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Pierre-Joseph Proudhon
The Extremes
1852

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The Extremes

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

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Avoid the extremes, and seek the happy medium, says the Wisdom of the Nations.

That aphorism, of course, is very true: but it must be well understood.

It is up to philosophy to look into it and demonstrate it.

I say that every extreme, in itself, is false and implies a contradiction; but by extreme I mean the element constitutive of every synthesis, an element to which it does not [], which constitutes it [i.e. synthesis] that much better as it is found employed more energetically.

Thus, the proprietor is a constitutive element of the social order, necessary, indispensable.

To deny it implies a contradiction.

In the common language we say: Property must be *curbed*, not pushed to the extreme.

I will correct that language, which lacks scientific exactitude, and say: property, in itself, strong or weak, powerful or controlled, as you like, is exclusive, fraudulent, sinful, selfish, and wrong; it contains within it, theft.

However, that same property, such as it is, is indispensable to human order; and it is even because of this that it is neces-

sary. Remove that individualist character, and [] you render it powerless....

It is not the extreme, [] property, that is to be avoided: that extreme always exists, since it is the very principle....

Here, all the happy mediums in the world are lies, pure arbitrariness.

It is necessary to balance property with a contrary principle, which is, as you prefer, collectivity or community.

(There is no moderate community: community in itself is as bad as property.... It calls, not for a corrective, shears, a gardener to fight it, a [] to geld it: it needs a balance.

The two principles must be joined, married, mutually penetrating, in a manner to form a [].... *Thus:*

Theory: Everything that can be appropriated must be appropriated; everything that can be grouped, even among the things appropriated, must be grouped.

(Similarly with *Competition, Credit, Government*, etc.; division of labor, collectivity.)

Other antinomies are subject to a different law, for example, that of *Dead weight—live weight*. It is certain that we tend, and will constantly tend, to reduce one and increase the other: that is the law of Progress. Cf. [] *Dead weight, live weight*, pages 11–12.