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Mutualism

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Abstract

Mutualism designates a group of anarchist philosophies that envision non-governmental society and non-capitalist commerce as the product of bilateral agreement and mutual guarantees between free individuals and social groupings. Historically, it predates anarchism as a term to describe the constructive counterpart to anarchists' critique of authoritarian institutions. From 1840 until his death in 1865, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon produced a body of social scientific work contrasting the systematic exploitation inherent in existing governmental and commercial institutions with the possibility of a society based on mutual tolerance and 'synallagmatic contract'. This analysis not only provided an explanation for how the exploitation occurs but also, he believed, demonstrated an already existing 'mutuality' of relations. As collectivist and communist forms of anarchist thought emerged, the term 'mutualism' became associated with non-communist forms of anarchism, including the individualism of Benjamin R. Tucker. The twentieth century saw the emergence in the United States of a more individualist form of mutualism, a 'market anarchism', and the present century has seen a continuation of the tradition that began with Tucker, in the 'free market anti-capitalism' of Kevin Carson. Meanwhile, more traditionally 'Proudhonian' mutualism continues to experience periods of renewed interest.

Within the anarchist tradition, *mutualism* has a long, complex and contentious history. That history has been written by *divers hands*, with opponents often contributing as significantly as proponents. As a result, we face a range of interpretive choices, none of which provides a complete picture. Approached as a single tendency, mutualism seems to defy definition. When we identify the common threads that unite the tradition, we find they are often

not the elements that have defined the various mutualisms individually. Between each stage in the history we find nearly as much discontinuity as continuity.

Considered in all its richness, taking into account the elements abandoned or added along the way, the history of mutualism sheds light on much more than just the portions of the anarchist tradition generally designated as mutualist. The price of those insights, however, is a willingness to exercise considerable interpretive care and caution, together with a willingness to allow the history its twists and turns.

The language of *mutualism*, which emerged in the 1820s, predates Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's appropriation of *anarchy* and *anarchist* in 1840, just as those terms predate *anarchism*, which did not come into widespread use until the late 1870s. Originally defined in terms of *mutual aid*, *reciprocity* and *fair play*, the term has designated both the general notion of *mutuality* and a series of more specific social programmes and ideologies. Once appropriated by Proudhon for his anarchistic project, it would remain associated with his thought, sometimes functioning as a designation for his entire project. That association would shape the understanding of mutualism within the anarchist milieu, which was repeatedly remade according to the fortunes of Proudhon's thought in the emerging movement. Once rivals emerged to claim the *anarchist* label and *anarchism* became widely used, *mutualist* and *mutualism* could not simply function as synonyms for these terms and a more radical shift in meaning took place.

It was at the end of the nineteenth century that the conception of anarchist mutualism was most significantly transformed, becoming largely a conceptual foil for anarchist communism, which emerged as a dominant tendency after the split in the

understood as compatible, particularly in the context of a Benjamin R. Tucker-inspired mutualism or ‘free market anti-capitalism’.²⁹

Subsequent works have expanded the project, extending the initial synthesis to include material from a wide range of scholarly disciplines, literary genres and reform movements. While the fundamental vision of a market-centred individualist anarchism is perhaps not substantially removed from that of Tucker, the eclectic range of materials and the ambitious, experimental approach to constructing ‘low overhead’ transitional institutions recalls various nineteenth-century mutualists.

The internet era has also provided new stimulus to the study of Proudhon’s work. *Property is Theft*, the first significant collection of full texts and lengthy excerpts in English, was a product of the same culture of online debate that produced *An Anarchist FAQ*. Some of the texts included there originated in the Proudhon Library project, a proposed continuation of Tucker’s original Proudhon Library. A number of book-length works have been translated and work has begun to bring at least a partial edition to print.³⁰

Perhaps the only thing more difficult than summarising mutualism’s past is speculating about its future. While the continued expansion of Carson’s project and the continued recovery of Proudhon’s seem likely to offer new resources to the anarchist movement, it is less clear to what extent mutualism is an adequate framework for the development of the anarchist project and to what extent it remains too closely tied to partisan conflicts that are now well over a century old. Only time will tell how long mutualism remains viable through cycles of appropriation and revision, but, as I hope this narrative suggests, the existing tradition contains enough unexplored material to occupy students for some time to come.

²⁹ Kevin Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy* (Charleston: Book-Surge Publishing, 2007). For more on “free market anti-capitalism, see Carson’s website at www.mutualist.org.

³⁰ Translations can be found at proudhonlibrary.org.

International and the death of Mikhail Bakunin.¹ Redefined as non-communist anarchism, it retained nominal connections to Proudhon’s thought, but in fact only reflected those aspects of his project not easily assimilated by rival tendencies. The emphasis on social and economic reciprocity remained, although it now became more likely that individuals would distinguish between *mutual aid*—and its associations with the anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin—and *mutuality*—now specifically associated with exchange and market reciprocity. Other defining characteristics were a penchant for practical, legal reform—in distinction to more overtly revolutionary means—and a rhetoric drawing on the language of commerce and contract. For a time, the dominant narrative was that there were two distinct and opposing forms of anarchism: anarchist communism and a mutualism most closely associated with *individualist*, *philosophical* or *commercialist* tendencies.²

While the starkest, most divisive aspects of this narrative could not survive, challenged as they were by a variety of tendencies, all subsequent definitions of mutualism undoubtedly owe something to this particular formulation. At present, the existence of multiple mutualist currents, each drawing very different conclusions from the available histories, only underlines the extent to which mutualism, in the broadest sense, has come to be defined at least as much in terms of what it is not as it is by the ideas dearest to its various proponents.

What follows, then, is a survey of representative episodes drawn from the history of mutualism, highlighting key moments in the evolution of the idea. In each episode considerable emphasis will be placed on those elements, beyond the shared thread,

¹ See, for example, Dyer D. Lum, “Communal Anarchy,” *The Alarm*, 2:15 (March 6, 1886), 2. “A distinction has been sought between what has been termed “Mutualistic Anarchy” and communistic anarchy...”

² Regarding these distinctions, see Steven T. Byington, “Anarchist Labels,” *The Demonstrator*, 1:2 (March 18, 1903), 2.

that differentiated the various individual mutualisms. This is a history rich in possibilities and rife with conflict, which cannot be understood without acknowledging these elements.

Much of the modern political lexicon emerged early in the nineteenth century, often arising in multiple locations and languages before being clarified and standardised in the international movements of mid-century.³ The language of *mutualism* (*mutualist*, *mutuality*, etc.) dates to the 1820s. In his *Traité de l'association domestique-agricole* (1822), Charles Fourier used the phrase 'mutualisme composé convergent' to describe the process of mutual education in his proposed system, a radical variation on the monitorial system, by which the education of children would be largely in the hands their slightly older peers.⁴ In 1826, a series of articles were published in the *New Harmony Gazette* under the title 'The Mutualist, or, Practical Remarks on the Social System of Mutual Cooperation', in which a decentralised, more libertarian adaptation of the Owenite experiment at New Harmony was proposed. The author signed the articles as 'a member of a community', and the community was probably the Friendly Association for Mutual Interests, located either at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania or Kendal, Ohio.⁵ In 1828, the *canuts*, French silk workers in Lyon, established the *Société du Devoir mutuel* (Society of Mutual Duty), which played a militant role in the labour revolts of the 1830s. Its motto was 'Vivre libre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant!' ('Live free working, or die fighting!').⁶

³ For an overview of this creative period, see Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "The Evolution of the Socialist Vocabulary," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9:3 (June 1948), 259–302.

⁴ Charles Fourier, *Traité de l'association domestique-agricole*, tome II (Paris: Bossange, 1922), 349.

⁵ "The Mutualist," *New Harmony Gazette*, 1:37 (June 7, 1826), 294.

⁶ David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency* (New York: Springer, 1996), 140.

anarchist individualism, and the contributors to *Liberty* included a wide range of interesting and able anarchist thinkers. However, as mutualism came to mean simply non-communist, the content that seems specifically vital to a history of mutualism dwindled. Among Tucker's associates, the one agitation that stands out as particularly mutualist was the long propaganda in favour of the mutual bank.

Indeed, in that one regard, the individualists of the Tucker school proved themselves tirelessly faithful to the projects of Proudhon and Greene. Alfred B. Westrup produced a series of tracts on the subject, culminating in the book *The New Philosophy of Money*, and organised the Mutual Bank Propaganda to spread the mutual credit gospel. Anarchist insurance broker Herman Kuehn produced *The Problem of Worry*, a variation on the familiar model organised according to principles derived from the insurance industry. And a substantial portion of Swartz's *What is Mutualism?* was dedicated to the question of mutual credit.

For much of the twentieth century, mutualism remained essentially moribund. With the arrival of the twenty-first, however, and perhaps particularly with the improved access to historical documents that has come with the advent of the internet, interest in mutualism revived considerably. At the centre of this largely grassroots revival has been Kevin Carson, an independent writer and scholar who over the past decade has produced four self-published volumes and a large number of essays exploring mutualism.²⁸ His first major work, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy*, attempted to show that elements of Marxian and Austrian economics could be

²⁸ Carson's works, which are all self-published, include *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy* (2007), *Organization Theory: A Libertarian Perspective* (2008), *The Homebrew Industrial Revolution* (2010) and *The Desktop Regulatory State* (2016).

One is dictatorial, the other libertarian.

And it continues for another 600 words, drawing the distinctions in no uncertain terms, ending with the prediction:

One is the infancy of Socialism; the other is its manhood.

One is already the past; the other is the future.

One will give place to the other.

Today each of us must choose for the one or the other of these two Socialisms, or else confess that he is not a Socialist.²⁶

Although this is clearly a reflection of the division noted by *Hazell's Annual Encyclopaedia*, Tucker did not himself make the distinction one of mutualists vs. communists. However, in 1894, Henry Seymour, in what was essentially a rewriting of Lesigne's letter, presents the struggle between 'The Two Anarchisms' in precisely those terms:

There are two Anarchisms. That is to say, there are two schools of Anarchism.

One is communistic, the other mutualistic.²⁷

And, in the decades to follow, the identification of mutualism with individualism would increasingly go unchallenged. In 1927, for example, Clarence Lee Swartz' *What is Mutualism?* would address socialism in a chapter on 'Proposed But Inadequate Remedies'.

Tucker's plumb-line individualism is, of course, well worth study on its own merits, in the context of the larger tradition of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Henry Seymour, *The Two Anarchisms* (London: Proudhon Press, 1894).

In each of these cases, we find individuals who would be associated with anarchist mutualism in tantalisingly close proximity. In 1827, Josiah Warren, who had visited the Kendal community in 1825, would leave New Harmony to pursue his own libertarian project, the proto-anarchist 'equitable commerce'. In 1829, Proudhon encountered Fourier during the printing of the latter's *Le Nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire*, and in 1843 he was living in Lyon, where *mutuellistes* were still an active, if largely clandestine, presence. But while there is no shortage of suggestive echoes and possible connections, we would probably be hasty to read too much into either the popularity or the persistence of the language of mutualism in an era when even the most familiar terms could be subject to repeated appropriation and reuse.

We know that Proudhon practised this sort of appropriation. His famous declaration, 'Je suis anarchiste', is an obvious example. And we know that he performed similar transformations of the language of property, Fourier's serial analysis and the phrase *laissez faire*, to cite just a few examples. The most obvious provocations were, in fact, grounded in a point of principle. In 1853, in *The Philosophy of Progress*, he declared that 'it is not my place to create new words for new things and I am forced to speak the same language as everyone'. Moreover, 'there is no progress without tradition, and the new order having as its immediate antecedents religion, government and property, it is convenient, in order to guarantee that evolution, to preserve for the new institutions their patronymic names, in the phases of civilization, because there are never well-defined lines, and to want to accomplish the revolution by a leap would be beyond our means'.⁷ Sometimes, of course, speaking 'the same language as everyone' means allowing even important words to assume multiple meanings or approaching a

⁷ P.-J. Proudhon, *The Philosophy of Progress* (Gresham, OR: Corvus Editions, 2012), 29.

single topic with multiple vocabularies—and this is what we find in Proudhon’s work.

While mutualism has at times become a shorthand designation for Proudhon’s thought as a whole, we know that for him it was one tool in a very extensive kit. In much of Proudhon’s work, *mutualism* and *mutuality* simply designate reciprocal social relations. ‘Credit’, Proudhon tells us in the *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, ‘is, from the point of view of social relations, a *mutualism*, an exchange’.⁸ There are, however, more programmatic uses. At the end of *The System of Economic Contradictions*, having explored the various unresolved contradictions that he believed dominated modern society, he claimed that ‘in order to arrive at the definitive organization that appears to be the destiny of our species on the globe, nothing remains but to make a general equation of all our contradictions’ and that the ‘formula’ of that equation must be ‘a law of exchange, a theory of Mutuality, a system of guarantees’.⁹

The practical application of this ‘formula’ was to be the subject of a sequel and Proudhon’s notebooks for 1846 are filled with notes for a ‘Program of the Progressive Association, or Theory of Mutuality’, which was his attempt to sketch a model of anti-capitalist self-organisation for the working classes. However, this work, which was probably the most comprehensive attempt to sketch a mutualist programme in the nineteenth century, is only now due to be published.¹⁰

⁸ P.-J. Proudhon, *Les confessions d’un révolutionnaire* (Paris: Au Bureau de la Voix du Peuple, 1849), 141.

⁹ P.-J. Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques*, tome II (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846), 527.

¹⁰ Edward Castleton has prepared an edition under the title *La propriété vaincue. Théorie de l’Association universelle*, slated for publication in 2018. See his essay ‘Association, Mutualism and the Corporate Form in the Published and Unpublished Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon,’ *History of Economic Ideas*, 25:1 (2017), 143–172, for a discussion of this work and a useful overview of Proudhon’s work on mutualism.

Almost immediately on meeting the older radicals, Tucker threw himself into the milieu, working on *The Word* and then moving on to publications of his own, launching first the short-lived *Radical Review* and then *Liberty*, which appeared from 1881 to 1907. Initially, his circle included a wide range of reformers, but Tucker’s consistent response to his indisputably broad range of influences was a steady narrowing and distillation of his own thought, often accompanied by noisy schisms in the pages of various periodicals. Tucker was proud of adhering to a ‘plumb-line’ politics, and he developed an analysis of society according to which it was various forms of *monopoly* that stood between people and a free society based on voluntary association. He then proceeded to adapt insights drawn from Proudhon, Greene, Warren and a host of other thinkers to this worldview, which was in many ways entirely alien to the original works of those thinkers.

Perhaps the clearest single expression of Tucker’s philosophy is the 1888 essay ‘State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far They Agree, and Wherein They Differ’.²⁵ Here, Tucker divides the modern socialist movement according to socialists’ adherence to either the principle of *authority* or that of *liberty*. Faced with the choice between these principles, he says, in a partisan retelling of the history, ‘Marx went one way; Warren and Proudhon the other. Thus were born State Socialism and Anarchism’. Kropotkin and the martyred Haymarket anarchists, he continues, seem headed down the wrong road as well. And the essay ends with the republication of a long ‘Socialistic Letter’ by Ernest Lesigne, outlining the distinctions between ‘The Two Socialisms’. It begins:

There are two Socialisms.

One is communistic, the other solidaritarian.

²⁵ Benjamin R. Tucker, *State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far They Agree and Wherein They Differ* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1911).

Absent from the pages of *The Spirit of the Age*, but present in the Boston free thought forums during precisely the same period, was Josiah Warren, theorist of *equitable commerce*—a system of cost-price exchange employing a unique variety of labour notes. Warren, despite his own avoidance of labels, would become known as a mutualist retrospectively, thanks to his influence on Tucker and his circle, but the movement for equitable commerce that developed around him was a force in Boston's reform circles at the time.²³

Twenty years later, the same eclectic mix of reformers and interests that had filled the pages of *The Spirit of the Age* would find an organizational expression in the New England Labor Reform League (NELRL) and various associated organisations. Founded in 1869, the NELRL was largely the brainchild of Ezra H. Heywood, who had long been active in abolitionist circles and had come to embrace both anarchistic mutualism and free love. With his wife, Angela Heywood, he published *The Word*, a paper of generally anarchistic tendencies, from 1872 through 1893.²⁴ The Heywoods were instrumental in publishing and distributing the works of Greene, Warren and others in their general circle. The last edition of Mutual Banking published during Greene's lifetime was published under the auspices of the NELRL.

Greene, Warren and Heywood were all present at the 1872 conference of the NELRL. Also in attendance was a young Benjamin R. Tucker, who had been attending meetings of the Boston Eight-Hour League, but without feeling that he had found the economic answers he was looking for. His encounter with the leading lights of the NELRL was transformative and set Tucker on the road to becoming the most prominent individualist anarchist in the United States, with few peers anywhere in the world.

²³ The best source on the equitable commerce movement in Boston, between 1846 and 1855, is the *Boston Investigator*, which followed its progress closely.

²⁴ See William B. Greene, "Communism versus Mutualism," *The Word*, 3:7 (November 1874).

After the French Revolution of 1848, Proudhon prepared a new mutualist programme, based this time around the notion of *free credit*. In 1849, a long series of articles appeared in *Le Peuple*, under the general title 'Demonstration of Socialism, Theoretical and Practical, or Revolution by Credit'. In these, Proudhon addressed many of the details regarding his Bank of the People, which aimed to provide a secure and inexpensive currency to workers who were otherwise excluded from most commerce. In the sixth article in the series, 'Deduction of the Revolutionary Idea.—Gratuity and Mutuality of Credit', he discusses the 'right to credit' and the duty to extend it, concluding that if they exist they must be equal. 'Now', he says, 'if the right to credit and the duty to extend it are equal; if obligation is born from guarantee, and vice versa, then we arrive at this formula: reciprocity of credit, mutualism'.¹¹ The full exposition is striking, drawing as it does on a variety of arguments pertaining to different spheres of knowledge, but it was the basic practical proposal that was imitated so faithfully for so long, particularly in the United States.

Proudhon's influence on the emerging international workers' movement can be traced to a third attempt at a mutualist programme. *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, the final work completed before his death, was in many ways a return to the project of 'progressive association'. Framed as a response to a group of Parisian workers questioning the advisability of supporting worker candidates in upcoming elections, Proudhon's response was a lengthy sketch of the 'Mutualist System' by which the workers could achieve liberty through self-management.¹²

These same Parisian workers were then instrumental in the establishment of the First International, although their influence was not to last. According to E. E. Fribourg, 'the history of the *Inter-*

¹¹ P.-J. Proudhon, *Mélanges*, tome II (Brussels: Lacroix, Verboeckhoven & Co.), 39.

¹² P.-J. Proudhon, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières* (Paris: Dentu, 1865).

national divides into two parts: the first period, which I will call Parisian, corresponds to the founding and the first two congresses, at Geneva in 1866, and Lausanne in 1867. During this time the association was *mutualist*, demanding of the collectivity only the guarantee of the execution of contracts that have been freely discussed, and freely consented to'. In the second part, 'the moral direction inevitably escaped the hands of the French workers, passed to Belgium, and in that second period, which we will call Russo-German, the International became communist, which is to say authoritarian'.¹³ But what Fribourg, himself part of the Paris contingent, describes as a change of tendency was described by César de Paepe, one of the most influential of the Belgian workers, as a dispute among mutualists.

During the 1867 Congress, in the midst of a debate on the social ownership of the soil, de Paepe stated:

Like the citizens Tolain and Chemalé, I am an adherent of the mutualist socialism, which wants to realise the principle of reciprocity in all the transactions of men; but I do not consider the idea of the inclusion of the soil in social property as incompatible with mutualism—quite the contrary. What, indeed, does mutualism demand? It demands that the product of labour belongs, in its entirety, to the producer and that this product only exchanges in society for an equivalent product, one costing the same amount of labour and expense; but the soil is not the product of anyone's labor, and the reciprocity of exchange is not applicable to it [...] It is because I am a mutualist that I want, on the one hand, the cultivator to have some guarantees that assure them, with regard to society, the full product of their labour and, on the other hand, some guarantees

¹³ E. E. Fribourg, *L'Association internationale des travailleurs* (Paris: Armand Le Chevalier, 1871), 2.

The first edition of Greene's work on mutual banking was a two-volume compilation of articles written in 1849 under the name 'Omega' for the *Palladium* of Worcester, Massachusetts. *Equality* was published in 1849 and *Mutual Banking* was published the following year. In those early volumes, we find not just Greene's adaptation of Proudhon's bank proposal but also legal and religious meditations on usury, together with an explanation of mutualism that presents it as the successor to Christianity.

[D]ispensation fellows dispensation; each dispensation being adapted to its peculiar stage of human progress. New light will soon break forth from the Gospel, and the NEW CHRISTIANITY will establish itself in the world—a Christianity as much transcending the one now known in the Churches, as this last transcends the religion of types and shadows revealed through Moses.

This is the order of the dispensations:—*the Covenant with Noah; the Covenant with Abraham; The Mosaic Dispensation; CHRISTIANITY; Christian Mutualism.*

Christian Mutualism is the RELIGION of the coming age:—Sanscrit, *yuga*; Heb. *yom*, or *ivom*; Gr. *aion*; Lat. *aeuum*; Light's manifestation, revolving age, dispensation, world, day.²²

Later editions, including two published by Greene himself and several published after his death, would dispense with the religious framing, but the original volumes are essential for understanding just how the milieu surrounding papers like *The Spirit of the Age* differed from the later individualist anarchist milieu associated with Benjamin R. Tucker and *Liberty*.

²² William B. Greene, *Mutual Banking* (West Brookfield, MA: O. S. Cooke & Company, 1850), 94.

Contradictions—where Proudhon gave the notion of Providence his own anti-theist twist—editor William Henry Channing framed the mission of paper in mutualist terms:

“What transformation does Providence now intend?”

We can but denote some of the impending changes which Humanity plainly commands and Heaven sanctions—thus presenting germs to be hereafter unfolded; and we invite the aid of practical persons in marking out the stages of this next era of *Guarantees*, as it was denominated by Fourier, or *Mutualism*, as Proudhon calls it.²¹

While the approach was eclectic, it was the sort of well-read eclecticism that could make the connection between Proudhon’s *mutualism* and Fourier’s *guarantism* long before Proudhon made it explicit in his own work. Mutualism was also the subject of articles by Charles A. Dana, Joshua King Ingalls, Francis George Shaw and Albert Brisbane. Translated excerpts from Proudhon’s *Confessions of a Revolutionary* also appeared, as well as unsigned articles on mutual banking clearly drawn from the work of William Batchelder Greene.

Greene was himself another eclectic, eccentric character, a soldier-turned-minister with ties to New England transcendentalism and the Massachusetts abolitionists, who left for France after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, encountering Proudhon during his stay, and then returned to lead a Union artillery regiment during the Civil War. In 1849–1850, he was adapting Proudhon’s mutual credit schemes to conditions in rural New England, attempting to reconcile the work of Proudhon with that of his rival Pierre Leroux, and seasoning the mix with his own brand of esoteric Christianity.

²¹ William Henry Channing, “Topics and Their Treatment,” *The Spirit of the Age*, 1:7 (August 18, 1849), 105.

for society with regard to the cultivator: and this is why the soil can only be the property of the social collectivity, and the cultivator can only have simple possession, the right to use without abuse. Mutualism is not only the reciprocity of exchange; it is also the reciprocity of guarantees.¹⁴

In this, de Paepe was largely correct and represented that faction among the collectivists who saw in their own ideas, as Bakunin put it, ‘Proudhonism, greatly developed and taken to its ultimate conclusion’.¹⁵ We see here the possibility of a different evolution of mutualism, perhaps one in which his analysis of collective force and progressive association might have found development. But pressures within the International tended to heighten tensions and deepen the gulfs between factions. Ultimately, de Paepe would defect from both the mutualist and anti-authoritarian collectivist camps, siding with Marx and others to whom Bakunin would not hesitate apply the ‘authoritarian’ label.

As for Bakunin himself, while his work shows numerous indications of Proudhon’s influence, he chose, even in the heat of his battles with Marx, to praise Proudhon for his instincts, rather than his social science. In 1872, he wrote that ‘Marx, as a thinker, is on the right track’, while Proudhon ‘had the true instinct of the revolutionary—he adored Satan and he proclaimed an-archy’. About mutualism he had little or nothing to say.¹⁶

It is clear that by the 1870s mutualism was a waning force within the anarchist milieu. Some isolated Proudhonian thinkers

¹⁴ *Procès-verbaux: Congrès de l’association Internationale des travailleurs* (Chaux-de-fonds: La voix de l’avenir, 1867), 80–81.

¹⁵ Mikhail Bakunin, *Oeuvres*, tome III (Paris: Stock, 1908), 252.

¹⁶ Bakunin, “To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain,” (1872) [<https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/bakunin-to-the-brothers-of-the-alliance-in-spain-1872/>].

continued to develop his ideas, often in a collectivist direction. Some of the best of this work, however, did not appear under the mutualist banner. Claude Pelletier, an exile in New York, published a number of striking Proudhonian works under the general title *Atercracy*, which he considered equivalent in meaning to anarchy, but perhaps less threatening to the uninitiated.¹⁷

As mutualism waned in significance as an anarchist label and as Proudhon waned as a reference among anti-authoritarians increasingly drawn toward collectivism, if not communism, *anarchism*, which had seen some use by anarchist communist Joseph Déjacque after 1859, arose as a label around which an anarchist movement might form in the wake of the splits in the International. At first, very few of the anti-authoritarians outside mutualist or ‘Proudhonian’ circles adopted the anarchist label. In his 1881 essay ‘On Order’, Peter Kropotkin described the process by which the label was reluctantly accepted. Having noted that rebels had often had their names imposed on them, he observed that:

[It was] the same for the anarchists. When a party arose in the heart of the International that denied the authority in the Association and rebelled against authority in all its forms, that party first gave itself the name *federalist* party, then that of *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. In that era, it avoided even giving itself the name of anarchist. The word *an-archy* (that is how it was written then) seemed to link the party too much with the Proudhonians, whose ideas regarding economic reform the International combated at that moment. But it was precisely because of that, in order to spread confusion, that the adversaries took delight in using that name; besides, it allowed them to say that the very name of the anarchists proves that their

¹⁷ See, for example, Eudalc Reitelpep, *Les Soirées socialistes de New York* (New York: n.p., 1873).

sole ambition is to create disorder and chaos, without thinking of the results.¹⁸

This is the account of a succession, by which one group of anarchists, the Proudhonians, have been replaced by another, proponents of a ‘modern anarchism’ that Kropotkin identified with anarchist communism. Five years later, *Hazell’s Annual Encyclopaedia* for 1886 would report that ‘Anarchists are divided into *mutualists*, who hope to bring about their economic results by Banks of Exchange and a free currency, and *communists*, whose motto is: ‘From every man according to his capacity, to every man according to his needs’.¹⁹ By that time, as well, a new mutualist faction had emerged to take its place opposite the anarchist communists.

The individualists who would claim the mutualist title at the end of the nineteenth century were largely the product of a development in the United States, parallel and often independent of the European movements. Proudhon’s mutualism had arrived there by 1849 and for a brief period the term had a wide currency in the radical press, even if its meanings did not always conform to Proudhon’s thought. Among the translations in *The Spirit of the Age* (1849–1850), a short-lived reform paper, appeared a long passage from *The System of Economic Contradictions*, under the title ‘The Coming Era of Mutualism’.²⁰ In this translation of the passage already cited, the ‘theory of Mutuality’ became a ‘theory of Mutualism’ and the accompanying discussion makes it clear that Proudhon’s ideas were being treated as compatible with the Fourierism and Christian socialism already present in the milieu. In a somewhat distorted echo of the *System of Economic*

¹⁸ Pierre Kropotkine, *Paroles d’un révolté* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1885), 99.

¹⁹ *Hazell’s Annual Encyclopaedia* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1886), 17.

²⁰ P.-J Proudhon, “The Coming Era of Mutualism,” *The Spirit of the Age*, 1:7 (August 18, 1849): 107–108.