REVIEWS

Nocella II, Anthony J; Seis, Mark; & Shantz, Jeff (eds.), Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology; A Historical Dismantling of Punishment and Domination

Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2020; 209pp; ISBN 9781849353809

Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology is, as the title indicates, a collection of texts from 'classic anarchists' (figures like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Goldman, Parsons, and others) about topics relevant to the field of criminology: the origin, purpose and legitimacy of laws, the morality of prisons and punishment, free will and moral responsibility, the difference between crimes in general and anti-social behaviour, the causes of crime and how they can be remedied, and alternatives to the existing legal and penal system. With its expressed focus on 'classic anarchists' the collection is limited to thinkers who all lived in and around the nineteenth century. A book like this has to limit itself in scope but this also means the perspectives are limited to those of (mostly male) Europeans and Americans (mostly European immigrants), many of whom were socially connected and influenced each other.

The different chapters are organised historically and by author. Since one must choose a method, this makes sense, but an alternative could have been to organise it thematically – for example 'causes of crime', 'genealogies of the penal system', 'morality of punishment', 'alternatives to prison', etc. I am aware that this would require a lot of work and hard decisions by the editors, as the texts might have to be cut and moved around at the detriment of their internal coherence. But it would give the casual reader a feeling of where to start if they were interested in a particular question rather than in the thoughts of a particular person. Alternatively, there could have been a reading guide in the introduction of the book to help the reader get an overview.

The reason for these considerations is that I am not entirely sure who the target audience is. The book aims to be a contribution to the field of criminology, and as such it is a valuable contribution – it has texts that provide important alternatives to the more mainstream 'classic' and modern material. It speaks directly to contemporary issues like the prison abolition movement while showing that these ideas have existed for centuries. It is important that these perspectives are included

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in the fields of criminology, law, and justice. But I wonder if a student or scholar of criminology, who is not already interested in anarchist ideas, would sit down and 'wade through' (as the afterword says) an entire book of very diverse anarchist texts. Such a person might benefit from a more systematic and thematic overview.

Another audience, of course, would be those who are in fact interested in anarchist ideas in general and would like to have a more focused insight into anarchist perspectives on crime and punishment. Even those who have read much of the 'classic anarchists' can find much in this book that might have skipped their attention before. Thus, despite having read quite a lot of Kropotkin's works, I did not know about his writings about the correlation between weather patterns and crime statistics (pp154-5). Naturally, I had to look this up and found evidence showing it is still the case that higher temperatures and humidity lead to more violent crime.¹

This is just one example of how these old texts contain knowledge that is still relevant today, as is the moral and practical implications: the causes of antisocial behaviour often have more to do with the circumstances than individual moral failures, so if we want to reduce crime we need to improve the social circumstances rather than focus on imprisonment and punishment. As many of the authors argue, incarceration does not deter crimes (in some cases it may even lead to higher crime rates), and criminologists are still trying to get that message heard today.²

Common themes among all the writers are that punishment is often unjust, that it does not work to rehabilitate nor discourage crime, and that the legal system in general is set up to benefit those in power and thus is itself unjust. None of the authors claim that anti-social behaviour would disappear entirely in a more egalitarian and just society, but much could be avoided by creating better conditions. These are classic anarchist critiques that are still as valid today and repeated also by non-anarchists. An interesting point raised in the book is how the punitive system encourages anti-social and brutal behaviour by setting in place a system of enforcement officers – the police and prison wardens – who are authorised to commit violence against others and encouraged to be suspicious of fellow humans. This is perhaps even more relevant today, where entire police forces are trained to view the public as enemies in a warzone and imagine themselves as the 'thin blue line' that stands between civilised society and 'anarchy' in the pejorative sense of the word.³

As the editors mention in the introduction, this 'thin blue line' mentality is an example of the ideology of the seventeenth century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, whose defence of the authority of the state rested upon a misanthropic view of 'human nature' as fundamentally anti-social, selfish and competitive. Without a strong government to keep everyone in check, this nature would break out, resulting in a 'war of all against all'. Few today declare themselves in agree-

ment with his philosophy, but it is still with us, implicitly, in much of the political discourse. It is still believed that domination is required because 'human nature' is fundamentally asocial. Rarely is it asked how the forces of domination contribute to shaping this so-called nature. Would a different society not create different humans, humans with more responsibility towards themselves and each other? That is an open question, and one this book contributes to the answers for.

Ole Martin Sandberg, University of Iceland

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- Kilian Heilmann, Matthew E. Kahn, and Cheng Keat Tang, 'The Urban Crime and Heat Gradient in High and Low Poverty Areas', *Journal of Public Economics* 197, (2021).
- 2. Don Stemen, *The Prison Paradox: More Incarceration Will Not Make Us Safer*, Vera Institute of Justice, (New York 2017).
- 3. Williams, Kristian, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, South End Press, (Boston 2007), p22.

George Barrett, *Our Masters are Helpless: The Essays of George Barrett*, lain McKay (ed.)

London: Freedom Press, 2018; 139pp; ISBN 9781904491323

George Barrett is not a name to conjure with. In the broad literature on the rise of modern British socialism and anarchism, Barrett is almost entirely absent. That, however, is not to say that Barrett – editor, writer, and activist – is, or has been, without admirers. The great British anarchist thinker, Colin Ward, for instance, described Barrett's pamphlet, *Objections to Anarchism*, as one of the 'best' anarchist pamphlets he had read (p3). And now, Iain McKay, who regards, similarly, Barrett's writings as some of the finest among the 'revolutionary, class struggle' anarchist tradition, has compiled here a selection of Barrett's essays, covering the period of Barrett's most productive political activity, from 1910-1915 (p7). The book is divided into three parts: the first reproduces Barrett's pamphlets; the second, Barrett's articles for *Freedom*; and the third, Barrett's reports and letters for *Freedom*.

Born in 1888, Barrett first became politically active in the Bristol Socialist Society, a parliamentary socialist grouping. By 1908, however, Barrett was advo-

cating for anarchism. In 1909, Barrett moved to London, where he participated in the revived, and increasingly syndicalist, British anarchist movement. The following year, he moved again to Glasgow, where he played a crucial role in expanding the movement, winning support for anarchist ideas through his indefatigable public speaking and the weekly newspaper's he established there, namely the *Anarchist* (1912) and *Voice of Labour* (1914). These details we learn from McKay's helpful introduction.

Contemporaries noted Barrett's extraordinary energy, recording, admiringly – and accurately – how he 'was undoubtedly an unusual personality'. The historian John Quail (from whose work, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, McKay borrows) cites an ex-Independent Labour Party anarchist, explaining the attraction of anarchism for many in Glasgow as not so much the ideas, but rather 'the glamour' of Barrett. Quail himself described Barrett's writings as 'somewhat prolix and rhetorical', and it is hard to demur from Quail's judgement. Yet, between 1910-1915, Barrett was still a very young man, persecuted by the state, sacked by his employer, and blacklisted following the Sidney Street Affair in 1911, and his articles and pamphlets must be read in that light.

Contrary to Ward's assessment, Barrett should win no plaudits as a political philosopher. In the pamphlets and articles McKay has assembled, Barrett is consistently inconsistent, arguing against economic determinism then for it, spurning voluntarism before endorsing it, and espousing the reasonable behaviour of the anarchist subject while rejecting compromise out of hand. Despite his dialogic approach and his nominal intellectual openness, Barrett habitually evades difficult questions, furnishing weak arguments on agency and incentives to labour, while failing to view domination as both a horizontal phenomenon as well as a vertical one.

Barrett is scornful of socialism and socialists. The Social Democratic Federation, the ILP, and Robert Blatchford are all sharply criticised. Yet, in one article, Barrett praises the maverick British 'Marxist', E.B. Bax, and there are, throughout, traces of Marx (or 'Marxism') in Barrett's thought – echoes of the *Communist Manifesto*, defence of the labour theory of value, and criticism of alienated labour. It is, however, Kropotkin who Barrett reaches for openly and most consistently, reproducing Kropotkin's optimistic evolutionary sociology.

Barrett was clearly familiar with anarchist thought in the round, invoking Bakunin, Tolstoy, and the French anarchist Jean Graves. But, in addition, Barrett drew on indigenous non-anarchist sources, such as Herbert Spencer, T.H. Buckle, and John Stuart Mill, in support of his no-government views. Barrett's engagement, however, with the work of non-anarchists – allies and opponents alike – is selective, and, as with his critique of 'scientific' socialism, he does not fully assimi-

late the arguments of his antagonists – Engels' 'dictatorship of the proletariat', for instance, or Mill's 'harm principle'.

It would be a mistake, however, to judge Barrett in these terms alone. For Barrett's personal charisma is also evident in his writing, which – romantic, combative, and condescending – evinces a certain arrogant charm and a proclivity for ironism. More, though, Barrett was an important figure in the anarchist movement during the years of the 'Great Labour Unrest'. His diagnosis of an 'unconscious anarchism' permeating the labour movement was no doubt wishful thinking. But Barrett's writings offer crucial insights into both the intellectual and the organisational history of British anarchism in the period between its revival in the 1900s and the Russian revolution. The transnational references in Barrett's work, his use of indigenous non-anarchist sources, and his interventions in domestic and international socialist and anarchist politics make for important reading. McKay has performed a great service to historians of modern British politics and ideas in making it accessible.

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- 1. John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019), p301.
- 2. Ibid., p302.
- 3. Ibid.

Cindy Milstein (ed.), *Deciding for Ourselves: The Promise of Direct Democracy*

Oakland: AK Press, 2020; 300pp; ISBN 9781849353731

Deciding for ourselves is the most recent addition to Cindy Milstein's series of edited volumes, following *Rebellious Mourning, Taking Sides, There is Nothing so Broken as a Broken Heart* and *Paths towards Utopia*. This time round, the volume is dedicated to direct democracy and the promise it contains for creating different worlds. Each chapter describes a radical political experiment, a community, a space where 'ordinary' people decided to organise their lives differently and trust each other to step out of the general channels of society.

For readers expecting academic arguments about the importance of radical democracy, Deciding for Ourselves is not a book that contains theoretically articulated arguments on the importance of 'interstices' for radical politics. However, it introduces its readers to a range of real-life examples where people (attempt to) self-govern for a period, in various locations around the world. Milstein has taken good care to ensure that this anthology is truly international, something she reflects on in the introduction. The stories she has collected are varied, she says, to highlight that direct democracy is not a ready-made mould one just adopts, but a practice that needs to be adapted to different contexts and is often understood differently by its participants. The purpose of this volume, Milstein admits, is to give us a selection of samples, like a taster board of various flavours to demonstrate human creativity (given the space for self-determination). A closer look reveals contributions from Barcelona, North America, Puerto Rico, Greece, Brazil, Denmark, Mexico and Rojava. Moreover, there are a variety of formats as well – some chapters are reflections from participants, others from researchers, and yet others are interviews or conversations. Some of these projects are long-term wellestablished (semi-)institutionalised projects like Christiania or a Greek workers' cooperative factory, and others are short-lived or small-scale success stories such as Mexico's village protests or the Anishinaabe people's restoration of old practices.

One thread uniting all the stories, however, is their optimism, whether about direct democracy, their various projects, or the future. All stories focus on people working together and putting aside their differences in a spirit of freedom and mutual aid, highlighting the positive outcomes of self-governance. Milstein is explicit that this optimism is an aim of the anthology - to inspire, to point out to creative solutions, to describe 'successful anarchism' (p8) – and the volume is effective in bringing out these feelings in the reader. Yet, as an anarchist, I can't help but be a bit critical of this approach. The experiments all seem overly positive, sometimes almost too much to be entirely believable. My experience of similar projects, including a visit in one of the ones described in the book, indicates that tensions, divisions and insurmountable disagreements often occur between participants and can even lead to the end of such experiments. Problems or disagreements do not discredit the promise of direct democracy or makes it less appealing, but shying away from talking about them certainly portrays a less honest picture of such spaces. I recognise that at a time when making the world a better place seems hopeless, a positive collection of stories can be inspiring and keep spirits up and Deciding for Ourselves is certainly that book. However, occluding the negative aspects of these narratives creates an overly utopian portrayal of direct democracy which can also be unhelpful.

Some of the contributions touch onto problems – for instance, Christiania's drug use, or tensions around patriarchy in Rojava – yet these are only briefly mentioned, and their divisiveness downplayed. For instance, despite the fact cannabis sale is 'one of the core problems facing Christiania today' (p156), there is no portrayal of the way the community has tried to address the problem. Problems are acknowledged, but not discussed, nor disagreeing voices given space. A few pages further the problem of Christiania working (selling out as the author puts it) with the Danish state is also presented as a fact, but not engaged with further. Some of the other accounts don't even go as far as mentioning disagreements or problems – for instance, the chapter about VioMe factory in Greece is entirely descriptive, with seemingly no issues at all organising hundreds of workers into a co-op. Despite the fact that Milstein recognises the messiness and chaos of selforganised communities in the introduction, not very much space is given to these elements in the actual contributions. About half-way through the book, it becomes obvious that the stories that are missing are those of the people who left because they disagreed, because these experiments didn't work for them, and the absence of their stories remains unaddressed in the rest of the narratives.

That being said, the anthology is a beautifully presented collection of radical organising. For anarchists, the real strength of the book is not so much to learn the principles of direct democracy or even its practices, but to be inspired to be creative and develop their own types of direct democracy. For people sympathetic to the idea of self-governing but not very well-practiced in its execution, this anthology might encourage to take the next steps. *Deciding for Ourselves* will not teach readers the entire activist repertoire of building cooperative structures but provides an optimistic showcase of ordinary people taking power.

Elizabeth Vasileva

Hayyim Rothman, *No Masters But God: Portraits of Anarcho-Judaism* Manchester University Press, (Manchester 2021); 272pp; ISBN 9781526149039

At first glance, the connection between fervently Orthodox Jewish thinkers and anarchism appears preposterous. The explicitly patriarchal, law-bound, traditionalist world of learned piety would seem to rebuff any strain of anarchist philosophy. Then again, if one takes into account the Hebrew Bible's prophetic tradition that demands social justice, the decentralised and tenuous nature of rabbinic power, the millennia-long evolution of a diasporic existence that engen-

dered autonomous communal structures, the cultivation of traditions of Jewish education that encouraged independent study and scholarship, the promulgation of grass-roots voluntary mutual aid organisations – to say nothing of a history brim-full of discrimination, dispossession, and expulsion that reinforced an ironic attitude towards systems of earthly power – then one might indeed conclude that Torah-true Jewish life is not only conducive to, but also reliant on, anarchist theory and practice. Scholar Hayyim Rothman touches on all these vagaries of Jewish fate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explain the life and work of eight exemplars of 'anarcho-Judaism'. Rothman's portraits of these men –and they are all men – are so compelling that they coalesce to offer a counter-history to prevailing perceptions of contemporary Jewish religious values.

Virtually none of the figures in Rothman's book will be familiar to readers. Even the best known, Yitshak Nahman Steinberg and Natan Hofshi, are considered marginal. Though I have written about Steinberg and produced a short documentary about him (*No Land Without Heaven*), there remains precious little about Steinberg in English, and so Rothman's informative chapter is a welcome addition to the literature. The other individuals Rothman profiles – Rabbi Yaakov Meir Zalkind, Rabbi Shmuel Alexandrov, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, Rabbi Yehudah-Leyb Don-Yahiya, Rabbi Avraham Yehudah Heyn, Rabbi Aaron Shmuel Tamaret – will be known to only a handful of academics. All these eight thinkers were born between 1865 and 1890, a period of time that for Jews ushered in disruptions to traditional life, geographic dislocations, increased persecution, as well as vigorous intellectual ferment. Rothman's sketches of these figures and their socio-cultural milieu make their personalities and intellectual commitments come to life. His scholarship is far-ranging and deftly moves from political theory to explanations of Talmudic reasoning. Readers unfamiliar with rabbinic exegetical practice may find themselves at a disadvantage, though Rothman effectively glosses unfamiliar terms.

Rothman opens his cleverly titled volume with an overview of the distinction between anarchist thinkers who happened to be Jewish (e.g., Emma Goldman, Bernard Lazare) and the figures he focuses on, for whom there was no contradiction between adherence to rabbinic Judaism and the ideals of social revolution. All these men were deeply learned individuals steeped in the traditions of a demanding, legalistic study of canonical Jewish texts. How then did they come to hold anti-nationalist, pacifist, and libertarian socialist convictions? Part of the answer, Rothman suggests, is that they sought to resist the conditions of oppression they faced through a politico-theological radicalism. Their radicalism derived from three key building-blocks: the biblical prophetic tradition, a Tolstoyan-inflected pacifism, and varieties of agrarian socialism. Each constructed his own

utopian dwelling from these diverse materials, and so *No Masters But God* collects a kind of clamorous dialogue between them that is reminiscent of the constant hum of disputations present in a traditional Jewish house of learning.

Indeed, the majority of those profiled studied at the prestigious Ets Hayim Yeshiva of Volozyn in Lithuania. A yeshiva is an independent school for the advanced study of Jewish sacred texts. In the Lithuanian model, the mostly unmarried, teenaged (male) students study on their own or in pairs and do not follow a fixed curriculum. Ets Hayim is often considered the first modern yeshiva, which does not mean that its leaders welcomed the modern world. On the contrary, its teachers and administrators were often at odds with the reformist or secularist influences that circulated clandestinely among students. Surviving documents penned by Volozyn's students testify to their engagement with issues such as social reform, nascent Zionist ideologies, and non-religious Hebrew texts, especially newspapers. Like others who studied at Volozyn - Hebrew national poet H.N. Bialik, and the first Orthodox rabbi to publicly support Zionism, Yitzhak Y. Reines – the anarcho-Jews Rothman considers were profoundly challenged by Zionist efforts to revive (or create) a Jewish national identity. The ingenious visions of the figures Rothman treats will continue to cause readers to strive with Zionism's contemporary neo-liberal and colonialist incarnations. Perhaps the activism of Steinberg, the mysticism of Ashlag, and the anti-militarism of Hofshi will yet inspire Jewish leaders to seek out alternative futures.

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Mohamed Abdou, *Islam and Anarchism: Relationships and Resonances* London: Pluto Press, 2020; 352pp; ISBN 9780745341927

In recent years, a number of books have examined anarchism in various faith traditions such as Christianity,¹ Judaism,² and Daoism.³ Previous work on Islam and anarchism has appeared in limited forms: (1) focused historical studies;⁴ (2) studies of largely European anarchists in North Africa and the Middle East;⁵ (3) biographies of early twentieth-century European Muslim anarchists;⁶ (4) various overviews of anarchism in Islamic contexts;⁷ and (5) Muslim anarchist manifestos.⁸

Many such works appear in a footnote on page 250 of *Islam and Anarchism* by Mohamed Abdou (who also goes by the name Mohamed Jean Veneuse). Yet, despite many footnotes (a total of 855 spanning eighty pages) and numerous academic references, this first full-length English language volume explicitly dedi-

cated to Islam and anarchism seems to fall roughly into the category of manifesto. Although it seldom engages the above-mentioned scholarship (and mentions, but does not discuss, Prado's work), it blends polemics with academic study, post-structuralist theory with personal experience, and Quranic exegesis with historical analysis. Attempting to present (post)anarchism through an Islamic theological lens and Islam through a (post)anarchist lens, Abdou stated:

Muslim anarchist and Islamic anarchist discourses, through what I refer to as *Anarcha-Islām* (an anarchistic, Qur'ānic Islamic non-authoritarian, non-capitalist, feminist, and social just interpretation of Islām and Islamic interpretation of anarchism), explicitly argue that capitalist nation-states that are inherently cisheteropatriarchal, theologically, ethico-politically, contradict Qur'ānic Islamic communal non-authoritarian and non-capitalist governance concepts such as *Shūrā* (mutual consultation), *Ijmā* (mutual consensus), *Maṣlaḥa* (public welfare), *Muḍārabah/Mushārakah* (productive partnerships), and pluralistic, as opposed to singular, conceptualizations of *Khulafā* (caretakers), such that governance and leadership is embodied, acted, if not remade every day, vis-à-vis egalitarian practices related to deep reciprocity (*tabādul al-diyāfa*), intimate practices (*hamīma* or *ulfa*)' (footnote 12; p244).

In Abdou's anti-capitalist, pro-queer, decolonial account, *Tawhid* (God's unity) compels Muslims 'to solely recognize the authority of Allāh and not one's ego or a nation, leader, tribe, or state' (p84). Furthermore, Allah severely limited even Muhammad's authority saying 'you [O Muhammad] are not a *Wakîl* [guardian or a disposer of their affairs or have say] over them' (p110; Sura 42:6). Rather than a ruler or a state, Islam instead requires 'collective and obligatory responsibility for the cultivation and caretaking of this earth together' (p95). A major contribution of this book may lie in Abdou's contention that Muhammad's legacy continued not through any leader nor type of leader (as believed by Sunnis, Shiites, and Ibadis alike) but through *systemic organizational practices* and the *collective will* to sustain those practices as outlined above (e.g., *ijmā*, *shūrā*, *maṣlaḥa*, etc.) alongside egalitarian *ijtihād* (reasoned interpretation) of the Quran (pp90-95). According to Abdou, mainstream Muslim tradition corrupted and failed this anarchistic legacy. European colonialism exacerbated that failure.

That said, attempting to follow the author's line of thought often felt difficult and 'kaleidoscopic' (a reviewer's term on the back cover) due to the following: (1) unresolved ambiguities and tensions regarding its disciplinary diversity; (2) prob-

lematic presentation (e.g., no clear or comprehensive review of relevant literature, no clear definition of key terms, no discussion about limitations to the study, and no bibliography); (3) cumbersome writing habits (seemingly unjustified detours, redundancy, namedropping, run-on sentences, and the use of overly academic terms such as 'panegyric,' 'osteological,' and 'anti-Euro-logo-phallo-centric'); and (4) the author's apparent unwillingness to clarify or explore potential tensions between Islamic 'law' and anarchism in theory and/or practice.

Finally, without explanation, the book virtually ignores (or barely mentions) related people and movements such as Ali Shariati, Muammar Qaddafi's *Green Book*, and Turkey's Anticapitalist Muslims. The book also erroneously includes Christian-turned-atheist Shibli Shumayyil (1850-1917) as a 'Muslim anarchist' and inexplicably excludes both Pashtun pacifist Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988) and the current Kurdish revolution in Rojava from its extensive discussion on Islam and militant resistance (although both the 2011 Tahrir uprising and the Zapatistas in Chiapas receive attention).

The author clearly put much labour into thinking, compiling, citing, sorting, writing, and re-writing. Those who appreciate post-structuralist authors such as Deleuze and Guattari (who inspired Abdou) may appreciate the final result but, for me, the text seemed often terse and obtuse. Nonetheless, although potentially overwhelming, readers may find new facts, points of interest, a wealth of resources, and, if nothing else, the first major press publication in English to broadly and exclusively cover the intersection of Islam and anarchism from an author who identifies with both spheres. If reading this book leads to more questioning and exploration of the creative possibilities and opportunities of encounters between Islam and anarchism then it seems like a worthy effort.

Anthony T. Fiscella

NOTES

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