Anarchism and Religion

Mapping an Increasingly Fruitful Landscape

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Both anarchism and religion have enjoyed renewed academic attention since the end of the twentieth century: religion has been an increasingly visible aspect of political life; and anarchist ideas have suffused recent social and political movements to a striking degree. Scholars have therefore increasingly turned their attention to both of these trends, seeking to illuminate the causes of their resurgence, and the underlying debates that have informed this renewed prominence.[1] In line with these trends, the overlap between anarchism and religion has also attracted new interest.[2] In print, on social media, in the streets and in religious communities, religious anarchist analysis, and the analysis of religious anarchists, is gaining traction.[3]

Yet anarchism and religion have historically had an uneasy relationship. There are defined tensions between the two camps that are freighted with historical pedigree: many anarchists insist that religion is fundamentally incompatible with anarchism, while many religious adherents have grown suspicious of anarchists given a strain of anticlericalism that has sometimes sparked shocking violence.[4] At the same time, religious anarchists insist that their religious tradition embodies (or at least has the potential to embody) the very values that have historically accorded anarchism its unique place in the family of political ideologies.[5] Their religious beliefs, they argue, imply a rejection of the state, call for an economy of mutual aid, present a denunciation of

[1] The literature on each of these is vast. For the resurgence of religion in politics, see for instance: Peter L. Berger, ed. The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics (Washington: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999); José Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Jonathan Fox, An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Jeffrey Haynes, An Introduction to International Relations and Religion (Harrow: Pearson, 2007); Jeffrey Haynes, ed. Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics (London: Routledge, 2009); Luca Mavelli and Fabio Petito, "The Postsecular in International Relations: An Overview," Review of International Studies 38, no. 5 (2012). For anarchist studies, see for instance: Uri Gordon, Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory (London: Pluto, 2008); Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl, eds., New Perspectives on Anarchism (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009); Ruth Kinna, ed. The Continuum Companion to Anarchism (London: Continuum, 2012); Carl Levy and Saul Newman, eds., The Anarchist Imagination: Anarchism Encounters the Humanities and Social Sciences (Routledge, forthcoming); Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen, eds., Twenty-First Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for a New Millennium (London: Continuum, 1997); Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen, eds., Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Duane Rousselle and Süreyyya Evren, eds., Post-Anarchism: A Reader (London: Pluto, 2011).

[2] For instance: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, ed. Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010); Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, "Religious Studies and Anarchism," in The Anarchist Imagination: Anarchism Encounters the Humanities and the Social Sciences, ed. Carl Levy and Saul Newman (tbc: Routledge, forthcoming); John A. Rapp, Daoism and Anarchism: Critiques of State Autonomy in Ancient and Modern China, Contemporary Anarchist Studies (London: Continuum, 2012); Mark Van Steenwyk, That Holy Anarchist: Reflections on Christianity and Anarchism (Minneapolis: Missio Dei, 2012); A. Terrance Wiley, Angelic Troublemakers: Religion and Anarchism in America, ed. Laurence Davis, et al., Contemporary Anarchist Studies (London: Continuum, 2014); Tripp York, Living on Hope While Living in Babylon: The Christian Anarchists of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2009).

[3] A full discussion and bibliography are available in Christoyannopoulos, "Religious Studies and Anarchism."; Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Lara Apps, "Anarchism and Religion," in A Companion to Anarchist Philosophy, ed. Nathan Jun (tbc: Brill, forthcoming).

[4] The Spanish Civil War provides the most frequently evoked case in point. On that, see for instance Manuel Pérez Ledesma, "Studies on Anticlericalism in Contemporary Spain," International Review of Social History 46, no. 02 (2001).

[5] Michael Freeden, Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ruth Kinna, Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); David Miller, Anarchism (London: J. M. Dent, 1984).

oppressive authorities that often includes religious institutions, and embody a quest for a more just society – despite, and indeed sometimes paradoxically *because* of, the acceptance of a god as 'master.'

However, despite the renewed attention devoted to the contested terrain between politics and religion, and despite the new prominence anarchism has enjoyed in radical politics post-1989, scholarship on the relation between anarchism and religion, on proponents of religious anarchism, and on their arguments, remains relatively rare. This is now changing. Whether emanating from academic, religious or activist circles, there is a growing literature, much of which centres on the Christian tradition, but is refreshed by an emerging focus on anarchism and Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions and spiritualities.[6]

Building on this fertile work, this book aims to open a forum for the academic analysis of this contested field, to offer a critical space for the discussion of the theoretical, theological and historical overlaps between anarchism and religion, and to cast a probing light on the rich dialogue that these conflicts have created. While the issue of contemporary political relevance is one that runs through many of the chapters in this volume, the primary intention of this collection is scholarly: tracing the under-acknowledged resonances between anarchist politics and religious ideas, understanding the historical animus at the heart of this relationship, and highlighting examples of common action and concern.

It seems appropriate at this point to acknowledge our positionality. We – that is, both we the editors and most authors in these volumes – write from a predominantly Eurocentric, white, male and therefore privileged position. This was not intentional, but does reflect the continuing intersectional hierarchies present across the academic sector. We have attempted to solicit a mix of chapters with a more balanced gender mix, seeking contributions from both non-male authors and about non-male scholars. For instance, building on the origins of this first volume in the Anarchist Studies Network's (ASN) conference held at Loughborough University in 2012, we targeted the 2016 ASN conference, which had a central theme of anarcha-feminism. Future volumes will hopefully therefore go some way to addressing these issues, but the lack of voices belonging to women and non-white people in particular highlights enduring issues in higher education.

It goes without saying that we remain committed to broadening this ongoing research by considering such papers in the future, and indeed, are actively interested in encouraging contributions that either in authorship or content are not predominantly white, Eurocentric, or Christian (or post-Christian). Yet, as much as these volumes may reflect deeper structural biases at play in

[6] For example: Harold B. Barclay, "Islam, Muslim Societies and Anarchy," Anarchist Studies 10, no. 1 (2002); Amedeo Bertolo, ed. L'anarchico E L'ebreo: Storia Di Un Incontro (Milan: Elèuthera, 2001); Furio Biagini, Nati Altrove: Il Movimento Anarchico Ebraico Tra Mosca E New York (Pisa: Biblioteca F. Serantini, 1998); Anthony T. Fiscella, "Imagining an Islamic Anarchism: A New Field of Study Is Ploughed," in Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Abdennur Prado, El Islam Como Anarquismo Místico (Barcelona: Virus, 2010); John A. Rapp, "Anarchism or Nihilism: The Buddhist-Influenced Thought of Wu Nengzi," in Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Rapp, Daoism and Anarchism; Kerry Thornley, "Zenarchy," IllumiNet Press and Impropaganda, http://www.impropaganda.net/1997/zenarchy.html; Michael T. Van Dyke, "Kenneth Rexroth's Integrative Vision: Anarchism, Poetry, and the Religious Experience in Post-World War Ii San Francisco," in Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Mohamed Jean Veneuse, "To Be Condemned to a Clinic: The Birth of the Anarca-Islamic Clinic," in Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

the contemporary scholarly world, each chapter makes an original and rigorous contribution to an important and emerging field, and these silences simply highlight the exciting work to done.

In what follows, we briefly stake out the current anarchism and religious studies landscape, and introduce the essays included in this volume.

Tentatively mapping the territory

The overlap between anarchism and religion can be studied in many ways, addressing different questions and using different methodologies rooted in different disciplinary conventions. While a detailed heuristic taxonomy of this burgeoning scholarship can be found elsewhere, a condensed summary nevertheless offers a useful compass.[7] Without meaning to force a limiting set of categories on to this literature, and noting that there are publications falling outside of this tentative classification, there seems to be four principal types of analysis typical in the scholarship examining the relation between anarchism and religion: anarchist critiques of religion, anarchist exegesis, anarchist theology, and histories of religious anarchists.

An anarchist critique of religion is apparent even in the earliest days of anarchism as a political tradition, and has tended to attack both religious claims and religious institutions.[8] The anarchist theoretician Peter Kropotkin is a quintessential example of this approach, portraying religious belief as an obstacle to a critical consciousness of social oppression, and depicting the organised church as a key ally of the nation-state in its efforts to dominate social life in the modern era.[9] The social role of religion has undergone significant transformations since the nineteenth century, but rarely have these changes been sufficient to convince anarchist critics that this critique is redundant. Even in Western Europe where secularisation is most pronounced, religious institutions and religious mindsets continue to play important roles in public life, whether through moral conventions, established traditions or new spiritual and religious perspectives. For many anarchists, many criticisms of religion therefore still stand. Anarchists have thus condemned religion as, for instance: a source of inequality and suffering; a deluded and incoherent lie harmful to rational self-awareness; a hypnotic deception distracting the masses from revolutionary consciousness; an unnecessary, and perhaps harmful, basis for morality; an institution complicit in the perpetuation of injustice and slavery; and a residue from an arcane past. Yet not all anarchists have been this hostile, with some seeing positive elements in at least some religious claims and values, and acknowledging the contributions of dissenting religious groups who have challenged their orthodox counterparts.[10] Indeed many religious anarchists have themselves articulated sharp criticisms of religion, sometimes exhibiting a zealous anticlericalism of

[7] Christoyannopoulos, "Religious Studies and Anarchism."; Christoyannopoulos and Apps, "Anarchism and Religion."

[8] For example, see: Mikhail Bakunin, God and the State (New York: Dover, 1970); Harold Barclay, "Anarchist Confrontations with Religion," in New Perspectives on Anarchism, ed. Nathan Jun and Shane Wahl (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010); Sébastien Faure, "Does God Exist? Twelve Proofs of the Non-Existence of God," The Anarchist Library, http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/sebastien-faure-does-god-exist; Johann Most, "The God Pestilence," Anarchy Archives, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/most/godpest.html; Nicolas Walter, "Anarchism and Religion," The Raven: anarchist quarterly 25 7, no. 1 (1994).

[9] For this, consider: Matthew S. Adams, Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 54–56, 87–88.

[10] For example: Barclay, "Anarchist Confrontations with Religion."; Gérard Bessière, Jésus Selon Proudhon: La « Messianose » Et La Naissance Du Christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 2007); John Clark, "Anarchism," in Encyclopedia of

their own. All these anarchist critiques, and indeed any religious counter-arguments, constitute one category of analysis in the area.

The second principal category, religious exegesis, is not unconnected to the anarchist critique in that anticlerical arguments by religious anarchists have often been based precisely on the interpretation of religious scripture. Anarchist exegesis, however, does not stop with the development of anticlerical arguments. There are numerous examples of religious texts being interpreted as implying either direct or implicit criticism of the state, capitalism or other structures of oppression. At the same time, the focus of anarchist exegesis has more often been the state (and to some extent the church) rather than other oppressive structures or phenomena. Leo Tolstoy and Jacques Ellul are the most cited authors of such anarchist exegeses, though there are many others who each bring different angles of interpretation and focus on different varieties of scriptural texts. Many of those authors have been weaved together to articulate a more generic anarchist exegesis of Christian scripture in, for example, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel*.[11] Yet there are many more anarchist interpretations of religious texts, many of which have been published in recent years, and not only with a Christian focus.[12] This category of analysis is vibrant in both religious and scholarly circles.

When religious communities have discussions on themes and issues as varied as war, poverty, injustice, charity and democracy, however, they do not necessarily always refer back to scripture. In other words, religious discussions are obviously not always reduced to exegesis, and those having discussions about social, political and economic issues based on their religious worldview will still use the grammar and referents of their religious tradition to articulate their reflections. When those religious reflections develop anarchist tropes, arguments or conclusions, what emerges is anarchist theology, the third category of analysis bridging anarchism and religion.

The boundary between anarchist exegesis and anarchist theology is not rigid: theological discussions might evoke religious texts (without making these the sole basis of analysis) and exegetical discussions might develop broader reflections on social and political themes (without losing sight of scripture), but these remain rather different modes of inquiry, each with their anarchist advocates. Scholarly discussion of anarchist theology has been rarer than anarchist exegesis, yet the potential for anarchist theology is vast, and there is exciting research underway in this field.

Finally, there is also a defined strand of research, primarily historical, focusing on the lives and ideas of religious anarchist individuals and groups. The form of these enquiries varies considerably, from biographical investigations seeking to recover the activities of neglected figures from the tradition of religious anarchism, to the analysis of religious communities, and the dissection of currents of thought, identification of overlooked genealogies, and ideological filiations. As this implies, the sub-disciplines that characterise modern historical practice often cast a distinctive light on the intersections of religion and anarchism. It is a field populated by the intellectual, cultural, and social historian, as much as the historian of political thought and the historian of religion. What they share is a concern to recover, uncover or discuss the histories of religious anarchists and those who come close to fitting such a label.

Religion and Nature, ed. Bron Taylor (London: Continuum, 2005); Peter Kropotkin, "'Anarchism'," Encyclopaedia Britannica, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_ Archives/Kropotkin/britanniaanarchy.html.

[11] Christoyannopoulos, Christian Anarchism.

[12] See, for instance, the many sources listed in "Religious Studies and Anarchism."; Christoyannopoulos and Apps, "Anarchism and Religion."

It is worth noting that this tentative taxonomy, despite aiming to cover much of the area, does not in fact cover all possible approaches. Nor are these four categories mutually exclusive.

Many studies in the present volume fruitfully combine elements of more than one category, and others take an approach that does not fit neatly into any of these traditions. Justin Meggitt's chapter, for instance, belongs primarily to the field of Bible studies – not quite exegesis, history or theology, yet arguably containing elements of each. There are also those such as Simon Critchley who adopt a Schmittian take on 'political theology' (where political discourses and institutions are understood as secularised theological ones) yet still discuss discernibly religious and anarchist themes – a case perhaps of anarchist theology, but not in the sense of 'theology' familiar to most theologians.[13] Or, to cite another example, there are interventions that read more as tracts, polemics or plaidoyers, perhaps eschewing a rigorously academic framework their authors consider constricting. These too are neither exegetical nor strictly theological in the traditional sense, yet they seek to develop and interrogate religious anarchist arguments from unconventional perspectives. This categorisation of *plaidoyer* is not intended to dismiss work that rejects the conventions of academic analysis, but, as a landmark on our tentative map of the territory, demonstrates the range of research currently underway examining the relationship between anarchist and religious ideas.

Our aim is to foster scholarly work on any of the above categories in a spirit of critical dialogue that is open to a range of perspectives not necessarily limited to the taxonomy outlined here. This also explains the sheer diversity of approaches, directions and methodologies in this volume. It also explains why some texts seem partly driven by an activist interest, and we recognise no problem in this method if the argument is rigorous. Our only criteria for us to consider a text for this project are that such work should examine the vexed overlap between religion and anarchism, and that it can pass the test academic peer-review. Of particular interest for the future, since particularly understudied thus far, are studies that deal with religions other than Christianity; analysis by authors outside the privileged demographic of white European males; further studies and reflections in anarchist theology; discussions of core accusations between anarchism and religion; and unwritten histories of important religious anarchists.

One of the surprises of working in this area is the true diversity of original research on religious anarchism, especially when these studies have emerged from different disciplinary areas and methodologies. Our aim with this multi-volume collection is to foster this variety, not encage it within a single direction or methodology.

How this book emerged

This book has a predecessor. The first major international conference organised by the then recently-founded ASN (as a specialist group of the United Kingdom's Political Studies Association) was held in Loughborough University in 2008. Out of a stream of that conference emerged *Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives*, a book which is unfortunately not available in open access and the chapters of which, although closely reviewed by its editor and peer-reviewed by the

[13] Simon Critchley, "Mystical Anarchism," Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory 10, no. 2 (2009); Ted Troxell, "Christian Theory: Postanarchism, Theology, and John Howard Yoder," Journal for the Study of Radicalism 7, no. 1 (2013).

publisher, were ultimately not submitted to as rigorous a peer-reviewing process as the present book.[14]

All the essays in this volume have gone through such a process. There are many more papers still in the metaphorical pipeline, so we expect at least two more volumes in this collection – hopefully more if the volumes generate further interest. Any potential author interested in submitting a paper for consideration can contact either of the editors.

The essays in this volume

This first volume contains seven chapters of original scholarship on a variety of themes. Few are confined neatly to one of the aforementioned categories of analysis: most offer a range of perspectives and are inspired by diverse disciplinary approaches. Some are primarily historical interventions (Pauli, Blanes), others engage with anarchist theology by reflecting on notorious religious and anarchist thinkers (Podmore). Another considers the mystical anarchism of two thinkers not typically classed as religious anarchists (Hoppen), while one paper blends exegesis and history (Galvan-Alvarez). Other papers are rooted in Bible studies (Meggitt), and the last offers a philosophical discussion of the relevance of a particular anarchist critique of religion (Strandberg).

The first paper in this volume, by Benjamin Pauli, examines a group perhaps not unfamiliar to those with an interest in anarchist history: the Catholic Worker community. Founded in the United States by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in the early 1930s, in Pauli's analysis the group exemplifies the seeming tension at the heart of the overlap between religious ideas and anarchist politics: reconciling a religious faith apparently weighted down by a history of authoritarianism, with a politics whose first principle is a repudiation of hierarchy. Viewing the Catholic Worker movement through the lens of 'exemplarity', Pauli sees in Day and Maurin's efforts to offer leadership through the power of example rather than coercion, an intriguing model of political action directly inspired by an interpretation of central figures in the Christian pantheon. Rather than its Catholicism mutilating its anarchism, Pauli sees the Catholic Worker's religious attachments as 'enhancing' its anarchism, a reading that, he contends, is important even to those anarchist theorists who regard the claims of religion with scepticism.

In his contribution, Ruy Blanes similarly investigates how a specific historical moment in the history of Christianity, and a particular cultural manifestation of organised religious practice, was imbued with essentially anarchistic values. The Tokoist Church, which rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s in Angola as it became a key actor in the fight against Portuguese colonialism, continued this oppositional role as a critique of the country's post-independence People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government. Offering a history of Simão or Simao Toko and his followers, Blanes examines the problems associated with peremptory rejection of religion that is characteristic of many anarchists, when the religious group itself initially embodied many anarchist principles: a commitment to horizontalism, a communal approach to leadership, faith in the powers of mutualism, and a burning desire to fight the forces of colonialism. At the same time, Blanes traces the process of 'hierarchization' that confronted the Tokoist movement, examining how these early principles were co-opted, and now often serve as fetters to 'processes of ideological and institutional innovation'.

[14] Christoyannopoulos, ed. Religious Anarchism.

Just as Blanes' contribution looks to the illumination of a fascinating but relatively unknown history as a means of interrogating the connections between anarchist politics and religion, Enrique Galván-Álvarez's chapter looks much further back, to Japan in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with a similar ambition. With the Buddhism of Shinran Shonin in mind, Galván-Álvarez looks to this tradition of Buddhist thought as especially relevant to contemporary anarchist practice. Through an analysis of Shinran's neglected writings, which offered a radical reading of the established sources of Buddhism, he sees Shinran offering a searching critique of political and religious hierarchies that has not only been neglected by historians, but retains its relevance nine centuries later as a fillip to those seeking to challenge hegemonic political forces.

Justin Meggitt's chapter interrogates the claim that 'Jesus was an anarchist' through a highly detailed exploration of both the history of anarchist thought, and a close reading of scriptural sources. Accepting the difficulties imposed by the heated debates concerning the very meaning of the label 'anarchist', and the issue of anachronism that might imperil efforts to associate Jesus with a political movement that emerged from social concerns and intellectual currents unleashed by industrial modernity, Meggitt nevertheless argues that there are good grounds for seeing Jesus through the lens of anarchism. Looking to Jesus' critique of existing power relations, and his quest for egalitarian and prefigurative forms of social life, Meggitt argues, echoing the reasoning of the anarchist Alexander Berkman, that Jesus was indeed an anarchist.

While Meggitt's contribution to this volume is notable for examining the perhaps unexpected connections between the historical Jesus and the anarchist tradition, Franziska Hoppen's chapter similarly sketches an original comparison in the work of two thinkers: Gustav Landauer and Eric Voegelin. Landauer's position in the anarchist canon is not in doubt, and his insightful and novel efforts to rethink the central claims of anarchist politics, while drawing on an idiosyncratic mysticism, are well established. Voegelin, however, a German academic with an interest in totalitarianism and political violence, is probably more unfamiliar to those inspecting the fault lines between anarchist theory and religious studies. This, Hoppen proposes, is a mistake, for considering the 'mystical anarchism' of Landauer and Voegelin in tandem reveals common threads in their vision of an 'anti-political community', in which the self is both a 'primary reality' and the starting point 'in the struggle for change'.

In this spirit of novel comparisons, the sixth chapter, written by Simon Podmore, unites the Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first thinker to wear the label of 'anarchist' as a badge of honour rather than a term of abuse. Podmore's paper reflects on the affinities between the two thinkers' negation of God and their paradoxical assertions about God implicit in that negation. Their anti-theism is thus compared and contrasted, showing that where Proudhon settles on the need to insist on the negation of the idea of 'God' in order to achieve justice, Kierkegaard's negation of God leads him to a theological affirmation of freedom. Juxtaposing these rather different thinkers therefore exposes interesting philosophical and theological parallels and differences.

Finally, Hugo Strandberg looks to another familiar figure in the anarchist pantheon, the German individualist Max Stirner, and uses his ideas to ponder the issue of whether religious belief demands servitude. He argues that, on reflection, it is egoism rather than religion which forces self-denial, because the egoist must harden their heart and renounce any social concern for others to submit to Stirner's ideal, whereas religion does not necessarily require servitude in submission to God, and can in principle be understood to affirm a kind of freedom primary to any political or religious institutions.

As this selection of papers demonstrates, there is an astounding intellectual vibrancy at the heart of contemporary scholarship on anarchism and religion. The range of perspectives encompassed in these contributions, their inherent interdisciplinarity, and the rich variety of thinkers, movements and ideas examined, all highlight the health of the field. Editing these papers and the many more to come in future volumes was both an intellectually stimulating and pleasurable experience, and we hope that readers will gain as much from them as we have.

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos & Matthew S. Adams, September 2016

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