

41. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
42. Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1958), p. 38.
43. Dunbar, p. 113.
44. Fleming, pp. 1-9.
45. Bakunin, too, promoted science, but more for its practical application than for advancing understanding of social conditions.
46. Peter Kropotkin, "The Wage System" in *Freedom Pamphlets No. 1, New Edition* (London: Freedom Press, 1920).
47. Fleming, pp. 1-9.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
49. G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 173-176.
50. Fleming, p. 110.

## 13

## Proudhon, Pragmatist

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At first glance, it seems peculiar to speak of Proudhon as a pragmatist, insofar as pragmatism, as a current of American philosophy,<sup>1</sup> is subsequent to this author.<sup>2</sup> Philosophical pragmatism, generally speaking, grants a central place to action. It makes action, among other things, the criterion for evaluation of cognitive statements. Nonetheless, some commentators on Proudhon have remarked that he could be viewed as a precursor to pragmatism. This was the case in particular with G. Gurvitch and J. Bancal.<sup>3</sup> However, these authors have mainly insisted on what Bancal has called "the labor pragmatism" of Proudhon. If the father of anarchism "is the first to arrive at a position which will receive the name of pragmatism"<sup>4</sup> this would be because of his view regarding the relation between labor and idea. For Proudhon, ideas have their source in labor as action.

In this chapter, I would like to show that the pragmatist motifs in Proudhon's work do not limit themselves to the question of labor. If, in the sixth study on labor in *Of Justice*, one finds the most complete outline of his labor pragmatism, it is also in this work, in part, that Proudhon develops a certain number of other themes from a perspective that one might also call pragmatist. To carry out this reading of Proudhon is to investigate the question of the relation between theory and practice. If ideas are products of action, what consequence does this have for the relation between economic conditions and political action, within the framework of a theory of social transformation and collective revolutionary action? Do economic conditions determine revolutionary action? Should the latter be thought using the model of insurrection? Is it organized by an avant-garde? Are discursive and juridical practices determined by economic ones? Proudhon's philosophical pragmatism makes action, understood simultaneously as both material and intelligent, a central notion of his political theory and this allows him to think, in an original way, the relation between the economic and the political.

The goal of such an analysis is to attempt to show in what way the work of Proudhon gives us the elements for thinking a renewal of contemporary anti-authoritarian political action that might be an alternative to Marxism-Leninism. In effect, the resurgence of interest in both the work of this author and in philosophical pragmatism seems to me to come together in the theoretical instruments that these philosophies offer.

## A Pragmatist Conception of Philosophy

In announcing his conception of philosophy in the first study of *Of Justice* (1858), Proudhon presents a pragmatist theory. "Philosophy must be essentially practical."<sup>5</sup> Philosophy for Proudhon does not have a purely speculative function. But just because it is not of the order of pure speculative thinking, this does not mean, contrary to what the Platonic tradition would have us think, a rupture with common sense. On the contrary, if philosophy investigates the reason for things, this reason is common reason. By opposing to the philosophical tradition a conception of philosophy in line with common sense, it is a question of defending a democratic theory that Proudhon calls the "democratic tendency"<sup>6</sup> of philosophy. This relation between philosophy and democracy constitutes a theme that one may call pragmatist. One finds, in Dewey in particular, a conception that connects pragmatist philosophy to democracy. Dewey shows, in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, that the *implementation* of a pragmatist method in science and in philosophy has played a role in the sudden rise in revolutionary democratic movements. The pragmatist method, by calling into question the authoritarian method in science, situates itself against the authoritarian organization of society.

The second point that Proudhon emphasizes is that philosophy, on his view, denies all forms of transcendence. It is based upon an empiricist method, which is to say, it is from observation that philosophy springs forth. There again, he proceeds from a common ground with pragmatist philosophy since, for Dewey, it is a question of moving from experience, and for James, pragmatism is a radical empiricism. For classical pragmatist philosophers, it is experience that permits us to break away from interminable metaphysical disputes. But what is undeniably pragmatist in Proudhon's conception of philosophy is that, for him, "philosophy is essentially utilitarian."<sup>7</sup> If philosophy is in line with common sense, it cannot be at odds with the concerns of the vast majority of human beings; philosophy would not know how to be an elitist activity, reserved for an aristocratic class. For Proudhon, as for Dewey, the *implementation* of a practical and empirical philosophical method is, in a word, pragmatist, driven to calling into question the conception of philosophy inherited from the Greeks, who made it into a speculative pastime. Through this questioning, philosophy becomes a democratic activity.

## A Labor Pragmatism

The thesis after which Proudhon conceives labor pragmatism has already been pointed out by Proudhon's commentators, as we have shown. So J. Bancal writes,

pragmatism historically finds its first formulation within a great socialist current of thought. . . . Benès, in Proudhon's moral conception, sees him as the initiator of this philosophical current . . . as do Pirou and G. Gurvitch.<sup>8</sup>

It is certainly G. Gurvitch<sup>9</sup> who offers on this point the most elaborated commentaries in his *Proudhon and The Founders of Contemporary French Sociology*. He writes,

labor which is both collective and individual is more than a collective force. It is effort and action, it is the general producer, both of collective forces and of mentality, of ideas, and of values. . . . Labor does not solely produce forces and economic values, but man, groups, societies, and ideas, including justice. In short, it is "society actualized" as a whole that is produced by labor. . . . Thus, pragmatism, in some of its turning points, becomes for Proudhon, as for the American philosopher Dewey, an instrumentalism.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that the first expression of labor pragmatism that one finds in Proudhon's work is, following J. Bancal, in *On the Creation of Human Order* (1843). There, Proudhon defines labor as "an intelligent action of man upon matter, deliberately aiming at personal satisfaction."<sup>11</sup> Thus, labor is defined as an action. This action is performed by man, by means of material instruments, appealing to intelligence.

This action has the particularity of bringing into play a collective force inside the framework of the division of labor. The concept of "collective force" that Proudhon borrows, as he says, from Marquis G. Garnier, has already been emphasized in *What is Property?* (1840):

the capitalist, it is said, has paid the days of laborers; for the sake of precision, it must be said that the capitalist has paid as many times *a day*, as many laborers it has employed each day, which is definitely not the same thing. Because, this huge force which results from the union and the harmony among laborers, of the convergence and simultaneity of their efforts, it has not been paid at all.<sup>12</sup>

The collective force is not simply the sum of individual forces. What the division of labor produces is not a simple acceleration of labor that a single person could produce but it supposes abilities and talents that one person could not put together. Even singular talents are in large part the result of solidarity and of a

collective force of society. Similarly, Dewey criticizes liberal individualism for justifying the appropriation of the collective intelligence by a minority.<sup>13</sup> What Dewey calls intelligence means "impressive methods of observation, experimentation, reflection, and reasoning which are in constant evolution."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, intelligence is not individual, for him, because the spirit is a social production.

But the most complete account of Proudhon's labor pragmatism is in the sixth study of *Of Justice*, dedicated to labor. Proudhon begins by showing that "the idea, with its categories, is born of action, and must return to action, at the risk of the degradation of the agent."<sup>15</sup> Proudhon's philosophical pragmatism leads him to think that all ideas, including metaphysical ideas, have their origin in action. As a result, the very idea of justice itself is a product of action. Proudhon's pragmatism allows him to surpass the opposition between idealism and materialism. Action is at the same time material and intelligent. Justice, for example, determines itself in the reciprocity of exchanges. Economic exchanges, as well as the exchanges of ideas, are actions. Exchanges of ideas are not phantasms that might be explained by reducing them to the economic sphere, but both types of exchange are real actions that have their conditions of possibility in the matrix of properly human actions, namely in labor. Proudhon, contrary to Marx, does not oppose materialism to idealism, but speculation to action.

Thought is found even in the activity of animals. Proudhon's labor pragmatism is a continuist naturalism. Human intelligence, which is illuminated in labor, is but the natural product of the evolution of instinct.

The characteristic of the first form of the instinct of thought is to consider things synthetically, the characteristic of intelligence, to consider them analytically. In other words, instinct, having acquired the power to contemplate itself . . . constitutes intelligence.<sup>16</sup>

The same continuity enlivens the productions of the manual laborer and that of the intellectual laborer. Beginning with the tool, animal instinct was transformed into intelligence, and activity into labor.

Given this distinction between instinct and intelligence, one cannot help but wonder if Bergson, who in *Creative Revolution* institutes an analysis quite similar, and who was close to the pragmatist philosophy of W. James, did not read this text of Proudhon. Proudhon adds that the genius of man "is not specialist, it is universal,"<sup>17</sup> that what differentiates the man from the animal, for him, is therefore what Rousseau had called perfectibility. But not only is the idea a product of action, but the idea must also return to action. This means that labor and technology must be informed by theoretical knowledge and scientific research. Proudhon, like Dewey, grants an important place to reflection on education. He rejects the distinction between intellectual speculation and manual labor. Education must be "at the same time an education from the parts of the body and from the understanding."<sup>18</sup> Which means that, for Proudhon, manual labor assumes the prior acquisition of a forced theoretical knowledge. In this

sense, the formation of the polytechnician is for him the model that corresponds best to his pragmatist theory.

## Public Reason

Another pragmatist concept that one finds in Proudhon is that of "public reason." This concept appears as particularly developed in the seventh study of *De la Justice*, dedicated to "Ideas." Public reason<sup>19</sup> appears in Proudhon as the concept which allows the elimination of the notion of the absolute in philosophy. It is an approach that one may qualify as pragmatist, insofar as it is possible to escape the idea of absolute foundation by way of a procedure of collective argumentation.

Now it is a question of giving to this collective being whose power and reality we have demonstrated, an intelligence, which we shall reach by a final elimination of the absolute, from which the effect will be to create public reason.<sup>20</sup>

Communicational intersubjectivity, "communicative action," or what Proudhon calls "collective or public reason" becomes, as for Habermas, the way to avoid the absolute of monological conscience. It is made possible by the creation of a true public space. "This is not difficult however: it is what one commonly calls freedom of opinion or freedom of press."<sup>21</sup> It is possible to escape the absolute by posing the opinions against each other. In effect, each individual opinion tends to present itself as absolute. It is possible to attain to the knowledge of reality by the contradiction of opinions. Proudhon therefore develops an intersubjective and realist conception of truth which would therefore put him more in line with Habermas or Putnam than with Rorty in the contemporary debates. Proudhon's philosophy appears as fundamentally anti-Cartesian since it concerns escaping the absolutism of individual conscience by the confrontation of opinions. In effect, for Proudhon, as for Peirce,<sup>22</sup> man is right away a social being: "the freest man is he who has the greatest relation with his fellow creatures."<sup>23</sup>

Public reason constitutes itself, like collective force, beginning with "the group of laborers." For Proudhon, reason finds its condition of possibility in his labor pragmatism—just as we have seen with labor, that is to say action, which is born from reason. Reason is not constituent, but constituted; moreover, it is constituted by the material action of men. Proudhon's public reason recalls Dewey's notion of "collective intelligence,"<sup>24</sup> which also presupposes a theory of the public.<sup>25</sup> In effect, for Proudhon, public reason implies the formation of a public: "every meeting of men, in a word, is formed for the discussion of ideas and the search for legal order." Certainly, public reason transcends individual reasons: "it will reach collective ideas, quite often contrary to the conclusions of

the individual self."<sup>26</sup> But public reason cannot establish itself without the pre-supposed reason of individuals: "in principle, the impersonality of public reason entails as an *organum* the greatest contradiction, the greatest possible multiplicity."<sup>27</sup> The exact opposite of public reason would be the absence of contradiction: "without a free and universal public polemic, reaching the point of provocation, there is no public reason, and no public spirit."<sup>28</sup> The opposite of this public spirit is the religious spirit, resting on the argument of authority, in which absolutist reason triumphs to the detriment of public reason.

The refusal of the argument of the majority leads Proudhon to establish a procedural theory allowing the determination of truth and justice:

1) to institute, on every issue, a vote and a counter-vote, in order to understand the ratio of opinions to contrary interests; 2) to seek the higher idea, synthesis or formula, in which the two opposing proposals balance each other out, and find their legitimate satisfaction; then to carry out a vote on this synthesis, which, voicing the ratio of opposite opinions, will naturally be nearer to the truth and to the law [*droit*] than any one of them individually.<sup>29</sup>

In effect, it appears that in Proudhon there is a vast difference between an "opinion poll" vote and a vote springing forth from a contradictory debate. In the latter case, the individuals argue their positions. From these reasoned positions, it is possible to try to establish a synthesis that rests upon the force of arguments of each party and which is not the simple sum or juxtaposition of different opinions.

Proudhon's public reason is pragmatist to the extent that it is at the same time theoretical and practical. It seeks the just and the true in a common impulse. At this point, there is no Kantian separation between theoretical reason and practical reason. It is a question of simultaneously establishing the truth in its correspondence with reality, and with that which is just, which is to say, not only to determine an individual morality, but to establish collective rules that govern relationships between individuals.

## Revolution as Experimentation

Proudhon develops throughout his work a theory of revolution which by its experimentalist aspect could, compared with the Deweyan experimentalism developed in *The Public and its Problems*, be characterized as pragmatist. As D. Colson emphasizes, "The social revolution likewise ceases to identify itself only with the protests of the masses, with only 'insurrectionary days,' with revolutionary conjunctions, as rare as they are ephemeral."<sup>30</sup> In the conference on "Proudhon et le syndicalisme révolutionnaire" ["Proudhon and Revolutionary Trade-Unionism"], D. Colson shows how revolutionary trade-unionism and the

cooperative movement of the beginning of the twentieth century seem to accord with the Proudhonian conception of social transformation:

in a certain sense it goes back to the analyses of Proudhon on the capacity of the workers . . . to constitute from now on an alternative on the economic terrain, the real affirmation of future self-management . . . they ignore too often the importance, in France at the very least, of the cooperative movement, a very powerful movement, often present in the small village, a movement which by combining with union activity would without a doubt have contributed to resolving the difficulty with which revolutionary trade-unionism met and so, in another sense, would have given a form to the meeting between this trade-unionism and the thought of Proudhon.<sup>31</sup>

The Marxist concept, inherited from Blanqui, of the revolution as *coup d'état* by an enlightened minority is imposed in history by the accomplishment of Leninism. Nevertheless, one forgets that Proudhon has produced a different theory of revolution in opposition to Marx. Proudhon works out a theory that breaks with the insurrectionary model that is either that of the organized minority or that of the spontaneous crowd. On the contrary, it is a question of thinking a transformation in depth of the economic and political structures by putting in place experimentations breaking as much with the state as with the capitalist system. The idea being that if a political revolution can take the form of a *coup d'état*, an economic and social transformation, putting in place a federal industrial and agrarian democracy, this requires changes in depth. In the capture of power by a group of revolutionaries, burdened with executing the passage from the capitalist society to the communist society, Proudhon opposes the *implementation* of experimental alternatives to the state and to capitalism.

Proudhon opposes Marx's notion of revolution, understood as a *coup d'état*. In effect, he refuses revolutionary violence which risks creating martyrs, which could only lead to the reinforcement of the bourgeoisie. What Proudhon has in mind, which he critiques frequently throughout the works of Rousseau, is the politics of the "Reign of Terror" of the Jacobins. He understood well that the implementation of terror exercised through the bias of the dictatorship of a revolutionary party could result only in the disservice of the cause of socialism. But does that therefore mean that Proudhon might be a reformist author who has abandoned revolution, as Marx asserts? In the reading of this letter (1846), one might think so. Nevertheless, this would make a mere trifle of the fact that Proudhon is the author, in 1851, of a work entitled, *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. It is therefore really another concept of revolution which is at stake for Proudhon.

In his letter, Proudhon makes reference to a work that he is in the process of writing. This would be the work, *The Philosophy of Poverty*, which, as we know, was violently attacked by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In this work, Proudhon analyses, as he himself says, "the laws of society, the way in

which these laws are realized, the progress according to which we manage to discover them."<sup>32</sup> In 1848, he participates in the February revolution, which led to the inversion of the July monarchy and to the implementation of the Second Republic. Proudhon has suffered from the physical acts of violence of which he was a witness during this period and, in particular, the repression of the June riots.

In March, Proudhon writes *A Solution to the Social Problem*. This text represents a good illustration of Proudhon's experimentalism. He proposes to try out the implementation of an exchange bank which allows proletarians the access to free credit. The difference between Proudhon's theory, and what today is called micro-credit, is that for Proudhon, this experience has to be understood as part of a more general approach which calls into question capitalism and the state. Thus, Proudhon explains in a letter to F. Bastiat:

If house capital, as well as money capital, were free, which means, if their utilization were paid as exchange, not as loan, land capital would not take long to become free as well. . . . Consequently, there will neither be farmers nor landlords, there would solely be laborers and vintners, like there are woodworkers and mechanical workers.<sup>33</sup>

At the moment of the foundation of the Bank of the people in 1849, Proudhon writes:

[I]f I were mistaken, public reason would soon disprove my theories, the only thing left to me would be to withdraw from the revolutionary arena . . . after this refutation of the general reason and of experience.<sup>34</sup>

It is interesting to point out in this statement that Proudhon makes public reason and experience the two criteria which determine the success or the failure of his revolutionary theory. Thus, Proudhon's theory appears as an experimental pragmatism. It seems difficult to determine whether the failure of the Bank of the people comes from experience in itself or from Proudhon's condemnation to a fine and to prison for having insulted the President of the Republic.

In *The General Idea of Revolution* (1851), Proudhon formulates the most widely followed form of his theory of social revolution. His conception of revolution is characterized by the refusal of political authority and of all forms of popular government. He refuses even the notion of direct democracy. The revolution has to set up the Republic or the positive anarchy. Thus, the social revolution, as defined by Proudhon, consists in "substituting the economic or industrial regime by a governmental, feudal, and military regime."<sup>35</sup> He writes, "I want the peaceful revolution, but I want it, prompt, decisive, and complete [ . . . ] not for reforming the government, but for revolutionizing society."<sup>36</sup> Proudhon's revolution has the function of eliminating the government for the benefit of an economic auto-organization of the society based upon an economically contractual theory of justice. "We will replace political powers by

economical forces."<sup>37</sup> After the French revolution, as a political revolution, which has abolished privileges, one has to achieve the economical revolution by calling into question the social inequality caused by the industrial revolution. This implies the experiment of new forms of economic organization which call into question social inequalities and capitalist property.

His forms of action are: a) the division of labor, through which it is opposed to the classification of people by caste, or by industries; b) The collective force, principle of Labor companies, replacing armies; c) Trade, concrete form of the contract, which replaces the law; d) Equality of exchange; e) Competition; f) Credit which centralizes the interests, like the governmental hierarchy centralizes obedience; g) The balance of values and properties.<sup>38</sup>

One might be surprised by the apparently liberal character of the Proudhonian social revolution. It is one of the differences between Proudhonian anarchism and the communism of Marx. Indeed it concerns the setting of a society of economic equality, but also a society of freedom.

The social contract must amplify for each citizen her well-being and liberty. . . . The social contract must be freely discussed, individually agreed, signed, *manu propria*, by all those who participate therein.<sup>39</sup>

It is the fear of the implementation of a liberticide society that leads Proudhon to also reject communism. The risk, according to him, is to see the entire society organized according to the same authoritarian model as the Christian monasteries.<sup>40</sup>

One could note that R. Westbrook,<sup>41</sup> with respect to Dewey, resolves the ambiguity of a Dewey liberal and a Dewey socialist, by a libertarian reading of Dewey. For Dewey, it might be a question of reflecting upon the possible experimentation of a socialism without a State. But this elaboration of an experimental theory of social revolution does not end there. In reality, Proudhon appears to not be satisfied with his conception of social revolution where the political is reduced into an economic republic. In 1863, he adds a theory of federalism to his mutualist economic theory. Consequently, to his theory of social revolution as economic revolution, Proudhon adds a political aspect. The juridical notion of contract serves in the political domain, every bit as much as in the economic domain, in determining the form of just organization. Nevertheless, the political contract, as Proudhon defines it, is not the political contract of classical liberalism. This contract does not serve to explain the origin of society, but, as in Rousseau's *Social Contract*, to think what might be a just society. The notion of contract, as much economic as political, in Proudhon serves as a pragmatic idea of experimentation. But Proudhon's federalist political contract is opposed nevertheless to the political contract of the "Jacobin" Rousseau:

The political contract acquires its dignity and morality only on the condition: 1) that it is synallagmatic and commutative; 2) that it is closed in, as in its object, within certain limits . . . So that the political contract would fulfill the synallagmatic and commutative condition that prompts the idea of democracy; so that, closing itself in within these wise limits, it remains profitable and convenient for all, it is necessary that the citizen, in entering into the association: 1) would have as much to gain from the state as she would sacrifice to it; 2) that she would retain all her freedom, her sovereignty, and her initiative, minus that which is relative to the special object for which the contract is formed, and of which one asks for the security of the state. Thus regulated and comprehended, the political contract is what I call a federation.<sup>42</sup>

Proudhon's federalist<sup>43</sup> political contract assumes that the villages, which are the base of the contract, retain more power than the federation. The consequence of Proudhon's position is the possibility for a basic unity to secede from the federation. One could consider *Of the Political Capacity of the Working Class* (1865) as a synthesis of hypotheses concerning revolution, which are elaborated for experimentation by Proudhon. In this work, Proudhon produces the theory of a mutualist and federalist working class democracy. Through the reference to mutualist working class movement, contained in *The Manifesto of the Sixties*, Proudhon's ideas appear to be at the same time the product of this movement and a source of inspiration for this movement. "The majority of them are members of societies of reciprocal credit, reciprocal aid."<sup>44</sup>

Proudhon's mutualist theory constitutes a theory of economic justice based upon the principle of contractual reciprocity. It is a question, through the demand of Justice, of setting up an economic system free of capitalist exploitation and state-governed charity.

We are interested in knowing how the ideas of mutuality, of reciprocity, of exchange, of Justice, substituted for those of authority, of community, and of charity, have come, in politics and in political economy, to construct a system of relations which holds nothing less than the transformation of the social order from top to bottom.<sup>45</sup>

Within the political domain, federalism responds to mutualism in economic theory:

transported in the political sphere, what we have hitherto called mutualism or guarantism, takes the name of federalism [...] In working class democracy, the political is the corollary of economy, that both are treated by the same method and the same principles.<sup>46</sup>

I think that by enriching Proudhon's revolutionary theory with a political component, Proudhon is no longer arguing for the notion of the Republic, understood as the economic republic, but the notion of the working class democracy. But this democracy, such as Proudhon conceives it, unlike the authors of *The*

*Manifesto of the Sixties* rejects political electoral representation. "Political unity is not a question of territory and borders, or a question of will or vote."<sup>47</sup>

On what principles then do Proudhon's mutualist and federalist working class democracy rest?

And first we observe that, just as there is no freedom without unity, or, what amounts to the same, without order, similarly, neither is there unity without variety, without plurality, without divergence; no order without protestation or antagonism.<sup>48</sup>

According to Proudhon, the political system must be organized in such a way as to guarantee the greatest autonomy to each individual, and to each village. It is this autonomy of individuals and of municipalities that guarantees federalism such as Proudhon defines it. It is that which, in the introduction to *The Theory of Property* (1862), Proudhon calls "anarchy, or humankind governing itself." It is this same political ideal of self-government that Dewey also develops in *The Public and Its Problems*. The expression of this diversity on the political plane implies, moreover, as we have seen, the *implementation* of a public space in which decisions can be handled according to the rules of public reason.

I have attempted to draw out what appeared to me as the principal pragmatist themes of Proudhon's philosophy. It seems that through this approach, one could attempt to draw out a certain unity of reading in the work of this author. Even its very mode of elaboration itself is pragmatist. It is a work that unfolds itself in the thread of historical experience that Proudhon acquires. It constructs itself in departing from a theory of action in which labor is the matrix. It is in beginning from labor that ideas are produced, in particular the idea of Justice. Revolutionary action has as a function in history the realization of the idea of Justice by means of the notion of contract and by means of exchange. The justice of the contract establishes itself in beginning with public reason which has as its foundation the collective force constituted by the laborers. There exist two forms of contract: the one that rules economic activities, called mutualism; and the one that rules the political contract, called federalism. The *implementation* by revolutionary action of these alternatives to the centralized state and to capitalism allows for the realization of a just society in which the different exchanges are carried out in a free and egalitarian manner. The revolutionary philosopher is characterized by her conception of philosophy as both practical and democratic. Her theories consist in searching for hypotheses of solution in experimentation. It is thus not a question of setting up a dogmatic utopia, but of experimenting with hypotheses that might be revised<sup>49</sup> contingent upon experience and public reason.

Consequently, Proudhon's political theory unfolds itself by starting with a theory of action which does not reduce discursive and juridical practices to economic practices. In making action the basic notion of his theory, Proudhon can

thus think in their specificities all actions, whether they are economical, juridical, or political. He therefore escapes the aporias of the determination of the superstructure by the economic foundation. Indeed, labor is the condition for the possibility of all other actions, but these are not reducible to relations of production. It is a question of transforming all at once the relations of production, economic exchanges, political organization, and the ways of handling collective decision. This transformation of the ensemble of economic and political relations implies progressive experimentation of new relations by the laborers themselves. Moreover, the notion of action thus affords to Proudhon the escape from the contradiction between an economic determinism and a political revolutionary voluntarism of the Leninist sort.<sup>50</sup>

### Notes

1. There exists a French pragmatist current, without connection to the American philosophical current, represented by M. Blondel. This author has outlined the doctrine in his work *Action* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993 [1893]).
2. The article by C. S. Peirce, "How to make our ideas clear" (1878), marks the beginning of the American philosophical movement.
3. Proudhon died in 1865.
4. Even if the latter, in the preface to his edition of Proudhon's *Selected Works*, seems to lean towards a use of the term "pragmatism" that might perhaps return more to the pragmatism of Blondel rather than that of James or Dewey. This point might perhaps be explained by the somewhat personal character of Bancal's reading.
5. G. Gurvitch, *The Founders of Contemporary French Sociology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), p.65.
6. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *On Justice* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 22.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
9. J. Bancal, *Proudhon: Pluralism and Self-Management*, vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1970), p. 218. Among Proudhon's commentators who highlight this point we can quote J. Langlois, *Acting with Proudhon* (Paris: Petite Bibliotheque Payot, 1976).
10. Gurvitch has an interesting pragmatic reading in the ninth study of his *Proudhon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) entitled "Progress and Decadence." "Thus, one could say that if for Bergson, concerning strictly speaking the biological life, the idea of evolution is overcome by the idea of creative evolution, for Proudhon, regarding the social life, the idea of progress is overcome by an unceasing recourse to revolutions always new whose success is never guaranteed. He links the idea of progress to its pragmatic orientations. Thus, he writes, 'progress is the justification of humanity by itself under the excitement of an ideal.' But then, [...] would not this be a species of ideology, if not a myth, which would inspire the action in the way Sorel has conceived the idea of general strike? [...] Similarly, why would the idea of progress, born of action, 'not return to action as project or plan?' [...] But, the moral order is tied up to labor and to collective action, progress presents itself one more time as a pragmatic idea, capable of inspiring a maximum of effort, of freedom, of labor, and revolutionary action. Finally,

progress is for Proudhon [...] like a pragmatic hypothesis meant to encourage collective action" (pp. 30-31).

11. Gurvitch, *Proudhon*, pp. 27-28.
12. Proudhon, *On the Creation of Human Order* (Bibliolife, 2008), p. 296.
13. Proudhon, *What is Property?* (Boston: Adamant, 2001), p. 215.
14. Cf. John Dewey, "Authority and Social Change" (1935), reprinted as "Science and the Future of Society" in *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: Modern Library, 1939), pp. 343-63.
15. Proudhon, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Adamant, 2002), p. 19.
16. Proudhon, *On Justice*, book 2, p. 78.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
20. On the history of this concept in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see the work of B. Bensaude-Vincent, *Science Against Public Opinion* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).
21. Proudhon, *On Justice*, p. 108.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
23. Cf. C.S. Peirce, "Evolutionary Love," *The Monist* 3:1 (1893), pp. 176-200.
24. Proudhon, *Confessions of a Revolutionary* (Boston: Adamant, 2002).
25. Cf. J. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Paris: Farrago, 2003).
26. Cf. J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).
27. Proudhon, *Confessions*, p.114.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
30. *Ibid.*, note J p.112.
31. "Social Revolution" in D. Colson, *Glossary of Philosophical Anarchism* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2001), p. 291.
32. D. Colson, "Proudhon and Revolutionary Syndicalism." Available at the site, *Recherches sur l'anarchisme*: [http://raforum.info/article.php3?id\\_article=3475](http://raforum.info/article.php3?id_article=3475)
33. Proudhon, "Letter: Proudhon to Marx" (1846), in *Correspondence of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (Bibliolife, 2008).
34. *Ibid.*
35. Proudhon, *A Solution to the Social Problem* (Boston: Adamant, 2002), p. 260.
36. Proudhon, *The General Idea of Revolution* (Boston: Adamant, 2001), p. 176.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
41. Proudhon and Bakunin have rejected communism as a mode of authoritarian organization. Kropotkin will later theorize, by way of such concepts as "grappling in the heap," a libertarian communist society.
42. Cf. Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).
43. Proudhon, *On the Federal Principle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), ch. 7.
44. In the contemporary juridical sense of the terms of federalism and confederalism, Proudhon is confederalist to the extent that, for him these are basic unities, the

villages, who determine the power of superior groups, and not vice versa. One should note that it is the idea of a federal society, built upon a communal democracy, which constitutes the hypothesis of experimentation that Dewey also formulates in *The Public and Its Problems*.

45. Proudhon, *On the Political Ability of the Working Class* (BiblioBazaar, 2008), p. 89.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 286. See also "Letter of Proudhon to the Workers" (March 8, 1864), in *Correspondence*.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 186

50. "But for God's sake! After having demolished all *a priori* dogmatisms, let us not dream, now when our turn comes, to indoctrinate the people [...] I applaud, from the bottom of my heart, your thought of bringing all opinions to light; let us make a good and loyal polemic; let us give to the world the example of a learned and cautious tolerance, but since we are at the head of a movement, let us not make the heads of a new intolerance, let us not put in place apostles of a new religion; this religion should be the religion of logic, the religion of reason. Let us receive, let us encourage, all protests; let us wither away all exclusions, all mysticisms; let us never look at a question as exhausted, and when we have used up our final argument, let us begin again if need be, with eloquence and with irony. On this condition, I shall enter with pleasure in your association. Otherwise, no!" (Proudhon, "Letter to K. Marx," 1846, in *Correspondence*.)

## Part 5: Anarchism and Social Science