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that is proof that the fact itself has been outlived, that other economic facts have made their appearance, owing to which the former has become unbearable and untenable."[4]

This is the power of Proudhonism, not just reflecting change as Engels would have ethics limited, but speeding and guiding it by making ethical reflection and practice a major dimension of social participation. The revolution of ideas, in Proudhon's view the emergence of qualitatively new concepts and morals to satisfy the urgently felt need of knowledge,[5] or as Kropotkin puts it, the process of idealisation when certain ideals gain an ascendency over petty life in order to make the contradiction between them and actual social life unbearable, is an egalitarian, democratic and functional mode of social thought.[6] In this lies Proudhonism's potential as a means of imposing values on ruling economic structures without simultaneously imposing them on the groups and people who can rightfully claim ethical priority. Even if Proudhonism is incompetent for this task, as an economic doctrine at least it can suggest means of restraining the economic structures which in the near future will inevitably continue to grow and concentrate. At the same time it can provide a basis for communal and international resistance directed towards the satisfaction of revolutionary values in a manner neither conventionally capitalist nor socialist.

[4] F Engels: 'Introduction', The Poverty of Philosophy, p12.
[5] Proudhon: Property, p32.
[6] Kropotkin: op cit p272.

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aid, and consequently, unless we know them. If, then, our science of moral laws is false, it is evident that, while desiring our own good, we are accomplishing our own evil…"[2]

Of course, it would be naive to rely entirely on this process, because the innate goodness of man is problematical and culturally relative. Even if it were true and absolute, it would in no way affect the relativity and diversity of moral principles, which Proudhon makes much of, nor the untidiness of social and material conditions. Given these constraints on social and ethical philosophy, the combination of interpretive certainty and conceptual indefiniteness characteristic of hermeneutic approaches to society like Proudhonism is itself a method of morality and of non-doctrinaire participation in social progress and ethical responsibility.

"Without the changes which occur in man's attribution of meaning to reality, we cannot understand social change. But neither of course does^this method provide us with sufficient explanation of social phenomenon."[3]

When Proudhonism claims to explain sufficiently, it exceeds its competence. But the same may be said of any doctrine. When Proudhonism claims to analyse meanings in social ethics and to reinterpret them in order to bring ethics more into line with social conditions, then it is invaluable. It gives to anarchism the attitude that no reality and no doctrine is so good that it does not merit analytical and ethical opposition. Proudhonism then is not content just to analyse. It seeks above all to moralise, not in the pejorative sense of passing judgement on people in order to have them submit to authority, but in the revolutionary sense, as Engels perceives, of passing judgement on institutions in order to have them adjust to conditions which have outpaced them.

"If the moral consciousness of the mass declares an economic fact to be unjust, as it has done in the case of slavery or serf labour,

[2] Proudhon: Property, pp20-21.
[3] Juntunen & Mehtonen: op cit p151.

Any epistemology is simply a mental construction of the world to facilitate action in it, and the degree of life it has depends on the amount it stimulates a motivation to act and the degree of reality it provides action in order to be effective in achieving goals and expanding knowledge. Ideas are neither alive nor dead; they can only be more or less lively in how they function, and this is as much due to their environment as to the ideas themselves. In the large issues Proudhon's doctrine is far from lifeless because die alternative to opposing good and bad categories is to suppress the vital intractability of reality by a dogmatic conceptual system in which an imagined inevitability is used to ignore or condemn all that does not accord with it.- Proudhon never does this, and if his answers to intractability are often just pure morality, this is not cause to spurn his writings but to embrace them, or parts of them. Yet Proudhon's account of causality, on which any doctrine rests, cannot be trusted. This must bring into doubt at least some of his values. In this sense Marx is right in implying that Proudhon creates his own problems to solve and has solutions suitable only to his own arbitrary preconceptions. But the prominence Proudhon gives to ethics, his insistence on its practical and democratic nature; and his scepticism towards moral principles which are obeyed merely because they have been long established and are propagated by the state or any authority claiming truth; his fundamental uncertainty about the world even in the hope of an objective truth providing some kind of ethical standard in the midst of uncertainty; all these attitudes are necessary to a re-appraisal of governing concepts. Despite the dogmatism with which he adheres to the natural rationality of moral principles, his overall approach to social knowledge is that thought must develop in concert with the realities and potential of society through reflection and action, in order better to accord with the continuous need to restate problems and redefine goals. This is a sound view, and forces us to creativity in place of doxology.

"But it is in us and through us that the laws of our moral nature work; now these laws cannot be executed without our deliberate

I. Materialism and Political Philosophy

As Western societies enter their historical decline and approach a new era of revolution, the need for political philosophy to redefine previously authoritative values will grow. Unless revolutionary philosophy treats all levels of society and social knowledge, from the most intimate and practical functions of everyday life to the broadest issues of freedom, authority and obligation, our future revolutions will be merely chaotic failures rather than a reconstitution of society. Political philosophy must seek a comprehensive revolutionary doctrine as the most expedient and most democratic attitude to our future history. Among the concepts which have to be grappled with is materialism, not in the first instance as an ontological metaphysics or even as a philosophy of history, but rather as a set of coherent expectations about what material rights, claims and conditions society can and ought to demand of, and provide to, its members. Sociological materialism in this sense is an evaluation of social structure and its dominant institutions. This of course implies an ontology, but it has theoretical and doctrinal functions long before then, which inform the major issues of political philosophy. Materialism is a perspective of values which assumes that the minimum needs for survival are also the creative values for society in general, even after survival has been apparently assured. Because each level of development in the material culture creates new minimum needs, material development correspondingly enlarges the scope of creativity, as well as of problems of survival.

Thus materialism is a necessary element in any critique of social conditions and evaluation of a society's future viability.

Western societies are now in an historical phase in which not only do their material capabilities, interests and expectations create needs and problems exceeding the capabilities of their governing institutions, but in which the economic foundations of their material culture are beginning to fail. Thus, on the one hand we nominally govern ourselves by inadequate political ideals, and, on the other hand, we are tied to a material culture which seems increasingly unable to renew itself and which is accumulating an unmanageable capability of destruction. Materialism in political philosophy must find expression in a re-evaluation of the potential values, capabilities and needs which our material culture makes possible, and in an application of these to political, social and ethical ideals. The purpose is to find means to redirect our social development within the conditions we have created, restricted neither by obsolete political ideals and practices, nor by dominant technological and economic interests, but equally careful to conserve or reclaim values and practices we already have which may augment the capacity for self-development of people everywhere in the world. Materialism's most urgent task, then, is to challenge the prerogatives of the technology, the organisations, the values and the purposes of Western industrial affluence.

Materialism cannot deny non-material needs and values. But it does regard them primarily as functions of material processes — above all of the economic systems creating, distributing and consuming material resources. Consequently it disparages idealistic values in social analysis, and holds that both the subject and methodology of social science is the explanation of how material needs arise, how they are met and how this is reflected and evaluated in social relations and thought.[1] Ideals are to be

[1] G Plekhanov: 'The Materialist Conception of History', in G Plekhanov: Fundamental Problems of Marxism, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1969, pi 10.

VI. Conclusion

Proudhonist materialism is a potentially coherent doctrine. It is inadequate as such to modern society and revolutions, perhaps, but yet it is a basis for re-interpreting both existing social orders and revolutionary purposes and means so as to avoid the simplicities and extremes which have so often disfigured revolutionary doctrines. Indeed, even the inconsistencies straining the tolerance of Proudhon's diversity of values can be taken as a virtue precisely for the modesty they impose on revolutionary philosophy, to keep it from passing judgement on things outside its competence, to make it respect a reality vastly more multifarious than revolution or social thought can ever be. It is true of course that much of the diversity Proudhon sees in society and builds into his philosophy are merely arbitrary rational categories which in reality may either not exist or not be able to coexist in the equilibrium of antinomies on which he bases his ethics. This is what strikes Marx most forcefully about Proudhon, and why he dismisses him as inconsequential.

"Indeed, from the moment the process of the dialectic movement is reduced to the simple process of opposing good to bad, of posing problems tending to eliminate the bad, and of administering one category as an antidote to another, the categories are deprived of all spontaneity, the idea ceases to function; there is no life left in it… There is no longer any dialectics, but only, at the most, absolutely pure morality."[1]

Marx may be largely right about Proudhon's method, and also about many of his analyses and proposals. But he misses the point.

[1] K Marx: The Poverty of Philosophy, International Publishers, New York, 1973, pp113-114.

ethical role and practicability in small-scale economic opposition to the ruling order is growing.

articulated by this means, and not by utopias of logic, theology or imagination. This does not mean that materialist or acquisitive values are considered the best motives for personal behaviour or collective political purpose, although many materialisms indeed end here. Socialist theory has, in principle at least, distinguished materialist social analysis from bourgeois values of personal and social acquisition,[2] and Cornforth stresses that material needs must be met artistically, which presumes that people cease relating to each other by material and especially acquisitive values.[3] Nevertheless, such 'bourgeois' materialism is an important aspect of materialism as a whole, and constitutes a very visible part of most peoples' daily lives. It greatly influences their disposition to see justice or injustice as prevailing in society and their estimation of society's future prospects.

This tension between systematic social analysis and the intrusion of acquisition, whether personal or collective, as the main or even sole purpose of society, is a dissonant factor in materialism, impelling it towards idealism in its political doctrines, and particularly towards the idealisation of materially successful or expansionary social systems. Analysis and critique of real conditions do not always coincide.

As a doctrine above all of private or personal property, Proudhonism is particularly beset by this tension. Therein lies its continuing importance to revolutionary philosophy. Proudhonism treats society as a whole, with specific ethical and functional needs and attributes, but its ethical focus nevertheless is on the individual person and small groups as the realm of liberty and autonomy, and ultimately as the real essence of society. Thus, while Proudhonism cannot deal effectively with many of the problems raised

[2] A Eskola, el al. 'Marxilainen Tutkimus' (Marxist Research) in R Alapuro, M Alestalo & E Haavio-Mannila, ed: Suomalaisen sosiologian juuret (The roots of Finnish sociology) Werner Soderstrom, Provoo 1973, pp202-203.

[3] M Cornforth: Communism and Human Values, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1972, p35.

by or resulting in Marxism, for example, it does perhaps, more strongly than Marxism, stimulate a materialist critique of society for idealistic and ethical purposes. It is potentially a more radical challenge to over-developed industrial societies because it more openly applies materialism to transcend materialist, or economic imperatives. This claim for Proudhon does not of course clarify his relationship to Marx. But nevertheless it does indicate the frequently neglected, relative non-comparability of their thought. Rather than foreshadowing Marx and his historically predictive doctrine, in which present ethical problems are regarded mostly as inadequacies in current history, Proudhon really continues Rousseau's inquiry into conflicts inherent in the notion and fact of society itself, however structured. Thus, while Proudhon at least begins with materialism, in that the existing form of society determines its problems and potentials, his purpose is to resolve Rousseau's problem: what ideal values are necessary to moderate or eliminate the conflict between society and the individual person as an ethical quantity preceding any given social formation and yet impossible outside society. This paradoxical quality in Proudhon's thought does not make for a clear or consistent doctrine. Nevertheless, Proudhon's materialism is sufficiently consistent to share materialism's three outstanding virtues as a perspective of political philosophy. First, materialism is a bridge between the heurism of philosophy and the social facts which people directly experience. It can make philosophy both comprehensible and useable to people who are not philosophers. Although materialism may be exceedingly abstract, nonetheless it concentrates on the development and satisfaction of needs comprehended in one way or another by everybody. It can give people a theory of how and why social structures constrain them, and of what their own latitudes are. It both specifies the conflicts which limit autonomy, and suggests guidelines for the actual extension of autonomy in the real facts of these conflicts. For Proudhon, this relationship is the bedrock of all social reflection and action, which he equates.

him in such clear-cut matters. Anarchism is rational, and therefore inevitable, because it expresses the true nature of society and man, both stimulating and reflecting it.

"Anarchy is, if I may be permitted to put it this way, a form of government or constitution in which public and private consciousness, formed through the development of science and law, is alone sufficient to maintain order and guarantee all liberties."[22]

Which of these functions is the stronger, anarchism as the guarantee of liberties, or as the result of their realisation, is not clear in Proudhon. This shows the extent to which he shares the perennial weakness of anarchist thought, in seeking to solve problems by pretending that they do not exist or are not necessary. Nevertheless, as an ethical ideal to stimulate allegiance to the social principles, and pursue them in conditions where social pressures weigh against them, Proudhon's notion of anarchism is consistent with the main elements of his doctrine, and indeed necessary to them if they are to be an effective revolutionary doctrine.

In fact, however, anarchism need no longer rely very much on Proudhon in defence of its ideals, because it has more direct political relevance than he grants it. Yet Proudhon's statement is not obsolete, if only because he stresses the close correlation between authoritarian political structures and less obvious authoritarianism in other social structures nominally outside politics. He indicates the elements of a social ethics which can extend opposition to authoritarianism beyond the systems where it is usually challenged and where it can most easily defend itself. Despite his rationalism, he also describes some practical means for moving towards anarchism, apart from the aggregation of anarchist attitudes among individual persons, a force not to be underrated. As a whole, these practical means, mostly connected with the organisation of mutualism, are not commensurable to modern social problems. But their

[22] ibid p92.

of mutualism, equity and possession, and of the falseness of any other claim to authority or obligation. To Proudhon, anarchism is above all an ethical attitude. He does not regard it as a utopian dream or as a doctrine immediately displacing ruling institutions. It is quite simply the only response a person can make to society once the rational principles are accepted. Once people have adopted anarchism as the form of ethical social obligation, they must then begin to express it, not as a declaration of egotism or self-interest, but as submission to the obligations of cooperation with other persons similarly loyal to the principles, however and wherever they can be pursued. Thus anarchism is a means of development, even though Proudhon, in contrast to subsequent anarchist thought, regards it as a result of development more than as a mode of opposition. Because it admits as just only that authority based on the voluntary cooperation of people in meeting needs as they themselves define them, and because the spread of possessive rights and mutualist economic interests disperses authority throughout society, anarchism implies the contraction of authority, although not of obligation and the constraints it may impose. Authority becomes communal or federal. Thus the extent of centralised authority more or less dependent on power indicates the extent of the erroneousness of governing principles, and the extent of anarchy indicates the extent to which society approaches a natural order and the best potentials of human nature.[20]

Anarchism, then, is both an urge towards moral improvement and the science of society, 'a marriage of reason and social practice', neither utopia nor blind routine nor submission, but rather the rational and practical acceptance of material laws and their ethical functions.[21] The whole of Proudhon's fervent rationalism is apparent here, showing his reliance on definitions in order to prove values and his faith that all people must perforce agree with

[20] Proudhon: Property, pp271-280.

[21] Proudhon: Selected Writings, p56.

"For there to be action, whether physical, intellectual or moral, there must be some ground that exists in relation to the acting subject, a non-self that confronts the self as ground and subject of action, and that resists and opposes the acting self. Action, therefore, is a struggle. To act is to fight."[4]

Whether this be in war, say, or in more developed, humane and progressive forms primarily creative labour as Proudhon envisages it— the epistemological effect is the same. By struggling to act intentionally, a person will come to see the truth of innate laws of reality, which both restrict intentions and make them possible. Action of any kind is philosophy. The founding of political philosophy on this practical, existential and intellectually expansive basis is necessary if it is to be democratic in the sense of not being alienated from people's real experiences. Secondly, materialism can bridge the gap between predictive theory and politics or social action. Predictive theory is the projection of casual explanations into the future in order to control forces which at present do not fully exist.

Politics is, or can be, the effort to create intentionally those forces, and the means to control them, within the constraints imposed by existing structures. By holding that it explains what must happen, and often also what ought to happen, on the basis of what has and is happening, materialism claims to be able to discern the future in the present and to explain how to get there. Of course it fails in this, but not so badly as to disallow entirely its avowed aim to make future society more faithfully serve material needs than does the existing one, and material needs more completely represent human potential than do existing ones. Proudhon makes this future-oriented function explicit when he contrasts capitalist political economy with its abuses of people and truth for blind self-interests, to socialism, with its ideal of remaking society by replac-

[4] P-J Proudhon: Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, S Edwards, ed, Macmillan, London,1970, p204.

ing property rights and egotism with property obligations, association and communism.

**"It is not to self-sacrifice and humanity that we must look for social betterment; the happiness of society can be increased only through the organisation of work and justice."*[5]

Throughout his writings, Proudhon attacks the chaos imposed on society and social thought, principles and ethics by the institutions of capitalist property and its adjuncts, the state and big industry. These, he argues, make progress to a better future impossible because they organise the present on incorrect principles. This is by no means a satisfactory method of social criticism and is historically dubious besides. But it is one way of applying ideals to political exigencies and it does reflect materialism's persistent hostility to institutions and ideas which prevent existing potentials from being realised, which stunt creative capabilities or force them to serve ruling interests. It demonstrates materialism's belief that social capacities can increase in response to real problems. In this Proudhon is supported for example by Durkheim, who contrasts socialism as the public organisation of economic functions for future development, to welfare charity, which, by protecting persons who have ceased to be economically useful, serves merely to maintain an unsatisfactory, stagnant status quo.[6] Plekhanov likewise stresses materialism's synthetic functions in social analysis, as a means of dealing with problems seemingly unmanageable within ruling liberal ideologies.

"There is not, nor can there be, a method that can remove at one stroke all the difficulties arising in a science. The important thing is that it is incomparably easier for the materialist explanation of

[5] P-J Proudhon: 'Political Economy and Utopian Socialism', in V F Calverton, ed: The Making of Society, The Modern Library, New York, 1937, pp274, 279.

[6] E Durkheim: Selected Writings, A Giddens, ed, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, pp162-164.

federalism is equally applicable to states as a critique of their real or claimed virtues in tolerating or encouraging the other values Proudhonist federalism seeks to further. To Proudhon, real federalism cannot result in just another state. He is suggesting instead the principles of a state which will emerge from society when it has already been substantially transformed. The nature of the state is a function, not a cause of the nature of society. The transformation of society must occur in those systems where its real essence lies, in the materialist processes of mutualism, equality, justice and possession.

Federalism, then, is not only a means of ethical analysis, but also a political measure of society's stage of development, and not really a means of developing it. The attractions of state power are disparaged and opposition to the state, in ways it can not easily suppress or co-opt, is encouraged. While the problems which conventionally concern federal theorists are not unimportant, they are not the problems to which Proudhonism is addressed. It is true that Proudhon regards federalism as a principle of government; it is more striking that his account of sustained, or even continuous revolution is in fact the only explicit form he gives it. Federalism becomes the dispersal of autonomous opposition, developing mutual obligations irrespective of the formal state structure. This notion of federalism is prominent in most collectivist anarchist thought on the gradual revolution of parallel structures. Proudhonist federalism is potentially a model for an alternative system of political opposition, a socially responsible and democratic revolutionary movement not given to the vices of violence and centralisation.

A similar principle but more active in transforming society because it is a condition of persons rather than of institutions, is anarchism. As an inevitable consequence of the realisation of the social principles described above, anarchism is the indicator of intellectual development, both in the individual person and in society, to the extent that it tolerates, encourages and gives scope to persons to act anarchistically. It is the rational recognition of the principles

error of his account of the rights of possession: he ignores the variety of different kinds of authority in society, and so their different kinds of relationships and the probable need for some superordinate authority to relate them. Secondly, he never adequately treats the problem of how a federal state is to impose a moral principle which he admits cannot be sustained by material processes alone, without acquiring the material and symbolic independence from society which he expressly denies it. He assumes too readily that federalism's apparent benefits will suffice for its legitimacy, but he fails to provide for its durability in cases of failure, which no realistic doctrine must fail to do. By making federalism a political ethics rather than a real political doctrine, he simply evades the problems which in the end determine the viability of the ethics. Friedrich, for example, denies that Proudhon is even talking about federalism, since he subordinates the centre to the units to which alone accrues citizenship and obligations, in contrast to real federalism in which people are direct members of both the federal centre and the constituent parts, with independent obligations to both.[19] Since Proudhon does not allow a separate political role to people, such a view of federalism and the conventional political values on which it is based is impossible for him.

Given the reality of politics in society, this is obviously a grave flaw in Proudhonism. Yet it is a noteworthy restraint on faith in the formal political processes, and in this way contributes to the doctrinal need for revolutionary philosophy. Proudhon's value of federalism has a germ of great truth for radical philosophy, exactly because it does question the reality of federalism in nominally federal states, which are nonetheless governed by centralised economic, administrative and military systems wholly or in large part outside the formal constraints imposed by the institutional structure. By Proudhonist values, indeed, there are no real federal states, so that

[19] J Friedrich: Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice, Frederick A Praeger, New York, 1968, pp17-26.

history to cope with them than it is for the idealist or the eclectic explanation."[7]

Thus materialism is pragmatic, flexible and experimental, even when disfigured by the dogma no less characteristic of Proudhonism than of Marxism. Thirdly, materialism is universal. It holds that the differences among societies are merely different ways of meeting needs common to all social life. Where there are individual or collective differences in needs, this means either that there are empirical differences in material environments which are nevertheless analytically commensurable in a theory postulating certain casual relationships between the environment and social structures, or that societies satisfy some needs better than others, thereby creating unequally distributed minimums within the same social order. In the first case the purpose is an analytical evaluation of levels of development and directions of change. In the second case the purpose is clearly ethical condemnation and social action. In both cases, despite the obvious risks of assuming as universally valid values and institutions which are not, materialism's relatively universal theories of causation can compare the viability of social orders and the validity of their ruling ethics more critically and comprehensively than can theories which teleologically evaluate societies in terms of the purposes defined by their elites, as idealistic doctrines typically do. Thus materialism's universalism stimulates opposition, or at least dissatisfaction and does not at all displace particularistic values. As Plekhanov describes it, when the social order dispossesses a section of society, the dispossessed, and ultimately the whole society, will become conscious of this, its causes and its remedies, just as if one's shoes were too tight. This optimism may frequently be too sanguine and in any event is not sufficient for the emergence of demands for social change. But it is a necessary precondition of it, and one of its functions.[8] Materialism,

[7] Plekhanov: Fundamental Problems of Marxism, p79.
[8] ibid pp126-127.

then, tends to be oppositional and egalitarian in its distribution of values because universalism is innately hostile to the ethnic, national and other distinctions associated with inequality. Proudhon is perhaps most confused in this respect. He all too frequently confuses materialism with particularistic moralism. Yet his moralism is intrinsically universal and is firmly based in materialist values of social order, in opposition to ruling orders. He argues that when justice is separated from economics, as in capitalism, then virtue and good faith in society are impossible because the apparently compulsory pursuit of self-interest overwhelms more real collective interests and values. The result is the destruction of human dignity as an inalienable right, by making it a function of the distribution of status and not the reality of each person as he or she might be.[9] This is a universal value, both in the manifold social structures which can express it and in the minimum material preconditions for its realisation despite all structural and cultural differences. Proudhon's stress on possession is admittedly only one aspect of economic processes and often his analysis does not justify the generalisations he draws from it. But possession and its governing conditions and ethics are in fact the source of values by which all economic interests are in the end measured. The ethical universalism in Proudhonism is therefore one foundation for a comparative critique of all societies which still take account of the particular contingencies of their material cultures. As a particularistic critique of our industrial societies, Proudhonism rejects the search for dignity, self-identity or collective purpose through insatiable acquisition or consumption, which usually leads only to compulsive and ultimately unsuccessful compensation for the lack of authenticity and autonomy in personal lives, and to authoritarianism in politics.[10] Conventional Marxism often makes this accusation

[9] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp52-53…

[10] K Ottomeyer: 'Identiteetin muotoutuminen ja kriisi kapitalismin arkipaivassa' (Identity formation and crisis in the everyday life of capitalism) Sosiologia, 2, 1979, Helsinki, pp124-125.

equality of labour and possession, must fail. Such a failure not only jeopardises mutualism as a viable principle, but also the principles it is supposed to further. Throughout, this lack of concern for the conflicts generated in his own ideal systems is one of the serious faults in Proudhon's writings as in all anarchist thought.

Federalism is the political form of mutualism. It is the organisation of the social contract, a compact among autonomous social units to create a structure that will meet their common needs without imposing its own needs on them. Proudhon sees a federal government as becoming ever more functional and specialised, intense but limited in its operations, directed exclusively to the general material needs of its units, to the administration of the mutualist principle of commutative justice.[17] It will be a channel for exchange and communication, and neither produce nor consume directly, nor have any independent symbolic, ethical or aggregative functions. Federalism is to Proudhon nothing less than the dispersal of government to wherever in society its specific functions are located, with little left at the centre save minimal tasks of coordination. The striking similarity of this to Lenin's vision of government as book-keeping[18] indicates that Proudhon is not talking about federalism as a form of government in the conventional sense, but as an alternative to government. For two main reasons, apart from the defects of mutualism generally, this cannot be taken as a real model. First, Proudhon is never clear about the nature of the federal units, whether they should be regional, local, familial, communal, functional, or composed of co-operatives and other economic undertakings. He takes federalism simply as a model of ideal relations between society and dispersed authority, rather than, as federalist theory usually has done, as an institutional structure among similar authorities in order to create a superior one. Proudhon repeats the

[17] ibid pp102-113.

[18] V I Lenin: Valtio ja vallankumous (State and Revolution) Kansankulttuuri, Helsinki, 1972, pp54-67, 112–121.

More serious, because it is a more notable part of his doctrine, is Proudhon's faith in contracts as the only kind of relationship capable of creating equality, autonomy and justice. Here again, Durkheim's remarks are directed to the condition Proudhon aims to supplant without his own doctrine proving how it could avoid the same defects. Durkheim rejects contractual relationships as a primary source of obligations, that is, precisely the function Proudhon attributes foremost to them. Contracts presume a social order governing the conditions of their scope and validity. Even the most instrumental of contracts has non contractual elements which must derive from another source, and without which no contract has any basis for enforcement save power, and thus no ethical substance.[15] Proudhonism can be defended by saying that contractual relations are simply the instruments of already accepted principles governing the rest of society, although this somewhat contradicts Proudhon's own claim that contracts themselves can create the principles by replacing authority and law with mutual obligations and co-operation.[16] Indeed, there is some substance to this claim, insofar as contracts are used to enlarge the scope of collective opposition to coercive authority, which may both reflect the conditions of mutualism and help to propagate the values associated with it.

But the fact remains that contracts have little scope for altering prevailing values because they are dependent on ruling institutions. Mutualism in its ideal form, as Proudhon states it, can survive no other mode of regulation save the consensus of self-interests through contractual exchanges, precisely the kind of process Durkheim argues with good reasons to be impossible to square with social ethics. Insofar as Durkheim is right, then, the main purpose of mutualism, or the organisation of distributive and commutative justice through the ethics of fair exchange based on the

[15] ibid pp92-103.

[16] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp96-99, 105–107

against various doctrines of possessive materialism. And it is often right, at least in respect of the social movements which have from time to time claimed descent from Proudhonism or been labelled by their apparent affinity with it. Proudhonism is unbalanced in many respects, but still it does aim to reconstitute a fragmented social and ethical order, and it expressly eschews crude materialist acquisition as the basis for human dignity, social knowledge or collective justice. It is not a panacea. It is anarchism, and anarchism is too profound and difficult an attitude to society to partake of the arcane simplicities brewed, for example, by Marxism or other materialisms which equate progress with material growth.

The virtues of materialism are invaluable to revolutionary political philosophy. But materialism is not equivalent to philosophy and we must be careful not to rely too much on it. The simplicity that gives materialism its virtues also gives it an overwhelming defect. It is reductionist.[11] It tends to raise consistency, utility and universality above all other ideals, which may survive precisely because they are not so instrumental or comprehensive. Its explanations tend to fuse all causes into one, and all kinds of knowledge into one explanatory system, with the implicit or explicit assumption that this knowledge can be socially controlled, and that the increase of social control is necessarily good. Social particularism is not the same as inequality, which materialism tends to assume, nor are functional differences in needs and ways of meeting them merely apparent and transitory.

Materialism in fact tends to universalise not so much needs as the ideal that needs must be satisfied in some specific way, and it often seems willing to reduce all the differences among societies, social groups and people to this ideal. The Marxist concept of social formation as an analytical evaluation of the stage of a society's material development and thus of its most appropriate structural forms, is often defended explicitly as a means of simplifying the

[11] G Leff: The Tyranny of Concepts, The Merlin Press, London, 1969, pl91.

control of social causation and planning. It shifts the focus of collective capacity from the groups, ideologies and other things people may believe in to the more simple instrumentalities of economic systems, where rational planning seems to have better prospects, and where it is justified because of the a priori assumption that these systems are scientifically proved to be the source of all other values.[12] In short, it reduces values to a means of economic and social control. Of course, social planning and rationality are important and are going to become more so on a scale exceeding existing nation-state structures. Proudhon recognises this, or can be interpreted to do so. He expressly accuses a social order based on capitalist property and the national state of being incompetent to plan rationally. But materialism errs — Proudhonism to some degree and Marxism to an excessive degree — in holding that the goals of planning, the purposes of social science and the evaluation of values are already known and scientifically proved. When this is believed, then all social thought is reduced to what Juntunen and Mehtonen call, "service to socal technology", a concern with means as technical rationality to a final truth, exclusive of normative reflection, doubt and uncertainty.[13] They make this charge against empirical neo-positivism and 'bourgeois' social science in general, and it is often true. It is no less true of Marxism, particularly when it is a ruling ideology. There is considerable danger of its being true even with such an ethical materialism as Proudhon's. He often fails to perceive the class particularity of values and interests which he takes as universally valid and proves to be so by demonstrating their validity for particular classes or groups, or their viability only in similar conditions, which he then takes as a necessary, possible and sometimes inevitable good for all societies. His whole economic doctrine of local self-sufficiency suffers from this kind

[12] M Juntunen & L Mehtonen: Ihmistieteiden filosofiset perusteet (The philosophical foundations of the human sciences) Gummerus, Jyvaskyla, 1977, pp64-71.

[13] ibid pp115-116

of co-operation for the satisfaction of collective needs and the realisation of responsible autonomy in the use of resources for the common good. Obviously, then, the value of mutualism exceeds mere commercial criteria. It is Proudhon's main device for applying ethics to commerce, to deprive commercial interests of any independent status opposed to or outside of social values.

Thus, despite the fact that Proudhon bases his account of mutualism on two dubious premises when taken as self-sufficient values in themselves, namely collectively obligatory self-interest and free equitable contracts, mutualism as a whole retains its function as a practical critique of the simplification of social relationships and purposes to the narrow dimensions of exchange for profit characteristic of capitalism, or of increased production characteristic of state socialism. It is a critique in short of commodity reification. Just how the errors of interest and contract invalidate mutualism even in this respect is a matter for further consideration. Durkheim's rejection of interests and material interests especially as a viable social bond, because they are ephemeral, ethically external or non-committal, expressing conflict more than solidarity and inconsistent among themselves,[14] is certainly true of the commercial structure Proudhon condemns. Yet he fails to explain how mutualism, itself a form of market economy, would engender anything different. Of course, if the obligations of possession were actually realised, exchange would indeed have different purposes and express different values. The value of mutualism can not prove this, but it might follow from it as a mode of commerce expressing a different ethics of society. How effective it might be as a mode of economic opposition in existing society is thus questionable, not disproved by Proudhonism's own actual failures to date, but not much encouraged by them either.

[14] E Durkheim: On Morality and Society, R N Bellah, ed. University of Chicago Press Chicago, 1973, pp87-90.

justice, it is also a means of pursuing justice in an unjust society. Proudhon sees the scope of the problem here, even if he does not tackle its main aspect: how are the exchangeable values to be defined so that some sort of equity is calculable, let alone agreeable. He does indeed suggest various techniques for this, but they do not add up to a workable system, and they are all subject to the abuse of property, accumulation and speculation. Perhaps the main problem is that mutualism, even as a mode of economic co-operation, still depends on competition, particularly in defining the terms of trade among the co-operative units. As mentioned above, the contradictions between the solidaristic obligations of mutualism and the centralising, stratifying and divisive functions of competition remain unsolved, save in an appeal to ethical rationality. But the overall ethics of mutualism can still be applied, if only as a counterpoint to the inevitable conflict of self-interests in any voluntary or non-coercive exchange system. This ethics has at its heart that no exchange of anything be founded on unequal power or need, or be agreed to in the absence of equally plausible and advantageous alternatives for all the parties involved. Anything that does not measure up to these conditions of mutualist exchange, that is, conditions of autonomy, knowledge, common social purpose and equality, is exploitation or theft, and can be traced inevitably back to the misuse of property and leads inevitably to it.

While there is no one best organisational form for mutualism in all productive systems, the requirements of liberty, willingness, equity and knowledge mean that the participating units must be as small as possible, in order to avoid any internal stratification which exclude some of their members from full rights in exchange. Mutualism requires not only the equality of exchanged values, but also the equality of the participants, their purposes in the exchange and their benefit from it.[13] The reason for this is that exchange is not just a form of distributive justice. It is first and foremost a mode

[13] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp61-63ff.

of circularity, which is typical of most attempts to prove dogma true by forcing reality to comply with it. Social life is too vast to be planned as a scientific process. If social science and philosophy are used only in this way, to render the environment and people subject to ever greater control, the values and laws they postulate will be oppressive and nescient. They will not liberate, but enslave.[14] Thus the dialectic in materialism is between its function as radical critique and its function as reductionism to some kind of control. Proudhonism faces up to this contradiction more honestly than Marxism and other materialist or economist doctrines, firstly by explicitly opposing any authority save that emergent in collective and individual autonomy, and secondly by lacking any clear programme of economic organisation. Proudhon devises such models profusely, under such various names as associationalism, mutualism, liberty and the like. But they all lack, fortunately perhaps, the ruthless practicality already emerging in Marx and brought to a head by Lenin and the Soviet state. Thus Proudhon's materialism retains a critical-ethical capacity never very strong in Marxism or other materialisms, and long lost to most of them in their current guises. In Winter's words:

**"The damage done to persons and society by the imposition of economic models on social morals in Western society during the past century is sufficient warning of the inadequacy of these models for direct application to social policy. From this perspective it is evident that such models introduce greater and greater distortions as they are extended to higher levels of social and political organisation. Nevertheless, the basic value of equality of access and balance of exchange formulates a fundamental value of social justice; so far as the norm of equal access to resources, opportunities and

[14] G Winter: Elements for a Social Ethic, The Macmillan Co, New York, 1968, p9.

the conditions of life can be systematised in a society, the ground has been laid for a more just order."*[15]

This is the task Proudhonism openly sets itself, and the challenge facing it and the whole of revolutionary political philosophy. The task is to redefine not only the nature, rights and obligations of property and usufruct, but also all the collective values and institutions related to different kinds of property, not least the location and rights of authority, opposition and autonomy. Proudhonist materialism aims at a clarification of the conditions of possession or usufruct, which are held to be either the sum of social liberties, or of social abuses. The processes which alter these conditions are taken to be the predominant causal forces in society, so that their adequate explanation and control is equivalent to adequate social knowledge and rationality. They can be made subject to free collective control and conducive to social rights if the basic truths of property, as Proudhon holds them to be, are admitted and acted on. His truths may not be basic to us, they may not even be true, and certainly they are not epistemologically adequate or universally valid as he claims. But that need not deter us. They may be both applicable and ethical, and all revolutionary philosophy need do is show that the values and ethics in Proudhon's materialism are beneficial to our other values and needs and that this benefit equals or surpasses the benefits of other doctrines in one way or another. Proudhon need not, indeed cannot be taken on his own terms, nor to the exclusion of other doctrines. Some confusion about the relationship of Proudhon to radical critical thought is due to the fact that he apparently starts from an assumption dear to the morality and economics of liberal capitalism: individual possession. But the similarity is deceptive, because his account of the purposes and functions of possession implies values hostile to liberalism. Proudhon defines individual possession as the measure of all social development, and he equates it with equality and justice.

[15] ibid pp238-239.

tions structuring the equilibrium of antinomies can not depend on a claim to scientific truth or historical necessity, or on the emotions and symbols representing such claims in politics. They can depend only on rationalist and calculated self-interests perceived within the context of the obligations to collective social ethics which make self-interests possible.

This approach to social formations has been one of the besetting weaknesses in anarchism's struggle with authority and competing doctrines, because no better than Proudhon has it devised a way of either restricting self-interests to obligations without resulting in their nullification, or of articulating an ideology which would non-coercively define self-interests as collective obligations. But this approach is no less an ethical strength. It not only raises the two above-mentioned problems, but it also demands both an extremely open and democratic articulation of values, goals and means, and social institutions small enough to stimulate and utilise such processes of generating collective purposes and meanings. The contingent principles structuring antinomies have these characteristics in common. Proudhon defines them as mutualism, federalism and anarchism, which express economics, politics and intelligence respectively.

Mutualism, whose intricacies are unnecessary to dissect here, is the organisation of equitable exchange among autonomous, generally self-sufficient economic units, which of course vary with the system in question. It is the main principle of commerce, defined by Proudhon as the free, willing, responsible and knowledg- able exchange of equal values.[12] Mutualism is a condition of justice and liberty since all the values and institutions Proudhon has established as necessary to justice and liberty could co-exist only if governed by a principle and system of exchange equally binding on and relevant to them all. He has faith that mutualism can do this, or at least can lay the foundations for it, so that not only is it a condition of

[12] Proudhon: Property, pp133-134.

implies two incompatible rights, in re and ad rem, either of whose realisation leads to structures hostile or incompatible with the realisation of the other, and yet each justified as the basis of social relations of property if the other is realised. Proudhon never openly admits the implications of this view, which might be the impossibility of any satisfactory or ethically durable property system, and therefore the impossibility of the principles predicated on one. But he nonetheless correctly sees the role of moral norms, themselves antinomical, as the means of tempering property's anti-social or unrealistic tendencies in seeking to expand either of its basic rights, and of j seeking to realise jus ad rem in a re-interpretation of jus in re. He is aware that the tension between them will persist and must be managed by ethical solidarity and functional obligations rather than by external power. Justice is this kind of reconciliation, which is why it is so hard to achieve.[11] The equilibrium of antinomies thus is a mechanism for development to the extent that at any given moment they are held to be unbalanced, even if the ideal behind them is static.

The notion of antinomies reveals how rationalist Proudhon's approach is. However much he claims them to be a reflection of natural laws and objective social principles, they are in fact interpretations of reality's different aspects or social meanings. He seems to accept the definitions of reality by rational thought as sufficient foundation for reality, not just as it is experienced, but as it really is and must appear to all rational thought. Yet he does not investigate the conditions or inadequacies of rational thought, even though his whole system admits the inevitability, indeed desirability of conflicting rationalities. As an epistemology, the equilibrium of antinomies obviously cannot claim any of the systematic rigour claimed for Marxist dialectics. In a way Proudhon admits this in the importance he attaches throughout to practical social consciousness and moral reflection. A result of this is that the social forma-

[11] ibid pp240ff.

All the forces inhibiting or corrupting it are both scientifically and ethically wrong, an obstacle to the natural progress of society.[16] But he does not equate individual possession with ownership, or with rights against society or preceding any given form of social order. Contrary to liberalism, possession is the result of proper social knowledge and morality, not their progenitor. There are, in Proudhonist materialism, three persistent themes which at every point define its purpose, and which, as Woodcock argues, lead to a radical critique of society. They are egalitarianism, the evils and irrationality of accumulated, maldistributed property and immanent justice as a result of a correct ordering of material relationships and purposes.[17] Kropotkin likewise, who sees in Proudhon pre-eminently an ethicist, regards these themes as the most crucial and valuable in his thought.

Kropotkin holds that Proudhon bases all morality on the notion of justice, justice on equity and equity on human dignity, which is inalienable, absolute and obligatory among people irrespective of their relationships or the duties imposed on them by any social order or ruling elite.[18] Because each person can establish autonomy in society only through some kind of possession, equity must necessarily have an economic base, which means 'mutuality of service' without subordination, in place of all the restrictions of competition, inheritance or any other kind of hierarchy. Given the conditions of equity, imminent justice or the proper ordering of things will gradually spread to all dimensions of social life. Thus justice is not only a restraint on social power, in its dependence on equity or egalitarianism; it is above all a creative force, the cause of ethical social relationships.[19] Proudhonism is materialist primarily in its

[16] P-J Proudhon: What is Property? Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1970, p285 & passim.

[17] G Woodcock: Anarchism, Penguin Books, 1962, ppl04ff.

[18] P Kropotkin: Ethics: Origin and Development, Prism Press, Dorchester, nd pp268- 270.

[19] ibid pp276-277.

account of the functions of social ethics, but not in their substance or purpose. Proudhon seeks to define sufficient possession, first in the certainty of productive survival and thereafter in the degree of creative capacity, defined as each person's ability to contribute to the creation of those values implied by equity, justice and human dignity. This is a far cry indeed from the one-dimensionality of acquisition and consumption, and from economic growth as an end in itself and a precondition of all other ends. It is in fact a denial of economic prerogatives unless they can be shown to be functional in ethical terms. More importantly, it is a refusal to recognise the obligation to submit to any authority which rests on or imposes compulsion to contribute to economic processes incompatible with the principles of equity, justice and dignity, and productive of maldistributed, accumulated property. Proudhon does not regard individual possession as a virtue or end in itself, nor even as the outcome of a just social order. It is the foundation of society properly ordered, but in a properly ordered society so much altered by other values, obligations and rights, as to be notionally non-commensurable with any existing structure of property or possession. His ethics of justice presume a condition in which minimum needs, which of course may vary with the nature of the material culture, are satisfied as equally as possible and in which surplus possession allowing creativity beyond mere survival is also equitably distributed, freely exchanged and responsibly used. As Plamenatz points out, Proudhon assumes that development will multiply people's needs and the means for satisfying them, which in turn will enhance the need for peaceful collaboration and cohesion, and prove the truth of non-authoritarian, egalitarian values, (all of which characterises fairly the emerging needs and demands of the new international economic order). Consequently, Proudhon usually sees collective, social possession of productive property as the necessary condition of individual possession. The purposes of possession, therefore, are to be found in the structure and nature of

moderation and compatibility of different ways of interpreting and acting in the world.

To conceptualise this and make it consistent with his notion of objective reality, he employs the concept of antinomy, or two correct but contradictory lines of reasoning about the same thing. The contingent principle is their balancing or equilibrium in the composition of truth, or at least a practical version of it. The equilibrium of antinomies means sometimes the coexistence of two incompatible things, sometimes incompatible aspects of the same thing, but in all cases a working towards reconciliation in which both sides persist, rather than a synthesis in which both disappear. Dialectics is thus, to Proudhon, the existence of irresolvable but not unendurable antinomies: conflicts among moral ideas, between morality and material processes, between society and political authority, among incompatible tendencies of any social condition, and so on. The function of the equilibrium, which he holds to be as much a product of human will as of natural law, is not development in the Marxist sense of dialectics, but justice, which is the co-existence of independent opposites each balancing and moderating the others.[10] This does not prevent him from making judgments about desirable states of affairs, but it does keep him from the error of holding any specific desirability to preclude related but contradictory desirabilities, the error of final solutions. This model clearly underlies his view of authority, specifically the absence of any sovereignty which seeks to resolve all conflicts or contain them in itself. Anticipating subsequent anarchist thought, Proudhon in part argues the case for extensive autonomy throughout society precisely as the only means of preserving liberty in the face of conflicts whose practical and ethical settlement would perforce be artificial and coercive. Thus the equilibrium of antinomies is not a device for evading moral choice, but of forcing oneself to make it without pretensions to finality. Property, for example, is antinomical in that it

[10] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp225-235.

its alternatives. This Proudhon does not do, at least not explicitly. Nevertheless, equality as an ideal value is indispensable to any attempt to found social principles and obligations on collective needs rather than on personal privileges or happenchance. This attempt is necessary given the density and complexity of modern social structure. Furthermore, although Proudhon discusses equality in the conventional manner as being an attribute of personal relationships, the collectivist and functionalist aspects of his doctrine, and specifically his analysis of autonomy and possession as preeminent economic values, lead to consideration of equality as a condition among social structures and functions. Such consideration is the starting point of any democratic critique of society, because it concerns both the institutional distribution of power and the legitimacy or otherwise of society's dominant interests, ideologies and value systems. To pursue this would demand greater depth of critical analysis than I have attempted in this essay. But it is an integral part of the doubts about the wisdom and durability of the specialisation of functions, knowledge and responsibilities which characterise our social order, in which social purposes, obligations and control become so fragmented by technological, organisational or elitist interests that only power remains a common factor.[9]

The other major contingent principles are different dimensions of equality. As mentioned above, Proudhon dislikes absolutes and dogma, despite his frequent recourse to natural law. Consequently he does not vest his doctrine with any sense of inevitability, apart from its self-evident rectitude, or with any easy vision of its realisation or maintenance. He is no millenarian. He does not think that even social principles rightly organised can abolish the tension between ethics and material reality, so that one of the functions of equality is to convey the value of proportionality, a sense of the

[9] H Wheeler: Democracy in a Revolutionary Era, Penguin Books, 1968, dd15-16 90–101

society as a whole, as an ethical unity equally responsible to each of its members.

An implication here, which Proudhon does not evade, is that possession and consumption must be restricted if they are to coexist with ethics and justice. They must be responsible to larger values. Unrestricted consumption and acquisition, at any level in society, are not responsible to anything except more acquisition and submission to any authority furthering this interest. So, in the end, Proudhon does return social ethics back to the individual — not as an antagonist to society as when property governs, but as a possessor within it, as a communist, to use the term Proudhon tentatively uses from time to time. It is in this kind of individualism that Proudhon's universalism finally lies, as indeed it must. The dominant values of Proudhonism are that progress is measured by the degree of autonomy contained in the possession of resources and products (whether by persons, social groups, societies or the world as a whole) and by the use of this autonomy to release people from powerless submission to oppressive authority and the undignified, destructive aimlessness of having too much or too little wealth. This cannot mean a proscription on the accumulation of wealth as such. Social progress without some kind of accumulation is inconceivable. But it does mean a prohibition on the accumulation of owned property, particularly as a predominant value, and on any acquisition by either individuals, social groups or society as a whole, which in any way interdicts the more profound principles of justice, equity and dignity. An examination of how Proudhon draws these distinctions is a rich mine of values for revolutionary philosophy.

II. Method

Proudhonism is not a systematic philosophy. It is not without a structure of course, but it is a structure of different kinds of philosophical, epistemological, theoretical and empirical observations glued together by a more or less arbitrary set of ethics. But as I have argued above, Proudhon is consistent in his concerns and his initial materialistic approach to society and ethics. His eclecticism does not wholly disallow the utility of his main method any more than of his ethical insights as a source of values for political philosophy. Indeed, because of Proudhonism's ultimate reliance on ethics, its value to revolution as a constraint on more dogmatic doctrines such as Marxism is all the greater, even if such ethics cannot be accepted, as Proudhon would have it be, as a declaration of natural law. In any case, Proudhonist materialism belongs to anarchism, and anarchism has always foresworn any dogmatic truth, and the ruthlessness accompanying it, as incompatible with freedom of action and search for social meaning.

Proudhonism is methodologically hermeneutic, if not ontologically consistent, then nevertheless straining towards what Proudhon calls ethical "proportionality", which is an element of practical consistency. Like hermeneutics in general, it starts with the assumption that cultural and social reality is permeated with variable meanings attributed to it by the people who experience it. Since these meanings are themselves part of objective reality, their investigation is on the one hand the beginning of social knowledge, and their conceptualisation and refinement is on the other hand the beginning of their interpretation, that is, participation in reality. From this follows practical action to develop the best potentials

Equality, then, is a dynamic principle, the narrowing of distances between extremes and the preventing of further accumulation. As a natural social principle, it is the basic condition of society, so that deviations from it must be explained and justified if possible. This contrasts with the prevailing view that equality is a distant and not altogether wholly desirable goal which must be justified. But to Proudhon equality takes ethical precedence over existing interests because it is the common denominator of all other social principles. This is why Kropotkin prefers the term equity to equality, somewhat against Proudhon's own usage,[7] since equity implies the equal claim to rights which may differ rather than the equal exercise of all rights by all persons, which is so unrealistic as to jeopardise all obligations and ethics. Furthermore, Proudhon's concern for the capacity of individual persons to show solidarity in refashioning society is shown in that, like Rousseau, he fears excellence because it weakens the sentiments of common obligation. Equality, he suggests, arises from the mean of intelligence and capability of the great majority of people whose conditions are the most typical of what society produces. It is therefore the only proper basis for material distribution, even if it can never be fully achieved.[8] In this sense he praises mediocrity: a mediocrity of well-being as a condition of moral and cultural progress.

Proudhon's case for equality obviously does not dispose of all the functions of some kinds of inequality. He does not consider the irrevelance of inequality to: many ethical precepts, nor the nature of the authority necessary for maintaining equality. These and similar questions unfortunately do not even occur to him, since equality is a natural law. This is absurd, of course; it is a social concept just like any other, and all cases for its necessity or inevitability or desirability have to be made on the grounds of the costs and benefits of its possible modes of social organisation in contrast to

[7] Kropotkin: op cit pp269ff.
[8] Proudhon: Selected Writings pp66-70.

attitude reflects some of Proudhon's philistinism, an inheritance perhaps from Rousseau, it also sets extremely high standards for the use of talent and for art and culture in general. In fact, any conception of the unequal merit of different social roles and the persons occupying them, which is so native to our notion of status and self-identity, is repugnant to him because it must corrupt the conditions of exchange in labour and the distribution of possession. All industries, professions, arts and labour are equally meritorious, given that they are used to enrich the culture. Payment for them must be equal because inequalities attributed to them are imaginary and non-obligatory.[5]

He does not suggest that this absolute equality can be achieved, and neither need we do, even if we accept it as an ethical standard to judge inequalities. It is an ideal which reality can only approach, and to approach it is equivalent to ethical development. Actually, he does not even accept the ideal fully. He condemns some social functions as expressions of a disordered society, without any natural necessity; and he recognises the ideal's practical limits imposed by other principles, above all autonomy. He sees that complete equality would deny that different functions involve different kinds of labour, education, capabilities, distribution of possession in respect of certain resources, and so on. But even here he always stresses the idea of difference as the source of specifically variable obligations and rights, rather than inequality as an accumulative social condition. He specifies that a hierarchy of functions, insofar as it is inevitable, in no way justifies inequality of dignity, material security or the capacity for fully autonomous participation in society. He redefines 'inequality of powers' as 'diversity of powers', and states that if functions in themselves are equal, so too are those who perform them, irrespective of their external attributes.[6]

[5] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp52, 69.
[6] Proudhon: Property, ppl30-132.

in these interpretations, and so to create new meanings and thereby influence the development of reality.[1] The development Proudhonism envisages is impelled by morality. But since this morality is directed towards an analysis of real material conditions, and depends on them for its reality, it is a mode of materialism.

In common, then, with many hermeneutic doctrines, if for different reasons, Proudhon tends to distrust politics as a means of establishing or communicating social meaning and ethics, because politics is necessarily founded on the unequal distribution of power. Thus, the outcome of political struggle usually augments authority and decreases the equality of participation in the creation of social meaning. Instead, Proudhon looks to economics as the means of social change and progress, because economics deals with the aspects of life which are immediately real and ethically comprehensible to everybody, where each person can directly experience the collective attribution of meanings to social phenomena. Proudhon's view of economics is considerably more political than that usually admitted to in liberal theory, so that his dislike of politics is, rightly enough, directed more to ruling political systems than to politics in an analytical sense. His faith in the existence of natural truth leads him to expect the ultimate emergence of self-evident economic and social principles of justice and equity,[2] an expectation we need not share with such certainty. Nevertheless, both the practices and the morality he prescribes imply the reduction of authoritarianism as a corollary of more democratic social knowledge. Surely this is desirable as a possible future, even if not the most probable. Proudhon's denigration of politics is exaggerated. But the greater weight is in his refusal to submit passively to the authority of ruling ideologies, particularly to the interests of property. In search of this liberation, Proudhon develops his doctrine, and his faith that its penetration

[1] Juntunen & Mehtonen: op cit pp125-130.
[2] Woodcock: op cit pp124-126.

into social meaning and interpretation would enhance liberation is not unfounded.

Paradoxically Proudhon's epistemology is not libertarian, but arbitrary. He believes in physical and natural laws which are external to cognition and which govern us at least to the extent of determining the success of our actions, no matter how imperfectly or incorrectly we perceive them. Yet even erroneous perception or interpretation of these laws may comprise sufficiently correct empirical observation and inferences to allow for reasonably effective action, so that action is itself a means of enlarging knowledge of objective laws, by seeking to explain its own failures. However, the limits to this kind of knowledge are reached very quickly when social purposes and needs exceed the semi-truth of inadequate empirical observation following from imperfect understanding of basic laws. Thus the need emerges for thought exceeding the constraints of action, for an ever more correct comprehension of these laws, formulated in principles both as definitions of reality and as statements of ideal goals governing action, between which Proudhon, alas, does not clearly distinguish. The absence or poverty of these principles he regards as the cause of social disorder.[3] In this way Proudhon states the aims of knowledge, a teleological functionalism in the form of ideal principles. Quite apart from the obvious risks to realistic analysis in this, a defect common to materialism looms: the tendency to reduce ethics and moral choices to a refinement of functional data, ultimately envisaging the superfluity of ethics altogether when sufficiently true data have been collected and acted upon. Fortunately, if at some cost to logical tidiness, Proudhon inadvertently avoids this by making an arbitrary and qualitative jump in his method. Social laws, unlike natural ones, are not external to thought. They are formed by the accumulation of social relationships expressing the interaction among people's perception and observance of natural laws, and collective purposes

[3] Proudhon: Property, pp14-17.

social contributions. In short, where labour results in inequality it is organised by inequality, and is consequently a priori wrong and so not a valid claim by anyone for the benefits of that inequality. Equality and its corollary liberty are absolute and inalienable. They are synonymous with society, whereas inequalities, insofar as they do not deprive from and are not restricted to functionally specific capabilities for generally admitted common interests, are simply coercion, and thus not a source of rights or obligations. It follows that to the extent that material inequality reduces autonomy, that is the practical equality of the capacity for liberty, it is an offence against society, a condition of war in place of cooperation.[3] Thus while he does not deny the need for some kind of economic market system, which is indeed necessary for his model of exchange as the means to commutative justice, he does insist that it can work only in a condition of equality, primarily in respect of the organisation of labour, but hardly less significantly in the actual possession of the social product, that is, of material conditions and social ownership.

Proudhon takes the virtue of equality to its conclusions sternly, if haphazardly. He rejects, for instance, the idea of wealth or status as a reward for any creative talent, both because society has in fact nurtured the talent, and because any talented person is sufficiently rewarded just in being able to use the talent.[4] Proudhon goes considerably beyond the assets theory of natural talent, by holding not only that talent must be used to some extent for the common good, but that it can only be so used because talents are by definition social products, involving resources, skills and values which can only occur in society as products of collective labour. Consequently, any attempt to gain private benefit from talent or to construct a status hierarchy on it corrupts society and its correct principles. His answer to this is the denial of that talent's expression. While this

[3] Proudhon: Property, pp44-48.
[4] ibid pp143-146.

V. Contingent Principles

On his own admission, the analysis of property is the centre of Proudhon's social theory and ethical philosophy.[1] Yet it is by no means the lengthiest part of it, and historically, in his influence on other doctrines, the other aspects of his thought have been more important. But it is fair to designate the principles he develops as contingent upon his notions of property, both because he argues them on the basis of what he conceives to be the true and inevitable nature of property in society, and because they could be realised only in a society organising property in some degree along Proudhonist lines.

Foremost among them is equality, which has already cropped up frequently. Equality is a law of nature, in that nature creates only differences whilst society awards different values or worths and so corrupts the equal values of different things.[2] Above all, people are equal simply because there is no natural difference in the amount of work they must do to meet their needs, apart from that created by society and so external to objective human nature. Thus labour, as remarked above, is a source of equality, or equity in view of the present reality of inequality, because it is common, inevitable and productive. Where labour results in inequality, this can only mean that some persons are not permitted by coercive authority to work at their full capacity, or that the organisation of labour and exchange deprives them of the possession of their product, or grants them possession of less than they have produced, or that society undervalues their labour, their investment in it and its

[1] Proudhon: Property, p362.

[2] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp51-52, 64–67.

composed of various social interests. In other words, although he does not make this clear, social laws are a function of social structure and collective social meaning, and so must vary accordingly. Objectivity can only be imposed by comparing a whole society to some external, natural reality, a dubious if not impossible undertaking. However, as a potential dissonance between what is and what might be, such a notion of objectivity can be useful in an ethical evaluation of society, free of that society's ruling norms. This is how Proudhon can be best interpreted. Social principles, then, are judgments about the existing and possible structures of society in the light of its potential. Social principles are, in fact, definitions of reality as it might be, and therefore of ethics and ethical choices. Proudhon's account of objective natural laws becomes irrelevant. This is why the public and democratic articulation of social principles is overridingly crucial, because only then can they attain the reality they need to serve as a judgement on society. Yet Proudhon still retains the fiction of objective laws, and not wholly to the disadvantage of his ethics, which like all ethics needs some sort of constraint outside its own notions of good and evil. To the extent that social principles are wrong or stated wrongly, that is, are incongruent with ultimate natural laws or with society's potential, the functionalism based on them will be misleading, and thus the definitions of reality and ethics defective or wholly erroneous. Given Proudhon's usual assumption that social principles are formed collectively, when they are unsound all the values and capabilities of individuals subject to them are put at risk, because few persons can by themselves effectively defy them. What this means in reality is that individual people will be compelled to live by false principles, contrary to their own nature and potential, if they wish to retain access to social goods. The impossibility of living in this contradiction forces them to rely on ever greater authority to meet their needs, because their natural capacity for autonomy is suppressed or corrupted.

Ultimately, even their individualism is crushed beneath impersonal interests, such as property, which are nevertheless in fact incompatible with society as it would be defined by true social principles. The necessity for truth will finally prevail, which is why Proudhon takes anarchism to be the ideal, possible and necessary form of society. In a way, then, individualism, however subjective it may be, forms the objective reality constraining social principles, just as these principles constrain or seek to constrain social reality. Yet Proudhon admits that principles also help construct reality; indeed they must do so as the means of progress. The distinction between this and the imposition of reality on incorrect principles remains unclear save in his own dogma of what is ethically right and true, and thus what are correct social principles. At this point many people may abandon him as a whimsical doctrinaire. But the method of Proudhon's ethics is not far removed from how most people reason ethically. And we still must judge his principles on their own, as well as take account of his own admission of the real limits on his methodological dogma: even false principles contain some truths which allow valid inferences and effective action. If it is absurd to trust any principles too far, since doubt must always exist, it is nonetheless necessary to recognise provisional truths as practical contingencies and to use them in the search for ever more comprehensive principles.[4] It is this leeway offered even by wrong principles that both allows individual critics scope for opposing society, and imposes on them the ethical responsibility of seeking collective adherence to their values. This is surely a sound model of the role of social criticism, especially if it is revolutionary. The implications are, first, that no social meaning can be taken as wholly false or ineffective; and second, that since the acquisition of truth is always practical and incomplete, no social meaning can be taken as wholly true.

[4] ibid pp20ff.

collective associations whose purpose is not in the first place to produce more property for profit, but to develop the welfare, solidarity, individualism and consciousness of their members in relation to society.[22] We may find then that the desire for property is neither so obsolete or dangerous as Marxists tend to assume, nor so individualistic and selfish as liberals argue.

[22] Proudhon: Selected Writings, ppl 13–124.

swer are there. Nor does he consider deeply the different kinds of property whose possession functions are not the same and could not possibly result in the same kind of rights or obligations. Yet one cannot read him without an increasing awareness of the fraud which founds social rights on control over property rather than on participation in and responsibility for the productive functions of possession, and without an increasing awareness of the relativity of absolute principles. When his analysis is freed from his archaic vision of production, it stimulates values concerning such issues as the optimum sizes for different kinds of economic units, the costs of centralisation and gigantism, alternative dispositions of natural resources, the inadequacies of efficiency as an economic value, the obligations of personal property, the diverse extent and modes of social ownership, and other values too often ignored in the increasingly shadowy conflict between capitalism and socialism. The rights, obligations and conditions of possession at all levels of society are more important criteria of social structure than the ownership of property and the demand for accumulation which invariably accompanies it, irrespective of the owner.

To refer again to the existential tone of Proudhonism as of anarchism in general, we might say that its very lack of a well worked-out economic doctrine compels it to rely on a morality in which the individual person, and correspondingly any autonomous social unit, is obligated to engage itself in the present by ethical action for ends larger than self-interests, in conditions which preclude dogmatism, ruthlessness and intolerance. It admits the need to be available and solicitous of others' needs and to pursue the creation of freedom especially where the external conditions for it are unfavourable, in order to create a constancy of commitments for the future.[21] To create, in short, social ethics. For example, Proudhonist materialism points to the still largely untapped experiment of communal socialism, in which property is privately possessed by

[21] Macquarrie: op cit ppl 11–112, 185–186.

Meanings are valid only to the extent that they realistically serve the needs of the groups creating them, as well as those which they claim to benefit. This kind of ideological pluralism is intrinsic to anarchism, and despite his self-certainty, to Proudhon's own estimation of the capabilities of his as well as of other doctrines. Proudhonism is fundamentally a modified fallibilism, which consequently never implies subordination of ethics and ethical responsibility to scientific dogma, as Marxism too easily does.[5] Thus Proudhon's method is a form of collectivised individualism, a necessary attempt to reconcile two hostile social perspectives running throughout his thought and anarchism generally, as they do in real society Proudhon himself admittedly does proclaim dogma not justified by his own admissions of fallibility. But that opens up his values to rather more critical testing than is easily done to more elaborate and closed philosophies. If social principles are wrong in terms of these laws, their consequences must be unfortunate. For example, because he sees justice as a way of ordering society and not as a product of mere law, which is a sound enough value, he holds that if the prevailing principles of justice are objectively false, the laws, institutions and social order consequent on them will be erroneous or disorderly or vicious.[6] Even if these qualities are but socially-structured value judgments, and not expressions of objective laws as he claims, still the fiction of objectivity is useful as a standard for both society as it is and for the ideals challenging it. Proudhon's seemingly unsubstantiated method ends in a practical demand for obligatory responsibility. Thus if the fallibility of social principles is admitted and greater effort continuously made to transcend them towards better ones, or in our terms towards increased responsibility, the result will be improved functional observations hence better

[5] S Stojanovic: Between Ideals and Reality, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, PP 137–155.

[6] Proudhon: Property, pp26-27.

personal and collective social action and more valid articulation of social principles, in short more justice. Thought and action will become more consistent, each criticising and reaffirming the other. "The co-operation of theory and practice produces in humanity the realisation of order — the absolute truth."[7] Even if his hope in truth is illusory, even if his equation of social order as coterminous with all significant reality is exaggerated or simply wrong, even if to ascertain eternal laws is neither necessary nor possible, Proudhon describes what the function of political philosophy and, to a considerable extent, anarchist opposition, ought to be, and in some measure always is.

But his own dogma belies this tentative and revolutionary definition of social thought, perhaps because he never decides whether he is a revolutionary against the existing order; or a propagandist for a truth which needs no tentativeness on revolution. Social development, he says, requires clear, unambiguous principles comprising thought which embodies rational laws, correct observations and effective practices. He assumes that all of these are self-evident in themselves open initially perhaps to different interpretations, and yet objectively true and so ultimately immune to misunderstanding from any quarter. This is clearly an unsupportable attitude to the vagaries of cognition, reflection, perception and action not to mention individualism. Even worse is the formula he derives from this: what is just, that is, naturally ordered, must be useful, what is useful must be true, what is true must be possible. Even allowing for his idiosyncratic use of the word 'possible', which means rationally coherent in his own system of principles, or truth as he claims it to be, this formula leads functionally to the worst excesses of materialist utilitarianism, the denial of thought and ethics in favour of mechanical efficacy measured on a single scale of simple values.

[7] ibid p427.

Yet these errors are failures in Proudhon's exposition more than in his intentions or analysis, because he does recognise, more lucidly than Geiger, the ethical problem arising from a social definition of property. Geiger, like Proudhon in fact, argues that any right to property is simply a limited right to use it in specific ways, and that an enumeration of these ways constitutes the right as such, so that the notion of dominion disappears.[19] The point here is that society's intervention into these uses can extend so far that nothing is left of private property save its name, and that this holds true for both private and public property, which distinction also gets blurred, and for personal consumption as well.[20] The problem, then, is how to control this intervention, both in practice as the exercise and organisation of authority, and in ethics as the formation of collective social purposes and values, so that property does not impose its own interests as equivalent to necessary social goods. At this point Proudhon's concept of jus in re against jus ad rem as two alternative sources for ethics is not only analytically more subtle than an enumerative social definition of property. It is also a necessary element in any doctrine capable of really limiting the rights of property rather than of just limiting their maldistribution, as in fact Geiger's approach does, along with conventional socialism. Proudhon has the right problem in mind. But he fails to get far beyond it because he never makes clear the values to organise the obligations of possession, apart from faith in some natural order of just and free economic competition without the conventional right to property which is probably intrinsic to competition.

Proudhon's theory of property has long been the most repugnant aspect of his thought to other radical thinkers. Although he is a materialist he has no direct answer to the abuse of property save moral idealism, even if the conceptual elements for an an-

[19] ibid p98.

[20] G Adler-Karlsson: A Swedish Theory of Democratic Socialism, Prism. Stockholm 1967, passim.

independence, or the combination of autonomy with responsible obligations, remains chimerical or subject to abusive misinterpretation. As with the first flaw this raises the question, is the distinction between property and possession valid or meaningful? These are not just problems of Proudhonism. They are essential aspects of the revolutionary challenge to modern industrial society. Their resolution is necessary if Proudhon's apparently laudable account of the positive functions of property is to be made consistent with his revolutionary purpose.

Ironically, it seems that in many respects Proudhon's doctrine must be counted along with capitalism in committing, as Geiger puts it, "idolatry with the concept of property, buttressed by the theory of natural rights". Geiger specifies three primary errors: that the right of property is conceived as the relation of a person to a thing and as domination; that property is an original right and therefore essentially independent of the legal order; and that property is unlimited dominion and can be limited only to protect the minimum rights of others.[18] These errors would indeed make the ethical intention of Proudhonism impossible. The problem with Proudhon's writings, from which any viable Proudhonism must be extracted, is that they are potentially guilty of the first error, because he never seriously considers the implications of collective possession on any level deeper than the virtue of equal contractual relations; that the second error is at the heart of his method, so that he neglects the fact that different kinds of economic systems and functions even within a single society must engender different kinds of possession; and that he is sometimes guilty of the third, because he lauds sovereign possession and never works out a scheme of which obligations pertain to possession, even though the fact of these obligations is the very essence of his distinction between property and possession, domain and usufruct.

[18] T Geiger: 'Class Society in the Melting Pot', in C S Heller, ed: Structured Social Inequality, The Macmillan Co, London, 1969, pp97-98.

Proudhon's own principles do not end here, mostly because they are not mechanically efficacious in any case. But still this method mixes up rationalism and functionalism and ethics, ignoring the different kinds of knowledge these produce. Despite his activist notion of the sources, purpose and functions of knowledge and meaning, Proudhon confuses the facticity of existence, or the limits of existential activity, with the possibilities of existence which arise in thinking about alternative values, which is where the most important ethical facts of the individual person's relationship to society are to be found. By ignoring this tension between facticity and possibility, that is, between the limits of the actual real and the limits of the future real,[8] and by taking his own principles as equivalent to reality, Proudhon not only weakens the ethical weight of his thought as a critique of both society and of social meaning, but also is led into developing a system of principles far exceeding the theoretical or ethical validity of his main ideas, and often tending towards absurdity. To weed out the absurdities is the main difficulty in interpreting Proudhon and in developing a useful Proudhonism.

[8] J Macquarrie: Existentialism, Penguin Books, 1973, pp189-193.

III. Purpose

Proudhon's avowed purpose is to show that the existing social order does not satisfy material or ethical needs. He believes it to be inconsistent with both the material needs it creates and with the principles of how society ought to be ordered. The exploitation of collective labour and the expropriation and misuse of surplus value, although he does not use these terms, are central to his view that particular economic interests are impoverishing society, if not from evil intentions, then at least from ignorance, which he regards as equally morally culpable. Somewhat negligently, but very repetitively, he proclaims the principles of the new social order, which he can prove to be compatible with, indeed the expression of, natural laws. These are: the perfectibility of man; the honourableness of work; material equality; the identity of social interests; the end of antagonism; the universality of comfort; the sovereignty of reason and the absolute liberty of the citizen. 30 It is never very clear what he means by all these, or if some of them mean anything at all, or if they are even consistent with his most substantial analyses. Nevertheless they declare openly enough the general tone of his proposals for social organisation, which he also and repeatedly brings out, if without the detailed analysis necessary to prove them feasible.

The most persistent and thus probably the most significant of these are the increasing division of labour as the basis of solidarity, the collective power of workmen's associations, the pre-eminence of contract before law as a mode of mutual obligations, the equality of exchange as the foundation for contracts, the role of competition and credit in distributing resources, and all in all, the replacement

to the rights of possession, both individual and collective, he also condemns the state as the focal point of socially owned property's absolute rights, a collective *jus ad rem*. He regards the state as the antinomy of the absolutism of private property, which he severely restricts by social obligations, including those of social property, but which he sometimes seems to accept with all its abuses simply as a desirable means of opposing the state, whose main fault is that it seeks to maintain private property against social needs. Thus his consistent dislike of the state displaces a consistent analysis of the functions of property, which alone ought to determine his attitude to the state. The functions of private property are beneficial vis-a-vis the state despite their social abuses, but intolerable vis-a-vis society because of these abuses, even though he only occasionally regards the state as a separate authority within society. The actual nature and location of the collective authority vested in co-operative and collective possession, then, which is the heart of the moral validity of jus in re, remains inchoate. His various programmes for mutualist credit, co-operatives and the like do not fill the gap because their relationship to the state is also unclear.

The second flaw is that when Proudhon discusses the rights and distribution of possession, he means collective forms of occupancy and usufruct, but when he talks about property as a basis of independence against alienated authority of the state, he refers almost exclusively to the individual person. We could say that he has in mind two different categories of property, in the first case collectively-possessed means of production, in the second case personally-possessed means of consumption. But he himself does not ever make this difference obvious, and indeed his notion of personal independence is manifestly linked to powers of production. Just how independence in this respect against the state, personal sovereign possession, is to be fitted in with all the demands of collective authority at various levels, because he admits that different economic functions presume different scopes of organisation, is never explained. Yet until this can be done, the notion of personal

the possessor which impel him into opposition against coercive authority, particularly the state and production monopolies, and into cooperation with other possessors. Property is democratic and anarchist because it recognises no superior authority and yet creates binding obligations of co-operation.[16]

"If, therefore, the citizen is to count for anything in the State, personal freedom is not enough. His individuality, like that of the State, must be founded on something material over which he must have sovereign possession, just as the State has sovereign possession over public property. Private property provides this foundation … However absolute the law makes him, he will soon learn to his cost that property cannot live by abuse and that it too must bow to common sense and morality."[17]

Quite apparently this is the source of the Poujadism and its relatives which have so often maligned Proudhon's reputation, mostly by observing the first part of his praise of property and ignoring its obligations. But the relationship of these movements to Proudhonism is problematic at best. In any case, we need not refer to them to see the negativity that besets so much anarchist social criticism, because Proudhon's positive remarks about property show serious flaws which must reflect also upon his conceptual and ethical premises. It is not within my grasp at this point to pursue all of these and their effects on Proudhonism in general, but two deserve mention because of their direct implications for the doctrine's relationship to other doctrines, that is, for its political validity.

One flaw is that throughout his analysis Proudhon confuses, or at least fails to distinguish consistently between the state and society or rather, groups within society. For anarchist ethics, this is disastrous, since all the obligations it postulates and rights of opposition it claims depend on this distinction. While Proudhon clearly leans towards the social ownership of property as a precondition

[16] Proudhon: Selected Writings, ppl40-141.

[17] ibid pp135-136.

of law, war, politics and coercion by contractual exchange, competition, common interests and economic needs, and autonomy. By contrasting the principles and proposals, and the materialist and ethical philosophy behind them, to the economic realities of capitalism, Proudhon claims to show, much as Marx does, both the inevitability and the desirability of his doctrine.

The first we can discount, if only because he never explores deeply the nature of social competition in order to show how and if solidarity could arise out of it without necessitating some kind of authoritarian centralisation. This is a curious gap in Proudhon, as both Marxist and liberal critics have pointed out, because his ethical argument that properly organised competition is necessary to libertarian solidarity is almost unconnected with his condemnation of capitalist competition as ruinous to justice and equity. He never seriously tries to show how his proposed competitive structures will either develop the solidary values necessary for reorganising competition, or how competition will of itself assume the new forms leading to justice and equity. He stresses the contradictions of the existing system to prove its irrationality, which he then takes as sufficient cause for its development to something better. In this respect his analysis of contradictions has none of the explanatory dynamism of Marx's historical materialism. He proves inevitability only by reference to the rationality of his value system as he presents it. Even the possibility, let alone the inevitability of his doctrine, thus must be suspect. But the second point, his proof for the desirability of his doctrine, is still a valid test for existing capitalist and socialist societies, as well as for Proudhonism's relevance today.

In fact, the economic conditions which originally stimulated Proudhon are more widespread now than then, albeit on a more worldwide scale and by having spread limited affluence rather than the absolute impoverishment he saw. His critique of economic interests is aimed at how they limit the satisfaction of material and ethical needs, sometimes denying them altogether, and nearly al-

ways discouraging or restricting the material and cultural creativity which might satisfy these needs in ways hostile to dominant institutions. By pursuing private aims of accumulation, accumulation as a systemic good in itself irrespective of its costs and of their distribution, dominant economic interests destroy the capability of the people to experience solidarity and collective purpose, or social liberty in short. He sees an irreconcilable antagonism between economism and materialism, and stresses as few materialists have done that effective, ethical materialism is not the same as the continuous pursuit of wealth or its concentrated accumulation as the measure of what society collectively possesses. As the fragility of Western affluence becomes ever more apparent, the conceptual reinterpretation of material interests which is at the heart of Proudhon's thought, becomes ever more topical.

In this context, Proudhon's praise of mediocrity and poverty are sensible, not necessarily as the personal virtue he imagines them to be, although that too is not to be prematurely discarded, but as a recognition of the limits of any society's capabilities as well as its contribution to and demands on the world.

"Poverty is not easy. For the worker this would be a form of corruption. It is not good for man to live in ease ... It is clear that it would be misplaced to dream of escaping from the inevitable poverty that is the law of our nature and of society. Poverty is good, and we must think of it as being the source of all our joys."[1]

If taken literally, this is just arrogant moralising, although perhaps more realistic than some crude Marxist idealism which excuses anything in the present in order to attain an affluent communist future with no problems. But Proudhon does not mean by poverty destitution or distress; he rightly regards these as functions of excessive and maldistributed wealth. He means frugality, respect for the functions of how material resources are used, a concern for other people's and groups' need to use resources, as a restraint on

[1] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pp259-260.

of people's obligations towards whomever seeks to use these prerogatives because they are then founded on expropriation and not on labour. But if material products are governed by the rights and obligations of possession, then personal access to possession in a palpable manner is the basis not only of an ethical and solidary relationship to society, but also of the autonomy which natural laws and social principles prescribe as necessary, and which even without these fictions underlies most of the libertarian values of both liberalism and anarchism.

Thus Proudhon is able to combine his famous utterance "property is theft" with the apparently contradictory one "property is liberty".[14] The functions and uses of possession decide which is the case. To some extent this paradox may show only his predilection to nonsensical contradictions because of his admittedly static model of society, as Marx comments.[15] But it also shows his recognition that an absolute right has different ethical functions depending on its uses and effects on other rights. Proudhon employs the fiction of an absolute right in order to analyse its actual relativities. Property is theft when it is abused, and its abuse is measured by its compatibility with principles potentially defining the rights of possession vis-a-vis larger values. Property is liberty when it furthers these values, whose actual realisation profoundly alters society's relationship to its material culture.

From this point, Proudhon then states the positive functions of property. Not only is property as possession the material basis of justice, it also has political functions which can manifest vestiges of justice even in existing society. Property is absolute to the possessor, given his acceptance of the obligations which are just as innate to possession as its rights. Property is therefore a de-centralising force, the means to the capacity for autonomy. It imposes needs on

[14] Proudhon: Selected Writings, pl40.

[15] ' Letter t0 P V Annenk ov\ in K Marx & F Engels: Selected Works, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1970, pp659-669.

seek to homogenise individual manners of consumption. On the contrary, its values indicate more variety than mass industrialised society encourages. It does seek a radical equalisation of the conditions and resources making individualised consumption possible. It seeks to make individualism the ethical constraint on production that it rightfully is and to sweep away its use as an excuse for privilege and private ownership. It seeks to establish a clear boundary between personal possession and public values, with the latter preventing any accumulation of possession by any social unit into property, and property into coercive power.

Thus, the burden of Proudhon's arguments is that all cases for property imply greater cases for justice, equality and liberty; and that equally divided, just property is not property at all, since it must lack all the alienating, anti-social qualities now equated with the right of property. He summarises these qualities in a tone of outrage: Property demands something for nothing; it produces and consumes luxuries, that is, uselessly and destructively; it is homicide; it stunts the bodies and minds of those who labour; it resorts to tyranny to defend itself when the hollowness of its claims to rights is exposed; it restricts equality; it consumes society in a relentless war against other property, since each proprietor is a threat to others; and it relies on force and violence as a means of social control.[13] These qualities are necessary to property as property. They are contradictory to property as possession. Therefore the nature of property is determined by how it is used and by the social formations of that use. The rights of possession are absolute in society insofar as they contribute to justice and equity, although they are relative in respect of the obligations possession owes to other social principles and to other loci of possession. As long as property is possession, it shares both this absolutism and these obligations. But immediately it violates jus in re by extending its prerogatives, it puts itself outside society. In practice this means the end

[13] ibid pp159-220.

an ethical obligation of one's own use. Poverty is ecological modesty and rationality. Proudhon opposes most heatedly useless consumption, which implies useless production as well. He argues at one point that all consumption which does not reproduce utility, that is, the means of further production for ethical and collective consumption, is the same as the destruction of what rightfully belongs to the producers of the resources from which the uselessly consumed products come. In other words, it is theft.[2] Ecological responsibility, while unstated in his work, persistently informs his analysis and evaluation of the use of material resources.

It is clear that implied here are numerous values which are not as self-evident or even as definable as Proudhon seems to think. For example, all production can be claimed to reproduce utility in some form, if only the analysis of functions is extended far enough. This vagueness must weaken his whole approach. Yet he is suggesting a potentially coherent attitude towards consumption as a major economic and social activity that leads directly to a re-evaluation of its structuring conditions and functions. The limitations he specifies may sound archaic, but suitably re-interpreted, they are portentous. He argues that consumption must be limited first, by one's own or family's or primary group's need to survive; secondly by the obligation of equally distributed creativity and autonomy promoting the capacity of all people to survive, create and participate in solidarity; and thirdly by what the consumer has rights of possession over, either by his own labour, singly or collectively, or by equal exchange with others in conditions of equal dependence and benefit. Useless consumption, or unlimited, irresponsible consumption, leads to private accumulation and coercive power, and cannot be justified on any grounds. By starting economic analysis and ethics with consumption rather than production, as is usual, Proudhon goes immediately to the issue of collective purposes, which gets obscured when production itself is taken as sufficient purpose.

[2] Proudhon: Property, p222.

Thus Proudhon lays the groundwork for a social ethics to oppose irresponsible economic interests and power and to put in their place a social purpose using economic forces instead of being used by those who own resources for the essentially insatiable ends of continued accumulation. Wealth is downgraded from an end to a means, and not even an indispensable one at that. In Woodcock's words: "The sufficiency that will allow men to be free — that is the limit of the anarchist demand on the material world."[3] What that sufficiency is and what kinds of freedom follow from different economic orders are questions broader than Proudhonism, but not alien to its line of inquiry. The increasingly apparent failures of conventional capitalism and socialism demand that these questions be re-asked.

Liberal welfarism is moving in this direction, for example in the challenge raised against the concept of a distributive majority as sufficient guarantee of economic democracy. Each person separately seeks and achieves a particular good which all share as a collectively legitimised aspiration, and yet which becomes impossible to enjoy precisely because it is too widely realised without the enabling conditions for it, which are genuinely collective goods, being similarly realised. Persons acting separately for their own interests do not constitute a majority in fact or with any of the rights democratic theory conventionally attributes to it. This leads then to the issue: to what degree and over what span of time can the individual person effectively act for her own interests on her own behalf in ways beneficial to the groups defining her social environment and values, and not just in illusory and anomic competition for acquisition and consumption.[4] The intent of this analysis need not be a harking back to outmoded individualism, although that is possible. More plausibly, it is a critique of the ir-

[3] Woodcock: Anarchism, p25.

[4] E Allardt: 'Poliittisista resursseista, demokratiasta ja hyvinvoinnista' (Political resources,democracy and welfare) Sosiologia, 3–4, 1975, Helsinki, pp115ff.

ued production and augment his autonomy, or it is the collective property of all who participated in its production, who thus have equal rights of possession and claims on its use.[11] The more extensive, complicated or productive this property becomes, the more intense must be the social relationships and institutions governing its uses. Material development thus results in social development and in increased autonomy, since both personal capabilities and mutual interdependencies are increased.

By creating both jus in re and autonomy as the starting point for liberty, labour in fact makes property as domain impossible unless it is stolen from those who labour. For example, Proudhon points out that wages are not equivalent to jus ad rem either in themselves or in what they can purchase, because wages cannot alienate jus ad rem from the product to the separate producers of it, not even with their assumed consent. Wages are only a condition of collective labour, a form of jus ad rem and incomplete at that. Only absolute and equal ownership makes wages equivalent to property and then only if all the persons in any way connected with the production share equally.[12] This is an unlikely state of affairs.

What is implied here is, first, that labour creates a right to egalitarian autonomy over property which can only be expressed in collective and autonomous social units; and secondly, that wages or any other form of reimbursement for labour are simply modes of social welfare reflecting each person's equal rights as a possessor of all that society's owns, which in the end means everything since any analysis of the sources of jus in re ultimately includes all the people. These implications are more radical than Proudhon's own conclusions. But they give substance to his principles of autonomy, justice and equity, and lead to a re-evaluation of the desirability and necessity of any kind of material stratification and its consequent inequalities of status, knowledge or power. Proudhonism does not

[11] ibid pp84-120.

[12] ibid ppl 12–118.

any one person. Labour, on the other hand, is not only necessary to assure survival and creativity; it is almost equivalent to social liberty because of the exigencies of collective participation it imposes. As the individual person's capacity for liberty, it must express autonomy, so that the ethical principle of autonomy is really the basis for the producer's right to her products. The principle is obviously limited by the equal claims of obligation and solidarity. Because labour implies at least some rights of possession over the resources requisite for survival and creativity, no matter how enslaved the labour is; because autonomy is the mode of labour consonant with social principles and natural laws; and because no person's labour can have a priori any greater rights or values than another's; because liberty is in principle a state of being which cannot be made into a divisible commodity, then whatever rights labour creates must be functionally equal for all, at least in the sense of not diminishing anyone's potential for autonomous labour. One person's liberty cannot usurp another's and still be consistent with liberty as a social principle.

On this basis Proudhon favours the autonomous production of small units. Equality is better realisable and the necessary restrictions of organisation more visible and manageable. Even within large economic systems this value is still timely. Proudhon also admits the need for increasing division of labour, not as the governing dimension of the individual person's life, but as the range of capacities existing in any given social unit, as a means of social progress. He explicitly attacks the notion that collective labour somehow suspends each producer's rights in labour or transfers them elsewhere, except as a result of the producers' collective and explicit decision. Thus the concept of autonomy running throughout Proudhon's treatment of this question is far from being the fragmenting value that socialist theory has often accused it of being. It is, on the contrary, the groundwork of ever greater cooperation, in lieu of coercive authority. After labour has produced something, either it is the property of the producer to ensure his contin-

responsible, collectively purposeless forms of individualism industrial society has favoured as a blind for the irresponsibility of its dominant economic interests and the impotence of the institutions formally governing them. Both analytical and ethical concern is shifting towards various social groups as the determining factors in how individuals live and as the primary channels of rights and obligations.

In this sense some welfare theorists like Allardt take as a point of departure for a re-evaluation of economic structures, the nature, and particularly the defects, of the so-called 're-insurance society'. Most people's minimum needs and status are guaranteed by welfare to the extent that such needs can be realistically calculated on an individual level. The underlying insatiability of material welfare defined in this way incurs increasing costs to society's productive capacity, while the pressure for material upward mobility, again on the individual level, continues unabated, or is even strengthened by the lessened risks of failure and the weakness of particularistic solidarities. The result is competitive pressure at all levels of society, coupled with an unrelieved need to produce enough wealth to cover the welfare costs of a system which augments the growing need for welfare because of the competitive pressure and the social failures it inevitably creates in spite of all its provisions. The consumption of welfare itself becomes, in Proudhon's terms, useless and destructive because it neither leads to real welfare, nor produces utility in the sense of developing values of justice, equity and dignity. At most, the distribution of property as theft may be spread more widely, but then so too are its evils, and even the extent of its distribution is seen to be illusory in context of the whole world. Morality is eliminated from consideration of how resources and property ought to be used because the combined forces of acquisition, growth and welfare allow so little scope for change or re-evaluation, either individually and institutionally. 36 At least one conceptual change necessary to challenge this is, Allardt suggests, to broaden the measure of welfare from the notion of what people

get from the economic system to what people have as resources for better realising social values extending beyond personal material conditions. 37 This broader notion indeed raises a challenge to the welfare values Allardt himself defends. The challenge is closely linked to the ideals of equity, autonomy and solidarity so prominent in anarchism and Proudhonism.

Proudhon's affirmation of poverty, then, or perhaps we could better say modesty or moderation, is a moral attitude underlying his emphasis on property as possession and consumption. Property is more than just an economic fact and ethical subject. He believes it to express the real economic structure of society and its material culture, to which the science and morality of society must be directed before all else. He contrives a system of values which he claims to be the real nature of society as it latently is and as it could be realised in practice: equity or equality, as an inalienable material right of all persons in respect of the conditions in which they live; law, or public policy and morality based on factual knowledge shared and contributed to by all; individual autonomy, primarily in the exercise of reason and the aggregation of collective capacities and solidarities; and proportionality, or the recognition of the competences and limitations of social meanings and all the values and truths arising from them, that is, a rejection of any dogmatic absolutism. 38 These values are not all that Proudhon claims. Certainly they do not express any objective truth about the nature of society. But they are ethically coherent as a critique of economic systems and of dominant social knowledge. They are one start to a revolutionary re-appraisal of the concepts around which we form our values and interests. In the structures Proudhon derives from them, such as mutualism, federalism and anarchism, they are practical principles for opposition to ruling social orders. Underlying these values, and comprising the essential part of Proudhon's contribution to political philosophy, is the analysis of property.

a rightful or justified occupant is collective and impersonal.[9] Occupancy is seen more as a service than a right, and precludes, as Proudhon makes clear, the use of the property occupied for speculation, usury, and particularly the transformation of its productive powers into financial capital. One of his most frequent denunciations is the right claimed by proprietors to usurp the increase of property from the producers in order to transfer it into investable finance, which is simply a claim to the right to produce without labour, an absurdity in Proudhon's system of values.[10]

Proudhon does not of course reject investment, which in any form is a kind of expropriation from the producers. He only seeks to ensure that this expropriation is not founded on the rights or powers of property and that it does not establish these rights and powers, but rather that it be subject to social authority vested in the obligations of possession, and shared as equally as the rights of possession are shared in consequence of whatever form of collective labour has produced the property to be expropriated. As an ideal, despite the obvious constraints of the actual disposition of material interests, expropriation must be an expression and mode of ethical solidarities. Thus the reconstitution of property for investment elsewhere with the sole purpose of maximising increased value is theft because it does not express any collective purpose; it is instead only private accumulation.

Consequently, labour is a better title to possession than is occupation, and to property too if possession's jus in re is actually realised to its full extent. Here Proudhon challenges the traditional Lockean doctrine in liberalism, that labour creates a right to property based on the value of the product rather than on the value and needs of the labour. Product value is to Proudhon rightly enough simply a function of its actual or expected social relationships, its collective or distributive utility, and therefore cannot be owned by

[9] ibid pp54-70, 82–83.
[10] ibid pp153-159.

property implies the deeper social rights of equity and justice, that is, the abolition of property, because property without society to organise and guarantee it is inconceivable, even to proprietors. Even if one admits all the abuses and contradictions Proudhon brings up and yet holds that this only shows how property can be misused, or that it is dialectical instead of impossible or anti-social, his analysis still gives cause to doubt whether a system of property subject to these abuses, insofar as it is, constitutes a laudable social order. To the extent that Proudhon accurately portrays the contradictions between property and society or other social values, his argument seriously questions the rationality of our social orders, which do nominally pursue other values and yet remain dependent on the interests and organisations of property. Likewise it questions the capability of our governing institutions to resist the imperatives of these interests and organisations in an effort to solve the problems they create and cannot solve themselves.

The abuses or impossibilities Proudhon specifies all rest on the contradiction between property and possession. He does not reject conventional claims to property outright, but seeks to show how they imply obligations negating particular *jus ad rem*. For example, if occupancy is the title to property, this can at most mean occupancy in order to survive, that is, autonomous production for self-sufficient consumption within the limits of whatever social unit is the occupant, be it a person or a family or a co-operative or a whole society. This however restricts the rights of occupancy to that use, the right of functional possession, and makes it relative to social conditions and needs, particularly those related to the functions of the property in question, such as the needs arising from the division of labour, the mode of production, the distribution of resources and population and so on. Therefore occupancy entitles the occupant only to both restricted and impermanent use and to the obligations of equity, since the basis for determining who is

IV. Property and Possession

Although Proudhon's theory of property varies considerably from place to place, the most important aspects for our purposes are fairly consistent, or at least something consistent can be got out of them. He never abandons the idea that property properly instituted is indispensable for freedom and justice, and equally capable of tyranny when improperly instituted. He points out that much of the conflict over property in history has arisen from the confusion of a simple absolute notion of property with different kinds of possession which are subsumed under it, so that their variable rights and obligations are obscured and the limitations of property impossible to establish.[1] His whole philosophy in the end turns on this distinction, which in fact is not at all original with him, apart from the conclusions he draws from it. He defines, labels and uses it in diverse and often inconsistent ways; but he always returns to the view that property is the absolute right to dispose of a thing in any way without regard to obligations, and possession is the relative right to use a thing in ways compatible with broader social needs and values, in responsible, restricted and obligatory ways.[2] This fixed point in Proudhon is a starting point for the redefinition of authoritative values, because virtually all aspects of society are touched by it in one way or another.

An evaluation of Proudhonism must begin with the two primary ethical principles he draws from this distinction. First, an individual has a right to occupancy in the products of his or her own labour, but no further. He or she must be able to use these

[1] Proudhon: Selected Writings, ppl25-127.
[2] Proudhon: Property, pp43-44.

products and to determine production according to his or her own needs to renew this capacity for productive labour and to participate in the creativity of solidarity and individual autonomy. Second, no-one has the right to misuse either his or her or anyone else's products, either by expropriating, destroying or forcing them to produce something which their rightful possessors neither care for nor are able to use.[3] This second ethical principle precedes the first because the division of labour even in simple societies makes any definition of personal products dubious at best, although not personal possession, which remains the foundation for individualism. Proudhon's deep-seated, romantic individualism often veils the collective application of these principles, if the concept 'man' is taken neither as a person nor as an abstract mankind, as he often seems to use it, but rather as social groups and institutions inside society and society itself as an active unit in larger social systems. But this latter interpretation is more consistent with his philosophy as a whole. In any case, the principles remain ethically testable on numerous levels, and indeed are not at all inappropriate to a reconsideration of individual rights and duties. However applied, the purpose is the same: to see how possession restricts property, defines it and in the end wholly supplants it.

Although Proudhon is not much concerned with the role of law, he gives his analysis of occupancy a legalistic form, and indeed he sometimes derives from it fairly precise legal prescriptions. All material products, he argues, are composed of the twin aspects of domain, and possession or usufruct, that is, ownership and use values. These create two basic natural rights around which all societies must be organised. The prior right is jus in re, the right in a thing, to its use in ways commensurable with its nature and its relationship to other things, and the right to reclaim for one's own use whatever one has produced, irrespective of who formally owns it. It is the right of usufruct. The second right, that of domain, is jus

[3] Proudhon: Selected Writings, ppl27-128.

facets of possession exist within it! Thus possession is the basis for a new definition of property and a challenge to society as it is now constituted. Proudhonism's materialist doctrine of revolution is essentially focused on ways of extending possession, jus in re, in opposition to all that restricts, distorts and maldistributes it.

This is the skeleton of Proudhon's analysis of property. As such it lacks any real bite of social criticism because the practical rights and obligations of possession remain inchoate, apart from some inessential observations on rent and other forms of payment to society for the use of property. Proudhon in fact never explicitly identifies what jus in re actually do survive in a society of property; yet this of course would have to be the first step in evaluating the doctrine's practical and ethical efficacy as a mode of opposition. Proudhon's first interest is to attack property as it is, to define it as the sum of its abuses, that is, of the abuses of usufruct or the restriction of *jus in re* in order to create particularistic jus ad rem falsely endowed with universality. By enunciating these abuses, Proudhon claims to show that property is impossible because it is self-contradictory, although in truth all he does show is that it is impossible to be ethically consistent with his own system of values. This necessarily focuses critical attention on his values as much as on his analysis of property.

Nevertheless, Proudhon's description of property's abuses not only defines property in his philosophy; it also lays the groundwork for an economic morality which can give the notion of possession more substance than his rationalist dogma gives it. It indicates values which might lessen the abuses of property and reconstitute society on another basis, or at least make this option feasible. Proudhon's argument is simple, although the details and polemics of his exposition are often bewildering. He seeks to do no more than show that the rights of property are constantly denied by the society property claims to uphold, lest society itself cease to function; that in return, property constantly denies the rights on which society is based, lest property cease to exist; and that any defence of

Whilst some of these restrictions are obviously impractical, their intent is clear, particularly as a challenge to the absolute jus ad rem invested in society as implied in Marxist theory and implemented in Soviet statism, no less than in conventional capitalist property. The limitations of proprietorship or domain are pertinent to society or its governing institutions no less than to people, corporations or whatever. There is no real proprietorship, at least as a basis of collective and autonomous obligation; there is only usufruct or possession, and that subject to other values.

**Jus in re* is in fact more than an attribute of social products. It is the basic link between people's relationship to products, or to material culture, and their rights and obligations in society. Thus an ethical evaluation of social meanings in material culture is the first step towards both social analysis and evaluation, as well as towards doctrinal practice. The benefits of this ethics to environmental and ecological issues are immediately clear. Less clear but no less important are its functions in resistance to materially-based authority and coercion in society, whether it be public or private, that is, to all authority not directly expressing the practical rights and obligations of possession as a means to other values.

Proudhonism's basis is thus coherent, if only with a good deal of editing. The socially relative rights of possession replace the absolute right of property, but also justify it if social conditions allow their equal realisation. If these conditions do not obtain, the right of property constitutes a violation of the rights of possession which are more congruent with the natural laws of reality. It is consequently a right outside society, in fact incompatible with it. "Property and society are utterly irreconcilable institutions", Proudhon can say, because when society is properly ordered, property is coterminous with possession and therefore lacks the qualities which existing society defines as property. So long as property is defined and instituted as the antithesis to possession, or at least antecedent to it, it imposes no ethical or social obligations on those subordinate to it, although they do remain obligated to whatever

ad rem, the right to a thing, or the claim to become proprietor over a thing, to determine its use and to own whatever increased value accrues from its use.[4] The problem is to see what functions these two natural rights have in society, and what effects either's realisation has on the other and on other equal natural rights. Despite the confusion in Proudhon's exposition, it seems that he does not take these rights as absolute in themselves but rather as subject to larger principles, so that their comparative evaluation and the evaluation of the different kinds of property following from the pre-eminence of one over the other is in fact a functional evaluation of their benefits or costs to other principles. Yet he argues the other principles as natural consequences of these two material rights, depending on the structural formations they assume. Thus as laws of objective reality, they precede social reality, whereas as ethics they acquire substance only in how society manifests them.

In any case, what stands out is that while jus ad rem is particular, in that it accrues to the person who exercises factual occupancy, jus in re is common to all who have produced anything, since any participation creates it as an expression of liberty, and liberty is innately inalienable, resting on equality and the commensurability of labour and possession of the products of labour. Capitalism, he notes, reverses this order, and makes ad rem universal as an attribute due all persons equally, without, however, guaranteeing the conditions which alone could realise its universality. Jus in re is reduced to a particular attribute of jus ad rem, available only to those who already own. This reversal of the priority of these two rights, Proudhon holds, makes it impossible for either to acquire valid social forms leading to justice, equity and dignity. Their simple restatement in their natural order is to him a sufficient basis for a whole doctrine of social revolution. Thus jus in re is a demand for repossession, a universal redistribution of property or its functions, benefits and responsibilities back to the producers, that is, to par-

[4] Proudhon: Property, pp43-44.

ticularise jus ad rem on a basis of equity which always determines the limits of its acceptable forms. In whatever form, jus ad rem as the basis of property as domain, remains a particular claim to deny other persons' rights in their products, their jus in re, by appropriating for oneself as the sole right of a thing that one owns, a quality which is valid only for a small part of it or its functions, and even then only incompletely.[5] Consequently, in respect of liberty and equity, *jus in re* is valid to the extent that production is collective, and jus ad rem invalid, except to the extent that production is wholly individual, limited to one's own consumption. Insofar as liberty and equity are objective social principles, jus ad rem is wholly anti-social. Yet the claim to it as a potential right is of course the redistributive motive of jus in re, and underlies not only the right to consume, but also the capacity for liberty.

This is paradoxical, but paradox never rattles Proudhon. There is room for considerable interpretation of the significance of these terms, but the most plausible, and for our purposes the most useful seems to be that *Jus ad rem* can exist as a just relation of people to property only if it is distributed equally, that is, if jus in re is actually exercisable by all the persons who have a claim to it deriving from the structure of production.[6] Ad rem is a hypothetical goal, in re the practical ethical means. Just what this relationship is never becomes clear in Proudhon's writings. But the relationship of these two rights is credible in its implications, some of which Proudhon indeed specifies. One, the most conventionally socialist, is that collective labour precludes jus ad rem in productive property because production itself creates jus in re or possession as the dominant social relationship. Since all labour is a priori equal, so too must be possession. As Woodcock describes Proudhon's position here, workers have absolute rights over their products insofar as they consume them without any directly distributable surplus

[5] ibid pp52-58ff.
[6] ibid pp 103–109.

value, but not over the means of production because that necessarily accumulates into rights over other person's products since no production is wholly self-sufficient.[7] Absolute right extends at most to personal property only, and usually not even then since such property lacks hard and fast definitions. Any ownership of production in any form must be limited first by jus in re and secondly by its equal distribution, both in principle and in practice, among all its producers who in any way have a claim to jus in re in either its products, the resources it uses or in the means of production as products of earlier production. This pretty well excludes far-reaching ownership of production of any kind, as well as drastically narrowing the notion of purely personal property. Furthermore, it precludes productive property as either a foundation or form of social authority, and production as an end in itself.

Proudhon indeed recognises this implication and makes it the cornerstone of his view of the proper relation of material property to people, even when he is stressing the positive functions of domain as the foundation of independence and autonomy vis-a-vis the state. While not denying *jus ad rem* practical expression, he always imposes on it such restrictions as to make it subject to greater values which it cannot transgress without negating its functions and thereby renouncing its right to exist. There can be no proprietors who in any way diminish the collective jus in re deriving from production, that is, who nullify the obligations of possession.

"Every occupant is, then, necessarily a possessor or usufructuary — a function which excludes proprietorship … He is responsible for the thing entrusted to him; he must use it in conformity with general utility, with a view to its preservation and development; he has no power to transform it, to diminish it or to change its nature; he cannot so divide the usufruct that another shall perform the labour while he receives the product."[8]

[7] Woodcock: Anarchism, ppl05ff.
[8] Proudhon: Property, p82.