possible purposes: production, consumption, and exchange, communications' etc. (Kropotkin, 1910).

For models, anarchists looked back to earlier institutions such as the clan, the village community, the guild, the free medieval city — by means of which 'the masses resisted the encroachment of the conquerors and the power-seeking minorities'. Indeed such notions of opposition or resistance to the state were almost a necessary by-product of centralised power and much earlier had taken a written 'philosophical' form in the works of Aristippus (fl. c 430 BCE), one of the founders of the Cyrenaic School, in the fragments of Zeno (342-c 367 BCE), founder of the Stoic philosophy, and in ideas of various early Christian sects, for example, in Armenia, among the early Hussites and Anabaptists, as well as among the French Encyclopaedists (whom as we have seen Kropotkin had studied) and among some of the participants in the French Revolution who stressed the role of communes rather than of the centre privileged by the Jacobins.

On the threshold of the nineteenth century anarchism received a systematic treatment in England in William Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1973) which advocated the abolition of the State and its courts, favouring the establishment of small communities without private property. Godwin (1756–1836), who was the husband of Mary Woolstonecraft, author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1791), and father of Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* (1818) and wife of the poet, Percy Byshe Shelley, was trained as a Presbyterian clergyman but had become a 'complete unbeliever' by 1787 and was greatly influenced by the French Revolution.

However, he was not the first to use the word 'anarchism' which was employed in 1840 by the French socialist, Proudhon (1809–1865), to apply to the no-government state of society, although the term had been earlier used in a different way. In fact Proudhon himself described his own variety of this ideology as *mutuellisme*.

Similar ideas were developed in the USA but the major step forward in the spread of anarchism in Europe was the formation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864 when some French *mutuellistes* met in London with some English followers of Robert Owen (1771–1858), who had set up Utopian communities in England, in New Harmony (USA) and in Ireland. Their aim was to undertake a direct economic struggle against capitalism without going through parliamentary agitation which had lost credence with the failure of the uprising of Parisian working men in 1848. With the collapse of the Commune in 1871 the Association was banned in France but it continued elsewhere, completely separate from Marxist socialism.

Anarchism was particularly associated with Russian intellectuals, with the political oppression they suffered and with their identification with the downtrodden peasants. As a result of this oppression many sought exile in western Europe, especially in Paris and London, where they met and collaborated with the leading revolutionary thinkers.

The two most important of these exiles were Bakunin and Herzen. M.A. Bakunin (1814–1876) was, together with Proudhon, the founder of the anarchist movement in nineteenth-century Europe. He resigned from the Russian artillery and in the course of his subsequent education went to Berlin, met the Young Hegelians and in 1842 published his first revolutionary credo, which included the aphorism, 'The passion for destruction is also a creative passion'. He settled in Paris and met French and German socialists such as Proudhon, Herzen and Marx, as well as engaging in direct revolutionary activity in Dresden in 1849 for which he was imprisoned. When he was eventually released, he travelled to London where he met Herzen again but quarrelled with him. He moved to Italy and then to Geneva where he joined the First International from which he was expelled by Marx in 1872. The breach split the whole revolutionary movement throughout Europe. For Bakunin decried political control and subordination to authority (making an unconscious exception of his own role within the movement) and took as his revolutionary model the Russian peasant.

A.I. Herzen (1812–1870) was another of the *Romantic Exiles*, as they were called by E.H. Carr, the illegitimate son of a nobleman who received a broad education and was associated with the Decembrists in their struggle for Russian freedom. As a result he spent eight years in virtual exile, became a left Hegelian and joined the Westernizers' camp in Russia. But he fell out with that group on embracing the anarchist doctrines of Proudhon. When he inherited from his father, he went to Paris but partly as the results of the Events of 1848 he lost faith in Western socialism and turned back to concentrate his efforts on Russia. In 1852 he moved to England, where he started the Free Russian Press in London as well as other publishing ventures. With the advent of Alexander II and the granting of freedom to the serfs, he took a more reformist stance but lost a lot of his influence by trying to weave between the two. Later he began to write his memoirs, producing the remarkable *My Past and Thoughts* (1861–67) and other works.

What did Radcliffe-Brown learn from Kropotkin and the rest of this tradition? He is often thought of as stressing law (he wrote the article on primitive law for the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 1933) and sanctions (in which he was influenced by Fauconnet and the Durkheimians (also in the ESS, 1933). But in his approach to political and legal systems the state played only a marginal part. Indeed his emphasis was the same as Durkheim's (another socialist) in the

Division of Labour where a major thrust had been to examine how people were able to live an ordered life in societies that had no state. To this end he interested himself in the whole range of social sanctions well beyond the boundaries of 'courts, codes and constables', in Malinowski's phrase. For to Radcliffe-Brown it was the maintenance of order in the broadest sense on which his attention centered. His major periods of fieldwork were spent among stateless groups, among the Andaman Islanders in the Bay of Bengal and the Australian aborigines. He was concerned to demonstrate the variety of sanctions, positive in the shape of the feud, revenge and verbal attack and negative in the form of the withdrawal of reciprocity, avoidance etc., by which such societies governed themselves. Hence too his interest in the lineage, a large kinship group which applied sanctions within and engaged in war (or the feud) without, and which was especially important in societies that had no central regulators. These societies were, as the phrase goes, acephalous, headless, without rulers (and for some, segmentary, borrowing a concept from Durkheim).

It is true that in writing of 'primitive law', Radcliffe-Brown confined himself to 'organised legal sanctions', unlike Malinowski who used the term for the whole range of social sanctions. Nevertheless, like Durkheim, he took a very 'social' view of the law. Talking of public (as distinct from private) delicts, he saw such deeds as normally leading to 'an organised and regular procedure by the whole community or by the constituted representatives of social authority…' The emphasis was on communal reaction rather than authoritative command. For this procedure of penal sanctions can be seen as 'a reaction by the community against an action of one of its members which offends some strong and definite moral sentiment and this produces a condition of social euphoria' (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 212). In all this he has remarkably little to say about 'repressive sanctions', especially those imposed on one group by another. For him the most elementary developments of law were 'intimately bound up with magic and religion'. He stresses this element even in Asante law, although that state did impose 'a rule of law' on other communities as well and ruled, in part at least, as the result of military conquest. Austinian conceptions of authoritarian justice were far removed from his communitarian view of the operation even of penal sanctions in 'primitive societies'.

Although this approach is compatible with the ideas of Kropotkin, it derives more specifically from Durkheim. In the *Division of Labour*, the great French sociologist takes as his polemical orientation Herbert Spencer's treatment of 'the problem of order' in society and argues against what he sees as Spencer's utilitarian reduction of the problem one centering upon the development of contract (as in the works of the legal historian, Henry Maine). Above all he was interested in the relation of the individual to the social group. In undifferentiated societies that relationship was 'mechanical' in that the components of each of the segments (he referred to the Kabyle society of Algeria as 'segmental') reacted in similar ways and operated a repressive law under the *conscience collective*. Differentiated societies were not, he argued, purely dependent upon the development of individualistic contractual relations, as Spencer and the laisser faire theorists had argued, but on organic sanctions, each of the subgroups being part of a more or less integrated whole (an organism) based upon the division of labour which provided the 'non-contractual elements in contract' required to make the system work. For this reason he too was critical of the individualistic social order posited by the utilitarians.

In criticising the utilitarians Durkheim took the stance of what Talcott Parsons has called 'sociologistic positivism' (Parsons 1937: 461). This position he came to modify, later seeing social constraints as 'a system of sanctions attached to normative rules', and emphasizing human agency in a social world. The primary source of constraint lay in the moral authority of a sys-

tem of normative rules, which constituted his notion of the social (as opposed to the individual) and rested upon ultimate common value attitudes. Constraints are not simply sanctions in the external sense but involve the voluntary adherence to a rule as a duty (Parsons 1937: 383). The social is internalized within as well as present outside the person. Men have an attitude of respect towards the rule which partakes of the attitude to the sacred and these rules are integrated with one another by common value orientations. Radcliffe Brown's discussion of sanctions and constraints is less subtle but more clear cut than Durkheim's. What is common in the present context is the fact that both concentrate on constraints of the non-authoritarian kind.

As we have seen these authors directed much theoretical attention to 'segmental' rather than to 'state' societies, to 'tribes' rather than to what Hobbes called the Leviathan, and into an enquiry into the source of order in such systems. That was very much Evans-Pritchard's problematic in his study of the Nuer (1940), where he employed the Durkheimian notions of solidarity, of moral density, of segmentation (though in a more complex way than Durkheim, since he saw the segments not simply as similar but as opposed as well as co-operating in their interests, depending on the order of segmentation). His focus was expressed above all in the notion of 'ordered anarchy', of an order that existed in the absence of institutionalized authority figures, a notion of which Kropotkin would have approved. Evans-Pritchard, like Radcliffe Brown, was often anarchic in his attitude to authority, though that derived more from the radical right than the radical left (Goody 1995). But at the centre of the interest he developed with Fortes were segmentary, acephalous societies, as we see from *African Political Systems* (1940) as well as from the works on the Nuer which initially drew inspiration from Maine but later owed more to Durkheim. Theoretically the contribution of this book was in that area rather than in centralised states, in the analysis of which anthropologists made little progress. Most of their theoretical energies, as far as political systems were concerned, were taken up with the arrangements of stateless societies, of systems where the checks and balances were often more manifest than authority itself, at least authority of a centralised kind, and which were marked instead by 'ordered anarchy'.

It will seem to some strange to think of Radcliffe-Brown as an anarchist, as an anti-authoritarian figure because he represents for many the archetypical ancestor of modern British social anthropology and hence is automatically 'an authority'. Only we who followed are the real revolutionaries, the real anti-authority figures, for we really did break away and establish a new tradition which had not yet become dominant.

While such an attitude is understandable from the standpoint of the developmental cycle of any one field of study, at least in the humanities, from a more distant ('objective') stance it demands some modification. For in terms of approach, Radcliffe-Brown's displayed a radical break with much of what went on before, although he established his own line of ancestors outside the usual anthropological genealogy (consisting of Montesquieu, Maine, Vinogradoff etc.) and switched his allegiance to Durkheimian sociology, again in a very radical way, with dramatic results for those who followed, especially for Evans-Pritchard and Fortes. But while his work was revolutionary in this sense, it was not at first sight anti-authoritarian. He was much concerned with social sanctions (following Fauconnet and others), with law, with social control more generally, and he looked at social institutions in a structural-functional way in relation to their contribution. However, while he remained totally influenced by the Marxist tradition, he was affected by that other socialist trend deriving from anarchist thought, for example, in such matters as 'distributive justice' as well as in his treatment of social organization more generally.

Social anthropologists have often played the role of questioning the current state of affairs in their society by pointing to alternative arrangements, associated with an interest in social reform and in the reversal of existing authorities. Durkheim was a socialist as well as a sociologist, a militant in the Dreyfus affair. Later on there was the strong Marxist tradition above all in French anthropology as well as the determined opposition to the Vietnam War on the part of many American colleagues. Among my professors in Britain, all academic offspring of Radcliffe-Brown (and Malinowski), Evans-Pritchard often stood against authority but from a right wing Catholic position. Others were more inclined towards the left. It is often thought that those who worked under colonial regimes were themselves 'colonialist'. Not at all. They were often at loggerheads with the authorities. Meyer Fortes, the great friend of Evans-Pritchard, had great difficulties in gaining entry to the Gold Coast (later Ghana), because he was a red and a Jew. People from the London School of Economics were particularly suspect. Others, like the German exile, Kirchhof, never made it to the field in a British colony for political reasons. Another of their collaborators, Max Gluckman, was excluded not only from his own country, South Africa, but also from USA and New Guinea. These earlier anthropologists also included representatives of the colonized peoples who were certainly against the system. Some later became distinguished contributors to the independence of their countries, Jomo Kenyatta (author of a book on the Kikuyu) in Kenya, who worked with Malinowski, and in Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, an occasional pupil of Daryll Forde and Kofi Busia, a pupil of Meyer Fortes and author of a study of Asante. Like many other anthropologists, these were motivated to become interested in the 'peoples without history' who were always in conflict with the colonial authorities. They were themselves somewhat anti-authoritarian, even anarchistic, and that has not proved to be a bad tradition to follow.

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