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6

The rise of ecological anarchism

Elisée Reclus and Patrick Geddes

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, two distinct anarchist positions existed in Britain, each representing one of David Graeber's models of political economy: exchange and communism. Yet, despite the optimism of some of its most prominent advocates, the anarchist dream was no nearer realization. Individualism was being undermined by the growth of the collective power of the corporation, whilst the prospect spontaneous revolution or the Christianizing of humanity, as envisaged by communists of different persuasions, seemed, at best, remote. In reality, they were impossibilist strategies.

As the realization of this began to hit home, some individualists made their peace with capitalism and embraced classic liberalism, whilst those whose outlook was broadly socialist turned to syndicalism as a practical programme of revolutionary change. Syndicalism was first defined in a resolution passed at the Basel conference of the International in 1869, stating that: 'The councils of the trades and industrial organizations will take the place of the present government, and this representation of labor will do away, once and forever, with the government of the past.'¹ Drawing in leading activists, such as Rudolf Rocker, John Turner and Guy Aldred, syndicalist activities peaked during the labour unrest in the years before the First World War.² For advocates of syndicalism the educative experience of economic struggle and the federal structure of trade unionism would make it the ideal instrument for the seizure of the means of production, thereby allowing collectivization without the state. Trade unions seemed to offer an alternative to political action and, especially given the sharp conflicts of the

day, provided a strategy that, though defensive in the short term, could be highly practical and give the opportunity for developing workers' organizations as the embryos of a new society.

Although it had a firm grip on reality, in that it was based on observable conflict and existing organizations, syndicalism's claim to universality could only be sustained if a specific concept of class conflict in a developed industrial society was seen as the necessary historical vehicle for revolutionary change. It tied anarchism to a Marxian, and a firmly 'progressive', social analysis, the very one that anarchism had questioned in previous years. This cemented the divisions in the anarchist movement and marginalized two important strands of thought, the individualist's emphasis on equitable exchange and ownership together with Kropotkin's warning about the fatal mistake of the neglect of agriculture. On top of which, Robert Michels³ argued that the very structures of a political party, i.e. oligarchy, bureaucracy, and leadership, which syndicalists so despised, would be the inevitable result of trade union organization. Even if it were possible to prevent the emergence of self-interested and aggrandizing leaders, he argued, the mere fact that syndicalist trade unions were a minority of the working class meant that instead of the 'dominion of the leaders over the masses' the result would merely be the 'dominion of a small fraction of the masses over the whole'.⁴

Others may have been less troubled by syndicalism itself, yet were perturbed by the divisions in the movement and became anxious to prevent a schism. They stressed the commonalities of the different anarchist strands, adopting the label 'anarchism without adjectives', first coined by the Cuban, Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, who was also exiled in London where he died in 1915. One of the more eloquent statements was that of the American anarchist, Voltarine de Cleyre, in her essay *Anarchism*, first published in 1901. She wrote of the visceral need for freedom, embedded in the passions of every individual, as the central uniting factor of all variants of anarchism. And so she called for diversity of thought and practice, for experimentation and for tolerance: 'Each choose that method which expresses your selfhood best and condemn no other man because he expresses his Self otherwise.'⁵ Yet earlier in the piece she hinted at something else; in discussing the polarization of opinion between individualist and communist anarchism, she wrote: 'Truth lies not "*between* the two", but in a synthesis of the two opinions.'⁶ The choice seemed clear – synthesis or schism, diversity or the dogma of certainty.

Amidst the continuing debates and intellectual experimentation, a synthesis was beginning to emerge, not one based on the existential need for liberty but in ecology. An ecological anarchism that unified many of the pre-existing themes of anarchist thought into a coherent critique of progress was being developed. The collective material interest in the environment inspired ideas that transcended class, were self-consciously rooted in the

natural world, and approached the resolution of particular social problems in ways that were both libertarian and practical. Its foremost advocate in England was the remarkable figure of Patrick Geddes, though he also drew on the work of his close friend, the revolutionary communist and geographer Elisée Reclus.

It is hard to summarize the life of an energetic polymath like Geddes in a few sentences. Born in 1854, he grew up in rural Perthshire, Scotland, had an academic career in the natural sciences and became Professor of Botany at Dundee University despite holding no paper qualifications, having never sat an exam. He was an early sociologist, became a radical educational reformer, a pioneer of adult education, established student halls of residence and created his own college in the South of France. As if that was not enough, he engaged in urban and rural development in Edinburgh, Cyprus, Palestine and India, mounted exhibitions and pageants, was involved in conservation – saving Thomas More's old house, Crosby Hall, from demolition and moving it from the City of London to its present location in Chelsea – and so much more. If there was one person who explored ideology through praxis, it was Geddes.

Geddes is still best known as one of the founders of town planning and most published work about him is to be found in the discipline of geography rather than politics. Even one of his best biographers, Helen Meller, probably unintentionally, depoliticizes him. She wrote: 'Geddes was able to view the political debate about the future as largely irrelevant. He chose to consider that his position was above the fierce discussions about capitalism and its social consequences.' She went on to describe how he felt his views 'cut across party lines' and 'would appeal to people of all political persuasions'.⁷ However, Meller's view of Geddes was shaped without a full understanding of anarchism and the intrinsically anarchist ideas of this intensely political polymath.

Geddes' place in the anarchist pantheon is now becoming recognized. The anarchist writer and journalist, Colin Ward, had long claimed him as part of the anarchist tradition,⁸ and academic authors are catching up. Peter Hall writes of the 'incalculable influence' of Kropotkin on Geddes⁹ and how 'From Reclus and Kropotkin, and beyond them from Proudhon, Geddes also took his position that society had to be reconstructed not by sweeping governmental measures ... but through the efforts of millions of individuals'.¹⁰ Jozef Keulartz places Geddes as an intellectual forebear of Murray Bookchin and social ecology, writing that: 'Bookchin should be seen, first and foremost, as an heir to the tradition established by Geddes and Mumford'.¹¹ Carissa Honeywell also sees him as illustrative of a 'radical pragmatism' that sought to put anarchist ideas into action on a smaller scale. She is absolutely correct to say 'that it is a mistake to see reformist pragmatism or small-scale practical change as a dilution of anarchism'.¹² I would go further and suggest that his ecological anarchism

was the basis of the practical synthesis that de Cleyre was asking for. Geddes was not just an organizer of practical action; he was an important theorist in his own right.

Geddes frequently cited Kropotkin and Reclus as his key influences and, though he talked positively of anarchism in much of his published writing, he shied away from identifying himself as an anarchist. However, not only was his self-proclaimed anarchist influence always prominent, but his approach to his sociological and civic studies was also consistently libertarian. Moreover, Geddes shared some of the prejudices and addressed many of the analytical issues raised by anarchist thought. Geddes both knew and read Kropotkin, although even his influence was overshadowed by Geddes' personal, intellectual and scientific partnerships with the Reclus family. Elisée Reclus is central to ecological anarchism and must be understood in order to place Geddes' thought in its proper context.

Elisée Reclus – revolution, evolution and ecology

Reclus was a distinguished French geographer, developing an holistic social geography. He was also an active revolutionary, permanently exiled from France due to his activities in the Paris Commune. The picture that the English-speaking world has of Reclus has been highly dependent on Marie Fleming's two books.¹³ Fleming strongly emphasizes Reclus' anarchist communism and revolutionary sympathies, stressing his understanding of the need for revolutionary violence and his somewhat eccentric defence of robbery as a process of restitution. For her, Reclus the socialist is predominant. She stressed his activity in the International and his assertion of the primacy of class struggle. Not only that, Fleming saw anarchism itself as being synonymous with communist revolutionary action only. As such, she can baldly state: 'The anarchist movement is generally held to have reached an end with the trial of leading French anarchists in 1894.'¹⁴

Reclus certainly was an avowed revolutionary communist and this would not seem to have much relevance to the work of Geddes. Fleming does not mention him in any capacity at all. Geddes was neither an advocate of revolutionary violence nor of class struggle, yet still he claimed Reclus as his mentor. The phrase he used to describe the ideas of both Kropotkin and Reclus was 'constructive anarchism'.¹⁵ Fortunately, John Clark and Camille Martin have provided a corrective.¹⁶ Their book consists of a set of new translations of some key texts by Reclus together with a long introductory essay depicting him as predominantly a radical ecologist. This partly reflects Clark's own role in contemporary anarchism and his breach with Bookchin over Deep Ecology.¹⁷ The authors' ecological convictions may lead them

to understate Reclus' revolutionary socialism, but their particular interpretation shows the themes and ideas that attracted Geddes and which he was to build on. Arguably, these too are the most original aspects of his writing and, by placing an emphasis on Reclus' concept of ecology, the book brings home his relevance to the current age when the era of faith in a global proletarian revolution has passed.

However, Clark and Martin are less aware of the significance of Reclus' connection with Geddes, as well as his follower, the American writer Lewis Mumford. Whereas for Fleming the anarchist movement ended in 1894, for Clark and Martin ecological anarchism died with Reclus until resurrected in the 1970s.

The kind of ecological perspective that Reclus developed ... effectively disappeared from mainstream social thought early in the century and did not re-emerge significantly until well into the 1970s in response to growing awareness of the ecological crisis. In the meantime, ecological thinking remained an undercurrent of anarchist and utopian thought and practice ... However, it did not become a central theme in anarchist and utopian theoretical discussion until the ideas of Paul Goodman and Murray Bookchin began to have a noticeable influence in the late 1960s.¹⁸

Ecology as a discourse played such a strong part in nineteenth-century anarchist thought it would have been unlikely to disappear. The conjuring trick that makes it vanish is the exclusion of Geddes and his followers from the tradition. Just as Geddes has been portrayed without anarchism, anarchism has been represented without Geddes. Reading Geddes in the context of anarchism vividly displays his ideological foundations. In fact, it is his bashful anarchism that made it possible for Meller to depoliticize him, especially when seen in the context of Reclus' analysis of the contemporary state.

For Reclus, the state is the physical embodiment of authority. As such, it becomes a machine for its own self-perpetuation. As a result, any revolution or political action that seeks merely to establish a new authority will fail. This is the inevitable consequence of all political movements. As Reclus put it: 'Throughout history, those who revolted against any authority almost always did so in the name of another authority, as if the ideal required nothing more than changing masters.'¹⁹ New laws and institutions cannot produce liberation. 'As soon as an institution is established, even if it should be only to combat flagrant abuses, it creates them anew through its very existence.'²⁰

Representative democracy is similarly flawed. In elections, 'it is certainly not the most honest of candidates who have the best chance of winning', and a legislature will 'be generally inferior in moral qualities, since it is

dominated by professional politicians'.²¹ Whilst bureaucracy is always obstructive:

The cogs of the administrative machine work precisely in the opposite direction from those functioning in an industrial establishment. The latter strives to reduce the number of useless articles, and to produce the greatest possible results with the simplest mechanism. By contrast, the administrative hierarchy does its utmost to multiply the number of employees and subordinates, directors, auditors and inspectors. Work becomes so complicated as to be impossible.²²

Reclus demolished the myth of the efficient bureaucracy and with, one perceives, a deep sense of personal frustration, railed at the 'arrogant, do-nothing petty bureaucrat who, protected by a metal grating, can take the liberty of being rude toward anyone'.²³

Geddes, too, showed his own dislike of bureaucracy in discussing his design for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, using words that will bring sighs of recognition for anyone who has endured the current fashion for managerialism in British universities.

Universities do not exist to be administered. The Administration exists only to serve Universities. Though records are indispensable and regulations may be useful, even necessary; the true regulation of the University comes from the mind, conscience, and character of those who make it up. Hence I have segregated the administrators where they may be good servants, for when they usurp the central position of a University, as so often in Britain or America, they become the very worst of masters.²⁴

There is a lack of sympathy in Reclus' writing for the administrative worker compared to his romanticization of the industrial worker. An anarchist critique can be made that points to the use of petty rules and restrictions as a way in which pressured and underpaid staff can reclaim elements of control in an increasingly authoritarian environment, rather than being a means of simply taking pleasure in the exercise of power. However, the main point Reclus makes is that the state can never produce desired ends; power corrupts at all levels. This is where Meller is misleading when she writes of Geddes that he was somehow above politics. In fact, he rejected conventional political action as the logical result of his political beliefs. He was trying to appeal to no one. Instead, he viewed action as the highest expression of political purpose.

This rejection of the state is also a source of misunderstanding about Geddes' views on women's suffrage. Geddes' position on female emancipation was different to that of Reclus. Reclus saw the subjection of women arising out of male violence enslaving women and turning them into

property. This was an intrinsic part of the rise of property as an instrument of oppression.²⁵ As such he could even write that

Obviously, all of the claims of women against men are just ... She has an absolute right to recrimination, and the women who occasionally take revenge are not to be condemned, since the greatest wrongs are those committed by the privileged.²⁶

Whilst Geddes was strongly in favour of female equality and felt that society was weakened by the exclusion of women, he viewed male and female roles as being specialized and complimentary, justifying his position with some particularly dubious biology, especially in his book on sex, written with J. Arthur Thomson. Geddes' description of women as being anabolic, preserving energy, and men being katobolic, expending energy, is hideously stereotypical, even if it would give women a primary role in his life-enhancing future society. He implies that men are active and women are nurturing, having a 'larger and more habitual share of the altruistic emotions'.²⁷ He commits further horrors, even going so far as to write of men as having 'bigger brains and more intelligence',²⁸ whilst his observation of the 'stronger lust and passion of males'²⁹ shows an uncritical acceptance of Victorian notions of female sexuality. Reading this certainly makes one feel for the forbearance of his capable, supportive and devoted wife Anna, without whom he would have accomplished so much less.

Though Geddes and Thomson's socio-biological study of sex had difficulty breaking stereotypes, it was still a breathtakingly open discussion for its time. It is just that the authors were less capable of abandoning the assumptions of late Victorian society than some other writers and were distinctly uncomfortable with the concept of social androgyny. Crucially, however, female emancipation could not be seen as simply a process that fully integrated women into an unchanged society. They deprecated the view that 'all things would be settled as soon as women were sufficiently plunged into the competitive struggle for their own daily bread'.³⁰ There was a need for social transformation. Thus, comments about Geddes' views on women's suffrage are misplaced, as Geddes viewed the vote as meaningless *per se* compared to social action and reconstruction. As Reclus put it: 'To vote is to give up your own power ... To elect a master or many, for a long or short time, is to resign one's liberty ... To vote is befitting of idiots ... To vote is to prepare shameful treachery and traitors.'³¹ With such sentiments, to campaign for the vote would be absurd.

Reclus also stressed that women's cause 'merges with that of all oppressed people, whoever they may be' and, taking a sideswipe at Josephine Butler (despite expressing his support in 1882),³² 'will need to occupy themselves henceforth with all people who are wronged, and not only the unfortunate women forced by poverty to sell their bodies'.³³ As Fleming succinctly puts

it, 'like Marx and Engels, Reclus subordinated the question of sex and gender to that of class'.³⁴

Of course, control of income and independence were, in reality, the urgent needs of working-class women, as active feminists such as Josephine Butler were fully aware. Women's interests were far from identical to those of the males of their social class. Pressing economic requirements and political recognition were not to be put aside until sometime in the future when women could be equal partners in a hazy, conflict-free, organic relationship. Both Reclus and Geddes' attitudes to female emancipation were deeply tinged by male condescension.

Of far greater importance were Reclus' theories of change and progress. His lasting influence lies in this fusion of anarchist revolutionary thought with the birth of late nineteenth-century ecology. The distinctiveness of Reclus' approach to social change is that he did not engage in what he saw as a false dichotomy of evolution or revolution. Evolutionary gradualism had often been proposed as an alternative to revolution. For Reclus this is illogical. Revolution is the consequence of evolution.

The word Evolution, synonymous with gradual and continuous development in morals and ideas, is brought forward in certain circles as though it were the antithesis of that fearful word, Revolution, which implies changes more or less sudden in their action, and entailing some sort of catastrophe. And yet is it possible that a transformation can take place in ideas without bringing about some abrupt displacements in the equilibrium of life? Must not revolution necessarily follow evolution, as action follows the desire to act? They are fundamentally one and the same thing, differing only according to the time of their appearance. If, on the one hand, we believe in the normal progress of ideas, and on the other, expect opposition, then of necessity, we believe in external shocks which change the form of society.³⁵

Superficially Reclus' theory of history bears tinges of Marxism in that he asserts that accumulated change forces sudden progressive leaps, but there all similarity ends. The engine of change is not class war but the dialectical relationship between humanity and the environment, both natural and social. Evolution is constant but the environment tends towards inertia, attempting to hold back necessary change, in the same way a river, swollen with rain, is constrained to an ever more ferocious torrent until it finally breaks its banks and floods.

Each transformation of matter and each realization of an idea is, during its actual process of change, thwarted by the inertia of the environment. A new phenomenon can thus come into being only through an effort that is more violent, or a force that is more powerful, than the resistance

... Such are revolutions – necessary consequences of the evolutions that preceded them.³⁶

Reclus was not a pure materialist, insisting that the way humans imaginatively interpret their environment also shapes progress. His account of social change is highly complex. Not only that, but Reclus was no Hegelian either. He did not see dialectical change as automatically leading to a higher form. Revolutions and evolutions alike are not necessarily linear and progressive. They can be both progressive and regressive. His model is nature:

Everything changes; everything in nature moves as part of an eternal movement. But where there is progress, there can also be regression, and if some evolutions tend towards the growth of life, there are others that incline towards death. To stop is impossible, and it is necessary to move in one direction or another. The hardened reactionary and the gentle liberal, both of whom cry out in fright at the word ‘revolution’, nevertheless march onward to a revolution – the last one, which is eternal rest. Disease, senility, and gangrene are evolutions just as much as puberty is. The appearance of worms in a corpse, like the first cry of an infant, indicates that a revolution has occurred. Physiology and history demonstrate that some evolutions indicate decline, and certain revolutions mean death.³⁷

As in nature, progression and regression occur simultaneously, therefore it is not possible to simplify historical interpretations of an epoch. However, Reclus admits to one constant. The cause of regression is authority, the source of progress is liberty.

There is a fundamental cause – indeed, the cause of all causes, that epitomizes the history of decline. It is the establishment of mastery of one part of society over another, and the monopolizing of land, capital, power, education, and honors by a few or an aristocracy.³⁸

Reclus’ positivism led him to conclude that humanity was governed by natural laws, but those laws were dynamic, with constant interplay between human culture and the environment. Reclus’ model of nature is an ecological one based on complex and dynamic systems. His insistence on such a holistic interactive approach means that he is not determinist, nor does he suggest that there is an immutable human nature. As Clark and Martin write:

In stressing the dialectical relationship between nature and culture, he [Reclus] focuses on the interaction between many natural and social factors in shaping human society, on the inevitability of change and

transformation, and on the open-ended character of human and natural history.³⁹

They continue by pointing out that Reclus was aware of how humans 'by understanding the determinants of the social world' 'can transform themselves into active, conscious agents in shaping their own liberation and self realization, and that of the entire planet'.⁴⁰ Importantly, they comment:

... nature shapes humanity at the same time that humanity reshapes the natural world. While modern civilization had devoted much attention to the latter side of this dialectic, the power of humanity to transform nature, it has exhibited little concern for humanity's moral responsibilities in its interaction with nature.⁴¹

This is the crucial aspect of Reclus' thought. Humanity is not merely a part of nature; it is a feature in natural evolution, an evolution it can consciously shape. However, for a progressive development of humanity to take place, it has to abandon concepts of domination, both social and natural, and to pursue knowledge and understanding in order to deliberately shape progress. This gives education a central role in Reclus' thought.

In 1877, Reclus published a short article on *The Future of our Children*, speaking against the exploitation and brutalization of children in the family, work and education. His commitment to anti-authoritarian education is explicit. 'But are not the schools also shops whose mechanism is scarcely less dangerous than that of the factory? The master seizes the child and brutalizes him from the very beginning with formulas, senseless words, gestures minus ideas.'⁴² However, Fleming placed greater emphasis on Reclus' position at the Lausanne Congress of the Jura Federation in 1882. There, rather than preparing the ground for revolution, Reclus argued that a free education system could only emerge *after* the revolution had taken place.⁴³ This was another example of giving primacy to the revolutionary Reclus.

Reclus returned to the attack in 1895. His pamphlet, *The Ideal and Youth*, lamenting the lack of contemporary student radicalism, still speaks to those old enough to remember the late 1960s. His educational idealism, compared to the financial pragmatism currently being used to sell student fees, makes for refreshing reading. The educational system as it stands, he wrote, is destructive of learning and of the human personality: 'from the first day of school the normal life of the child is contrary to nature ... Does it not run counter to the great objects of education as understood by the wise in all ages: strength, grace, beauty.'⁴⁴ A student is stifled and 'furnished with his text book as the convict with his chain'.⁴⁵ The sole purpose of learning has become instrumental: 'Now, from the very constitution of society students become aware as a preliminary fact that they will amass money by means of their diplomas.'⁴⁶ But, for Reclus, knowledge and

learning are the basic prerequisites for human progress. Learning is neither instrumental nor is it to be solely confined to the academy, and he not only stresses the practical aspects of education but the solemn duty which learning confers: 'To know lays upon us the obligation to teach.'⁴⁷

The centrality of education, in the broadest sense, to the process of change was made explicit by 1905. Reclus embedded learning at the centre of his liberation ecology. In his essay on progress, he stressed how humanity's active ability to shape its present and future depends on understanding the past.

All past civilizations, even those of prehistory, offer us a glimpse of the treasure of their secrets and, in a certain sense, are gradually merging into the life of present-day societies. We can now look back on the succession of epochs as one synoptic scene that plays out according to an order in which we can discover the logic of events. In doing so, we cease to live solely in the fleeting moment and instead embrace the whole series of past ages recorded in the annals of history and discovered by archaeologists. In this way, we manage to free ourselves from the strict line of development determined by the environment that we inhabit.⁴⁸

Reflection and learning are required for human progress, as

Self-conscious progress is not a normal function of society, a process analogous to that of a plant or an animal. It does not open like a flower, but rather must be understood as a collective act of social will that attains consciousness of the unified interests of humanity, and that satisfies them successively and methodically.⁴⁹

And education is vital, as he lyrically puts it:

Man loves to live in dreams. The effort which Thought must put forth in order to seize hold of realities seems to him too hard, and he tries to escape the task by taking refuge in opinions ready-made.⁵⁰

Education engages with reality and breaks simple faith in favour of the power of reason: 'Beatific faith is the pillow of the weak in mind.'⁵¹

The emphasis on interaction with nature places humanity back in the natural world and much of Reclus' writing deals with this relationship. His respect for nature was reflected in his vegetarianism. Reclus felt that the way we treat animals reflects on our attitudes not only to the natural world but to the human world as well.

It is in no way a digression to mention the horrors of war in connection with massacres of cattle and carnivorous banquets. People's

diet corresponds closely to their morality. Blood calls for blood. In this connection, if one considers the various people he has know, there will be no doubt that in general, the agreeable manners, kindness of disposition, and equanimity of the vegetarians contrasts markedly with the qualities of the inveterate meat eaters and avid drinkers of blood.⁵²

The virtues ascribed to a meat-free diet may be somewhat overstated. It may be a cheap jibe, but, after all, Hitler was a vegetarian.

In this essay, and in his article '*The Great Kinship*', Reclus argued that animals are natural companions for humans rather than food and that the process of domestication of animals has led to their reversion into an inferior species compared with the natural wild creature from which they are descended. However, he avoided dogmatism by concluding:

But it is not for us to found a new religion, and to hamper ourselves with a sectarian dogma; it *is* a question of making our existence as beautiful as possible, and in harmony, so far as in us lies, with the aesthetic conditions of our surroundings.⁵³

Making human life a thing of beauty involves a profound understanding of the environment.

The industrialist who tries to make use of what the earth produces inevitably sees around him unutilised riches. As for the simple man who is content to love nature for itself, he finds in it his joy, and when he is unhappy, his sorrows are at least mitigated by the sight of wild countryside ... And if nature has the power to console or to strengthen individuals, what could it do over the centuries for whole peoples? Without a doubt, magnificent vistas greatly contribute to the qualities of mountain populations, and it is no mere figure of speech to call the Alps the boulevard of liberty.⁵⁴

Failure to respect the environment brings disaster in its wake. In discussing the decline of Spain as a great power, he added something that historians do not normally mention.

But did the Spanish passion for cutting down trees due to their fear of birds ... contribute nothing to this terrible decline? The earth, yellow, rocky, and naked, has taken on a repugnant and fearsome appearance: the soil is impoverished, and the population, which has been decreasing for two centuries, has to an extent lapsed into barbarism. The little birds are avenged.⁵⁵

Remarkably, given these sentiments, Reclus did not fall back into the trap

of the 'back to the land' movement, a repudiation of modern urban society. As a progressive, he felt that humans cannot develop in relative isolation, they need society, and, in particular, they need the city to flourish. 'When cities grow, humanity progresses, and when they shrink, the social body is threatened with regression into barbarism.'⁵⁶ Ultimately, ruralist movements can never succeed, as the growth of cities is based on humanity's greatest need, association. 'Certainly we need the rustling of trees and the babbling of brooks, but we also require association with other people and, indeed, with all people. The entire globe becomes for humanity a great city that alone can satisfy us.'⁵⁷

For Reclus, the city is organic; it must grow and reinvent itself or it will die.⁵⁸ It flourishes when it is in harmony with its environment, which includes both regional resources and the limits imposed by methods of communication. Reclus envisaged global networking and the development of a world culture and single language that would link independent cities into a free, globalized community. In contrast to the natural city, a city becomes ugly and vulnerable to decay where it is based on artificial circumstances such as the reliance on a single industry, particularly a polluting one, or an administrative centre, such as a state capital. He saw one of the worst offenders being the type of development based on the fantasies of speculators 'planned beforehand by architects who have never visited the site, much less gone to the trouble of consulting the future inhabitants'.⁵⁹ Considering some of the disasters of modern housing, Reclus' critique is highly prescient.⁶⁰

Maintaining his biological analogy, Reclus asserted that the lifeblood of a city is its people, and the health of each individual contributes to the whole. Through association and interaction a higher state of evolution is reached. Art reflects the consciousness of the population,⁶¹ but even in the most developed of contemporary cities, there was a disease eating away at the health of the city – poverty.

Even in cities in which the administrators try to veil all these horrors hypocritically by hiding them behind decent whitewashed fences, the misery breaks through nonetheless. Behind them, death carries out its work even more cruelly than elsewhere. Is there among our modern cities a single one that does not have its Whitechapel or its Mile End Road? As beautiful and imposing as an urban agglomeration may be in its entirety, it always has its open or hidden vices, its defects, and its chronic sicknesses. These will lead inevitably to death if healthy blood does not once again freely circulate throughout the organism.⁶²

Reclus praised the work of Geddes in restoring the old town in Edinburgh, but warned, again presciently, against a process of urban renewal that merely displaces poverty elsewhere. And so there is one overriding necessity

for the healthy evolution of a city – an end to ‘the antagonism between Capital and Labour’.⁶³ And so, Reclus draws us back full circle through his ecology to his anarchist communism. True social interaction can only happen between those who are free and equal, and that means the abolition of exploitation through the ending of private property.

Conservative-minded politicians are inclined to conjure up rhetoric about duty and respect as virtues. What this really means is obedience. Just as Badcock disposed of duty from an egoist perspective, in 1894 Elisée Reclus wrote: ‘Isn’t the loss of respect a quality par excellence of contemporary society?’⁶⁴ Like Badcock, he saw a conservative virtue as an unintelligent vice. Disobedience is part of a process whereby people begin to reclaim what used to be theirs. ‘Faith in greatness has disappeared ... people no longer believe in the sacred origin of private property’;⁶⁵ this will lead, he supposed, to the abolition of the state and for the workers to ‘calmly reclaim possession of all the products of their common labour’.⁶⁶

Reclus was not so unrealistic as to insist that this change was imminent. It would depend on continuous evolution. He did not share Kropotkin’s belief in spontaneity. But he did point to the fact that, though there were no historical precedents for the type of urbanized anarchism he advocated, anarchist practice and morality was widespread throughout society. There were the obvious experiments of the anarchist colonies but, most importantly for Reclus, anarchism was embedded in the lives of ordinary people.

But where Anarchist practice really triumphs is in the course of everyday life among common people who would not be able to endure their dreadful struggle for existence if they did not engage in spontaneous mutual aid, putting aside differences and conflicts of interest. When one of them falls ill, other poor people take in his children, feeding them, sharing the meagre sustenance of the week, seeking to make ends meet by doubling their hours of work. A sort of communism is instituted among neighbors through lending, in which there is a constant coming and going of household implements and provisions. Poverty unites the unfortunate in a fraternal league. Together they are hungry; together they are satisfied ...

A miniscule society that is anarchistic and truly humane is thus created, even though everything in the larger world seems to be in league to prevent its being born – laws, regulations, bad examples, and public immorality.⁶⁷

Here then are the main themes that interested the ever-practical and formidably energetic Patrick Geddes: living cities, practical and radical education, social evolution, environmental awareness, and an end to poverty. He picked all these up in an exhausting programme of social reform and experimentation as he, too, set out to create his own realms of anarchy within contemporary society.

Patrick Geddes

Geddes can be problematic. His methodology is difficult to grasp, he was poorly organized, and often dependent on collaborators, such as Bramford and Thomson, for his relatively few publications. He has left behind voluminous archives of – sometimes bewildering – notes and manuscripts. He developed a technique of graphic displays, grids and diagrams that he referred to as ‘thinking machines’. Utterly convinced of their universal effective application, Geddes did not see these as a personal working method that needed refining into a more conventional text, but as a dramatically new form of communication. Lewis Mumford, despite seeing himself as a ‘disciple’ of Geddes, was deeply mistrustful of the method. He saw it as being rigid and didactic, despite the fact that Geddes thought that his diagrammatic representation was a flexible tool that opened an introductory route into thinking. The literary Mumford saw only an obstacle to the fuller expression of Geddes’ ideas.⁶⁸ Helen Meller and Peter Hall have qualms too.

This one example, taken from the Geddes archives at Strathclyde University and reproduced here with their permission, gives a good sense of his working method. Responding to a paper on politics, he sketched out this flow chart to try and make sense of the interconnections between the ideas.

So convinced was he of the startling clarity of the design that he scribbled a suggestion on the back that it should be

... compressed into a flag form, woven with devices symbolic of ideals, and with various colours showing the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal ... This flag to be unrolled at socialist, Malthusian, and all gospel meetings, to impress the audience with the essential simplicity of the enquiry, and to lessen the sale of quack pills.⁶⁹

It is fairly certain that there would be an impact on the audience, but what it would be is far from certain.

It would be easy to be dismissive, however; Volker Welter, in a superb intellectual study of Geddes, makes a coherent defence of his graphic designs and stresses their integral value to the understanding of his work. There are two relevant aspects to Geddes' thought that are illustrated by his use of graphics. The first is that he is holistic and the second is that this holism is extremely complex. Thus, as Welter points out, Geddes' diagrams 'were a means to create and express order in complex systems'.⁷⁰ Welter also provides a persuasive explanatory description of the working of one of Geddes' better-known thinking machines, 'The Notation of Life'.⁷¹ His defence is compelling and should, however reluctantly, lead scholars away from a lazy bewilderment.

Mumford did have other reservations, however. In particular, he questioned Geddes' constant activity and production of vast piles of rough notes and 'thinking machines', which he saw as a work avoidance strategy to prevent Geddes putting on paper the great synthetic work that would express his total philosophy. It is probably more realistic to suggest that Geddes' increasingly desperate demands for Mumford to collaborate (as a disciple rather than a partner) were because he simply lacked the organizational skills to be able to undertake the task.

Novak hints that the grief cause by the death of Geddes' son in the First World War badly affected his productivity.⁷² It is probably more accurate to suggest that it was his wife's death shortly afterwards that took away the one person who could organize him. Geddes intimates as much in some unpublished notes for a speech: 'On an impartial survey of the situation there can be little doubt what it is that determines a man's success in life. It is his capacity for finding and capturing [sic!] a woman skilled in life economy.'⁷³ Eyebrow-raising Victorian prejudice aside, surely this was far from an 'impartial survey'; it must have been based on Geddes' own household instead. As well as displaying the limitations of Geddes' views on gender, it suggests that his emotional outburst to Mumford on their first meeting in New York was not really that he wanted Mumford as a replacement for his son, but for his wife.

The picture of Geddes that emerges is of someone who was vigorous and

manic by turn, a compulsive talker, and a writer of voluminous fragments. These include items that are frankly incomprehensible, such as a letter summarizing his life under the title 'Optimiam Individual-Ontogeny'.⁷⁴ Other pieces try creative expression that verges on the comically banal – for example, his attempt at the 'Poetisation of Sociology':

Four stanzas. Or Five?

1. The People
2. The people perish for lack of knowledge
3. Where no vision is the people perish
4. Whereas, when knowledge and vision combine, the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light⁷⁵

Occasionally, he can lose his progressive optimism. In this piece, he writes movingly about the slow death of last humans in a world about to be extinguished by a new ice age.⁷⁶ It is possibly a metaphor for his own, failing dreams.

And what more has cosmic science, for any of us, if this be indeed a cooling globe, doomed to be the frozen moon of an earthly sun, whose heat and light have ended, and so to circle aimlessly till some vast collision at once dissipates and rekindles the whole skeleton system in stellar catastrophe. And even if this be the beginning of a new cycle, a new and relatively uniformitarian evolution, where can it look forward to, save the same end?⁷⁷

The final problem that Geddes has given writers is that many of them have great difficulty with Geddesian multi-disciplinarity. It is a comment on the compartmentalization of current academics – something that Geddes deplored – that they simply do not have the breadth of knowledge to be able to write comprehensively on his ideas. Writing by those with a strong grounding in anarchist theory has certainly been lacking, but there has also been a neglect of his work by political scientists in general, once again obscuring his political commitments.

An example of this tendency comes from Welter's otherwise impressive analysis where, on several occasions, he displays limitations around radical political thought. So, for example, he is correct to emphasize Geddes' interest in spirituality, not as a believer but as a positivist who is interested in religion as transmitter of culture. However, he gives this primacy over most other aspects of Geddes' thought and does not mention anarchism or even political radicalism. To illustrate this omission, Welter includes the assertion that 'since the 1870s Geddes had been acquainted with Annie Besant, a future influential figure in the international theosophical movement'.⁷⁸ Of course Besant did not become a theosophist until 1887.

Until then, and for more than the first decade of her association with Geddes, she had been a member of the National Secular Society, was an atheist, socialist, feminist, birth control campaigner and labour organizer. The association is much more evidence of his membership of radical circles.

In addition, it is with weary resignation that the reader finds that those who actually do mention anarchism in the context of Geddes nearly always characterize it as violent⁷⁹ and often appear to be poorly informed on anarchist ideas and history. Geddes' own rejection of violence was unequivocal and he did not share the sophistry of anarchists, including Reclus, who argued that violence was the act of people driven to desperation by the suffering caused by the injustice in the world. He was much more succinct and perceptive.

Each new doctrine of whatever kind is an intoxicant in its day to a proportion of its excitable youth, who employ direct physical force. This is the auto-intoxication of hysterics.⁸⁰

Murdo Macdonald, despite an initial, near-compulsory mention of bombs and assassinations (many with, at best, tenuous associations with anarchism), was more thoughtful. He quoted Geddes' correspondence with a person critical of his positive use of the term 'anarchy'.

He [Geddes] stoutly rebutted the criticism, although at the same time he makes clear that he has no intention of fully allying himself with anarchy, any more than with any other political philosophy. He does, however, make clear that he firmly believes in the desirability of the political state to which anarchy refers, namely that it 'simply means what it says an-archy – without government i.e. without governmental compulsion.'⁸¹

How he could not ally himself with anarchism whilst simultaneously firmly believing in it is perplexing. One conclusion can be that both his generalism and his pragmatism⁸² made him anxious to avoid labels. Then again, he probably did not want to be associated with socialist notions of class struggle.

Helen Meller makes a very succinct point when she argues:

He was hostile to a centralised state and welfare policies believing always that the individual had to be the focus of policy, not the masses. No state machine, he believed, could control or develop the interaction of the individual with environment, which was the only path for future progress. By making this stand Geddes was to take himself outside the political debate in which the future social progress of the nation was actually worked out.⁸³

However, it did make him central to the anarchist debate. Interestingly, Meller indicates not just his unease with the growth of social democracy but the fact that Geddes was uncomfortable with the anarchist communist acceptance of class war, despite its prominence in Kropotkin's and Reclus' thought. In reality, whether he was conscious of it or not, Geddes' contribution to anarchist thinking formed a possible bridge between the individualist anarchists and the communists. It is certainly arguable, too, that his approach to 'constructive anarchism' is an effective vehicle for a creative synthesis of anarchist perspectives and their application in practical social experimentation.

There is a great deal of published material on Geddes and the purpose of this chapter is not to re-examine the scope of his work. It is also severely limited by its author's own, very un-Geddesian, specialization and scientific illiteracy. Instead, the aim is to resurrect Geddes as a political figure, and to show how the intellectual fecundity of the libertarian left in late Victorian Britain was of such an influence. This section, therefore, is not so much about what anarchism contributed to Geddes, whose extraordinary generalist thinking should never be confined into a single specialist compartment, but to start to think about what Geddes did for anarchism.

The future society that Geddes envisaged would be dynamic rather than static, based on continuing evolution. He refers to it as '*Eutopia*'. The name emerged from Thomas More's famous book, *Utopia*. Geddes suggests that More was punning two ancient Greek words which would sound similar, Outopia, signifying no place, and Eutopia, a good, beautiful or true place.⁸⁴ By contracting the title to *Utopia*, More was indicating that he could be describing either or both. This intended sense became lost and the more cynical 'nowhere' became the commonly understood meaning.⁸⁵ Geddes, an admirer of More and rescuer of Crosby Hall, More's old London residence, sought to resurrect the original meaning. However, by choosing to be unambiguous about the sense of a good place Geddes was trying to insist that its achievement is practical and possible. This is because, for Geddes, action and Eutopia are one, ideas and action cannot be divorced from each other, and, what is more, his definition of Eutopia is a model of pragmatism. Eutopia is 'the realizable best that can be made of the here and now, if we invoke and use all the resources available, physical, mental and moral'.⁸⁶

There are several key aspects of Geddes' Eutopia that could have been lifted straight from Kropotkin and Reclus: mutual aid, the importance of the interaction between *social* individuals and the environment for evolution, the autonomous city with organic links to the rural areas for mutual benefit, the possibility of regression as well as progression, organic societies without government. It is arguable, too, that he shared prejudices with these anarchists as well, most notably the romanticization of the Middle Ages and the medieval city, the depiction of rural life as essentially

peaceful and harmonious, and his identification of France as a source of liberty and Germany as the representation of both Prussian militarism and authoritarian thought.

There are elements of Proudhon too in Geddes, with a similar approach to federalism, and to both Proudhon and the individualist anarchists in what he calls 'the Civic Bank'.⁸⁷ This was a suggestion for the 'extension of the credit system ... to the everyday usage of the people, and the social application to the betterment of environment and improvement of population'.⁸⁸ However, Geddes was nothing if not an original thinker and he added a number of fresh elements, which, in effect, broadened anarchist theory and laid the foundations for a coherent ecological approach that synthesized ideas and action in a way that would be familiar to the modern Green political thinker and community development activist alike. That said, Geddes' ideas were still rooted in a left critique of industrialism.

Since the Industrial Revolution, there has gone on an organized sacrifice of men to machinery. During a still longer period, there has been a growing tendency to value personal worth in terms of wealth.⁸⁹

As a result, Geddes' distinctive contribution to anarchist discourse is best approached through his rather neglected writings on political economy.

The first distinction between Geddes and the conventional left is that though he saw clear divisions in society, they were not based solely on economic class. Class oppression is a symptom of the state of evolution of society; it is not the cause. In a very sharp analysis, Geddes refused to play the orthodox game. He certainly deprecated natural rights, especially to property: '*Natural* is a good word; it proves anything.'⁹⁰ He also exploded sarcastically the myth of the entrepreneur as the heroic figure of the age with despotic powers.

For must he not be rewarded for his generous abstinence from consuming his whole wealth in a moment; compensated for his enormous risk of loss in astutely finding the best investment for it; rewarded for his unparalleled labours of superintendence, performed, of course, by deputy? That under these circumstances this benignant autocrat should be entitled to absolute obedience, enforced by one penalty, that of instant dismissal.⁹¹

But in doing so, he was not tempted to mythologize the worker. He castigated socialism for merely being 'the old orthodox economics turned inside out'. All socialism does is reverse the capitalist myth, making the capitalist villain and the worker hero. This, for Geddes, is patently ridiculous. Instead of 'stage labourers and stage capitalists', there are a 'host of irreconcilably different types and varieties of labourers and capitalists,

struggling for existence amongst each other'.⁹² The existing condition of both the worker and the capitalist is the creation of mutual interactions, the one against the other, reinforcing the worst aspects of the relationship. The answer is social evolution, firmly rooted in Reclus' ideas.

As with Reclus, Geddes was clear that humanity can both progress and regress. He used biology to explain how this occurs in human society. Just as an organism dies with a lack of nutrient, so it does with an excess. As a result, there are two types of degeneration.

... on the one hand, deprivation of food, light &c., so leading to imperfect nutrition and innervation; on the other, a life of repose, with abundant supply of food and decreased exposure to the dangers of the environment. It is noteworthy that while the former only depresses, or at most extinguishes, the specific type, the latter, through that disuse of nervous and other structures, &c., which such simplifications of life involves, brings about that far more insidious and thorough degeneration seen in the life history of myriads of parasites. It is noteworthy that both these sets of conditions of organic change exist abundantly in society, the former being known as poverty, the latter as 'complete material well-being'.⁹³

He continued: 'the influence of all this upon the degeneration of individuals and upon the decline and fall of nations alike, need not be insisted upon.'⁹⁴

This would suggest that equality of distribution would be the solution, but Geddes denied this also. It is the quality of what is produced that is crucial.

The practical economist, who would increase the well-being rather than the mere number of the population, must attempt a vast proportional increase in the industries which elevate life over those which merely maintain it; and must make his ideal of progress for a long time lie in raising quality of production over mere quantity of it.⁹⁵

Geddes was trying to move from a material economy to what he termed a 'life economy'. This is absolutely essential, because he was one of the early ecological thinkers to identify limits to growth. For Geddes, increased production produces increased population and therefore increased demand. A focus on seeing wealth and well-being in material terms alone also creates additional demands from consumers. And if production is constantly increasing, he asks, 'What will happen when the coal is exhausted, or the Western corn-lands filled up?'.⁹⁶

Although supposedly biological in source, this is really the revival of an older critique of decadence. Geddes was writing against Adam Smith who, by dethroning virtue and elevating vice, felt that the collective good rested

in continuing production and consumption to meet the demands of petty desires. Geddes, the Presbyterian moralist and ecologist, felt that, in today's terminology, this was not sustainable. Humanity cannot escape morality: 'the road to real and permanent wealth, individual and social alike is up the harder and less inviting path of self-denying culture.'⁹⁷

Despite rejecting this aspect of Smith's writings, Geddes did not jettison the principle of markets, though he would not see himself as a market theorist. In one respect, he is clear that Smith is right. Market demand reflects human desires. However, he did not see prosperity arising from this, simply because he did not have a quantitative concept of wealth. The solution to successful evolution is not increased production. 'Now, the essential scientific fact about the evolution of any species ... is improved average quality. Increase in quantity is not evolution; nay it is even apt to be the precise reverse.'⁹⁸ In doing so, he set himself against the conventional notion of material progress.

Geddes' criticism of socialism and liberalism, both of which he often derided as '*futilitarianism*', was based on their focus on purely material, monetary distribution. Cultural evolution is what matters. It is a process that will transform the 'individual Race for Wealth into a Social Crusade of Culture',⁹⁹ and in doing so will change the pattern of consumption and reform production. Geddes rejected the view that producers can always manufacture markets for their products.

... it is consumption which determines production far more than conversely: we are sufficiently told how the capitalist directs the labourer, but not yet sufficiently how the consumer directs them both. In short, the consumer decides what the producer shall work at ...¹⁰⁰

Social evolution will change demand to reflect the higher faculties of humans and thus market mechanisms will redirect production towards goods that are life-enhancing, beautiful and of permanent value. This cannot be achieved from above; any qualitative change in production can only happen through individual choices in an advanced society. That individual choice lies at the heart of his economics means that there are two aspects of evolution that are necessary parts of his theory. The first is idealism, collective consciousness, and the second is psychology, individual consciousness.

Geddes uses several descriptions of the makeup of civil society. He bases his ideas on his interpretation of Le Play, using the celebrated classification of place, work and folk as being the main factors in the construction of society. For the region, he uses a fourfold notation of town, city, school and cloister as the necessary components of a developed society, a typically Geddesian way of referring to physical geography, economics, education and spirituality. This classification can confuse, especially in relation to

the notion of spirituality. Geddes developed an interest in Eastern religion and culture, not because he accepted its theology or mysticism, but because its holistic philosophy matched his own approach to an ecological understanding of societies as complex systems. Geddes' use of the term 'spirituality' is somewhat different and it is best understood by looking at the political distinction he made between state and nation.

Geddes wrote about the nation as being 'spiritual power' and the state 'temporal power'. By this, he meant that the nation consists of language, literature, music, poetry, common memories and aspirations – in other words, culture. Temporal power, the state, consists of the soldier, policeman, MP, tax gatherer and that 'mysterious functionary commonly known or unknown – as the bureaucrat'.¹⁰¹ It is temporal power that is represented by property and war; it is the instrument of crude materialism. Spiritual power, if uncorrupted by such materialism, embodies mutual aid and is the key to the evolution of society. As a result, human society needs collective instruments of learning embodied in universities (he coined the term 'University Militant' to describe the university that would play an integral role in the development of its community and region), exhibitions, the Outlook Tower (Geddes' own 'index museum' and 'sociological laboratory' in Edinburgh), and visual pageants etc. All of these Geddes experimented with as well as advocated. However, this collective engagement with learning can only be effective if individuals are psychologically equipped to benefit.¹⁰²

The key to this is in one of Geddes' most charming essays, 'Sunday Talks with my Children'.¹⁰³ In this he talked of 'Out-worlds' and 'In-worlds'. Out-worlds are experiences of the material world, facts, knowledge, action and observation. But they mean little until they are brought home inside the mind, the 'In-world', where they can be reflected on, interpreted and converted into both memories and plans for future actions. This 'In-world' is just as real as the 'Out-world' and helps shape it through a continual process of reflection and action. No individual can be effective unless they operate on both levels. For example,

... those who stay behind, in the house of memory, may become more and more learned, but they will never do very much. That, in fact, is what is wrong with too many educated people; that is why they feel paralysed, and can neither speak nor act though the occasion calls.¹⁰⁴

Thus 'the true, the complete education, the coming education ... must fit for both',¹⁰⁵ thought and action, work and learning.

Education is central to Geddes. He disliked instrumentalism, loathed formal assessment and qualifications and never took a degree himself, something that no doubt saved him from an orthodox academic career, despite his chair at Dundee. He disliked the increasing compartmentalization

of academic study, and felt that learning could not take place without action. These were encapsulated by his slogans '*vivendo discimus*' – by living we learn – and his replacement for the three Rs – the three Hs, heart, hand and head. Education, for Geddes, is about how people learn, rather than how they are taught and assessed. It is a way of nurturing the natural sense of wonder in a child and preserving it through life by the development of habitual observation, itself a factor in active involvement in the world. Given free reign in the last years of his life at his own international college in the south of France, students would spend as much time gardening as on formal study. If evolution depended on interaction with the environment, education could not foster change if it removed students to a remote place of limited and specialized learning. The development of the individual was the key to realizing Eutopia. Geddes is unusual in that he made individual mental development, including imagination, dreams and ideas, central to a theory of change. Yet, it is this, and the forms of collective memory that embody the spirit of a place, which underlies his concept of Civics.

Geddes is better known as one of the founders of town planning and his method of what he called valley sections and city survey only need to be outlined here. His main conception, the valley section, constitutes a natural region from which the city has emerged and with which it interacts harmoniously and symbiotically. The region needs to be analysed geographically (place), economically (work) and anthropologically (folk) to be able to understand its evolution. Certain types of occupation are found according to the location in the region. These are miner, woodman, hunter, shepherd, peasant, and fisher. In a harmonious society they are in balance. For Geddes, modern occupations are not new; they are fresh variants of the older types. So, the military and the state embody the nature of the hunter. Modern capitalism is also a reflection of the hunter, needing to be moderated by the more peaceful pastoralist occupations.

The city survey interprets this and visualizes the city as 'more than a place in space, it is a drama in time'.¹⁰⁶ Survey and interpretation allow an understanding of this historical drama. This is vital, as 'Understanding the present as the development of the past, are we not preparing also to understand the future as the development of the present?'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, development should be in harmony with the past, a technique he called 'conservative surgery', a participative planning process whereby the past is conserved as a collective heritage, not as a static museum piece, but adapted to new, living circumstances.¹⁰⁸ This is in complete and utter contrast to the obliteration of communities in, for example, 1960s slum clearance based on an imposed, brutalist architecture. In this way, Geddes advanced a theory of modernity that saw it as a development from the past rather than a complete breach with it and which retains it as memory whilst transforming it into something radically different.¹⁰⁹

Modernity, for Geddes, was, as for Reclus, the city. This was the essence of his politics. As he wrote in an unpublished manuscript,

Politics is here to be taken in the literal Aristotolean sense of city development. To restore to Politics its lost vision of the city is the practical objective of a revitalised social philosophy. The consequent policy of civic regeneration is concerned not with making Utopias but Eutopias. The former ideal is relevant to the abstract politics of metaphysical, juristic or mechanical tradition. It is in the concrete, 'nowhere'. But Eutopia is the place where the good life can be lived.¹¹⁰

However, the city could not be isolated from its region to which it both gave and received in equal measure. Again, following his evolutionary ideas, the city does not mark a breach with the rural past; it is a development from it. And if Kropotkin was correct that a breach with the countryside had led to the downfall of the medieval city-state, maintaining harmony with the region is essential to the continuance of a healthy Eutopian city.

This is not just a social necessity but an ecological one too. Geddes and Branford, in an unpublished manuscript, also claimed that deforestation was one of the causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire. They referred to a new study that saw 'the far more terrible ruin of old Italy, as indeed of all Mediterranean lands, from Spain to Greece ... through the destruction of forests; for thus it was that most favoured of regions became increasingly desolate, and is still so profoundly impoverished'.¹¹¹ This is the factor that was neglected by socialists and revolutionaries: 'This blindness of urban thought to rural reality persists also in all schools of Socialism'. They continued:

Surely it is a commonplace to every social geographer, that of all forms of rural development over Europe, it is the forest which most definitely thrives and prospers under collective ownership, that of the village, the town and city, the province or State also.

So for Marx and his successors to have thrown away this magnificent argument for collective ownership, is to our rural minds an amazing illustration of the limitation of urban thought. No wonder the peasant ... is little moved by the urban socialist ...

... this is why the 'red' revolution is now plainly evoking against it the green banner of the peasant.¹¹²

This green revolution is to spread and come to pass, 'Yet not by militancy, but the very reverse, the methods of reconstructive peace'. The ethics of agriculture is the nurturing of life. Urban revolutionaries are mechanistic, focused on money and rooted in force.

Whereas our regional and rural interpretation is far more at home than they are in the understanding and control of the physical environment, because also with more understanding of the organic and mental life, of social origins, and of the correspondence of ethical evolution ...

We also increasingly see why such revolutions also fail so seriously to realise the common weal they desire since their banner is of the warlike urban red, not of the peaceful rural green.¹¹³

The connection between city and countryside is material, ecological and mutually sustaining but, most importantly, it also embodies a peaceful, constructivist ethic. 'Such ethics is inseparable from its social applications: our ethical urges, our social and political endeavours all need reunion in life.'¹¹⁴

This ecological and regional approach is one that is well suited to anarchist thought and it is clear that Geddes was fully aware of it. Volker Welter writes:

Geddes never arrived at a well-defined idea of the boundaries of region-cities. He declares at one point that the boundaries of modern nations are 'essentially concepts of war, and of that passive, latent, potential war' which is connected with expansion. Boundaries and war are ultimately caused by the dominant position of the hunter and his descendants amongst the natural occupations. To constrain them requires that society be given a structure composed of region-cities, which in turn means basing societies on natural geographical regions ... Boundaries then lose their importance, and as they do so the importance of the urban center correspondingly rises ... Beyond the vague idea of a 'natural' or 'geographical' region, Geddes could safely ignore the definition of boundaries, as the future would render them superfluous.¹¹⁵

Boundaries are, of course, necessary for two things, private property and the nation state. And so, the anarchist Geddes emerges, the logical conclusion is that the essence of his regional vision is one of a society without government.

Geddes is important to anarchism in his insistence that evolution is a conscious process in which individual and collective ideas are paramount. But he could never simply be a monist. There was an element of technological determinism in his thinking too. His optimism for the future was buoyed by what he saw as technological changes that would enable this social evolution take place.¹¹⁶ The industrial revolution had been characterized by technology that he called *Paleotechnic*, analogous with the Paleolithic Old Stone Age. Geddes saw this being replaced by a new, *Neotechnic* age, just as the Neolithic age saw the introduction of settled agriculture. Much of this

was based on new technology, especially electricity, which would enable a new decentralized advanced industrial economy to grow to replace heavily polluting and exploitative mass manufacturing. The *Paleotechnic* mindset on volume and money would go and be replaced by a *Neotechnic* 'Vital Budget'.

Again, under the Paleotechnic order the working man, misdirected as he is like all the rest of us, by his traditional education towards money wages, instead of Vital Budget, has never yet had an adequate house, seldom more than half of what might make a decent one. But as the Neotechnic order comes in – its skill directed by life towards life, and for life – he, the working man, as in all true cities of the past aristocratised into productive citizen – he will set his mind towards house-building and town-planning, even towards city design; and all these upon a scale to rival – nay surpass – the past glories of history. He will demand and create noble streets of noble houses, gardens and parks; and before long monuments, temples of his renewed ideals, surpassing those of old.¹¹⁷

Geddes would have been disappointed that the promise of the new technologies only produced more and greater destruction in the twentieth century, though he would blame it on the continuance and strengthening of *Paleotechnic* mentality and power structures. However, he would not be the last person to express the view that technological change will usher in a qualitatively different society. His notion of life-enhancing technology was to be taken up in again in the wake of the growth of environmental awareness from the 1970s onward and, even if overly optimistic and deterministic, still seems relevant to the early twenty-first century.

The question remains as to Geddes' position in the anarchist tradition. I have no doubt he should be included and that he created an important alternative direction for anarchist theory and action. His Victorian moral earnestness is less appealing to modern libertarians, but he made a deep and distinctive shift away from a revolutionary class analysis towards a holistic philosophy of development without the state. Through it, he emphasized ecology as the basis of the relationship of humans with both the natural and the built environment. His vision of change was participatory, valued individuals and communities, and rested on both cultural and technological change. His vision of exchange was one that saw it as a system that shaped production, rather than one that manufactured needs. In valuing quality over quantity, he was advocating a very different type of political economy from mainstream progressive thought. Above all, the change he offered was practical, diverse, and was not a violent rupture with the past, but an organic and voluntary development from it. Though it was real change indeed, it was change that would be created from below and cushioned

by the familiar. It was anything other than the violent ruptures caused by globalized turbo-capitalism. His view of the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between the rural and urban is in stark contrast with the present-day urbanization of the developing world, based on rural impoverishment and vast shanties housing the displaced poor.

Yet Geddes did not reject the urban, he celebrated it. The maximizing of liberty and the optimizing of evolution could only take place in autonomous communities that can sustain advanced human culture and that means cities. Nor, despite his stress on continuities with the past, did he want to replicate it. The past may always be with us, but our liberation from it is just as important. That liberation would happen through the evolution of historical forms into very different variants of familiar themes. In this way, he was a modernist rather than a nostalgic, believing firmly in technological and intellectual progress. It is just that he advocated a qualitatively different model, based on a social evolution that mirrored that of the natural world. Development, for Geddes, could not be imposed, but unlike Kropotkin, he did not see it as a spontaneous result of revolution. Instead, spontaneity was to be replaced by planning. Geddes' idea of planning was not an imposed process. It was based on guidance rather than direction, on example, experimentation and mutual aid; it was to be driven from below rather than imposed from above. Town and city planning as envisaged by Geddes was not governmental, but a collaborative way of developing and evolving the life of cities to promote social development and enable each individual to be a free and active citizen. It was integral to his broader emancipatory philosophy.

Geddes' major contribution to the anarchist movement was to adapt Kropotkin and Reclus' environmentalism and bio-regionalism in ways that they may not have fully approved of. Those anarchists clinging to class struggle and a distinctively libertarian socialist ideology would certainly be uncomfortable with it. Yet, here were their main themes worked into a coherent and libertarian ideology that was no longer tied to a romantic, revolutionary or impossible strategy. Instead, Geddes developed a method that was inherently peaceful and pragmatic, even if only immediately realizable in those pockets Reclus had identified. On top of which, with its acceptance of market exchange and its emphasis on cultural change and individual intellectual development, it would not be unattractive to individualists. It was through Geddes that the possibility of synthesis was made apparent, even if it was neither fully developed nor accepted.

The continuing re-evaluation of Geddes' life and work and his growing reputation is firmly rooted in his continuing relevance to ecological thinking. Often described, perfectly fairly, as being difficult and obscure, Geddes also had a powerful and effective way of expressing the key issues of his day, and none are more apt and moving as his reflection on the dependence of humans on nature from his farewell lecture at Dundee:

For an example: How many people think twice about a leaf? Yet the leaf is the chief product and phenomenon of Life: this is a green world, with animals comparatively few and small, and all dependent on the leaves. By leaves we live. Some people have strange ideas that they live by money. They think energy is generated by the circulation of coins. Whereas the world is mainly a vast leaf colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass: and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests.¹¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Rudolph Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Freedom Press: London, 1988), p.26.
- 2 See Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914: Myths and Realities* (Pluto Press: London, 1976).
- 3 Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset (The Free Press, Macmillan: London and New York, 1962).
- 4 Ibid p.322.
- 5 Voltarine de Cleyre, 'Anarchism', in *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltarine de Cleyre – Anarchist, Feminist, Genius*, (eds), Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005), p.82.
- 6 Ibid p.78.
- 7 Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes. Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990), p.4.
- 8 Colin Ward, *Housing: an Anarchist Approach* (Freedom Press: London, 1976).
- 9 Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow. An intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, updated edn (Blackwell: Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1996), p.144.
- 10 Ibid p.145.
- 11 Jozef Keulartz, *Struggle for Nature: A Critique of Radical Ecology* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998), p.93.
- 12 Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition*, pp.11–12.
- 13 Marie Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-Century European Anarchism* (Croom Helm: London, 1979) and *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus*, introduction by George Woodcock (Black Rose Books: Montréal and New York, 1988).
- 14 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.180.
- 15 Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person: An Introduction to the Ideas and Life of Patrick Geddes* (Victor Gollanz Ltd: London, 1975), p.136.

- 16 John P. Clark and Camille Martin (eds), *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Lexington Books: Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Oxford, 2004).
- 17 See John Clark, *Municipal Dreams: a Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin's Politics* and Murray Bookchin, *Comments on the International Social Ecology Network Gathering and the 'Deep Social Ecology' of John Clark*, all from *Anarchy Archives: An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism*. CD copy burned 3 October 2001. Maintained by Dana Ward, Pitzer College, Claremont, California. Web address. http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives
- 18 John Clark and Camille Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, pp.19–20.
- 19 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, pp.205–6.
- 20 Ibid p.207.
- 21 Ibid p.208.
- 22 Ibid p.211.
- 23 Ibid p.212.
- 24 Quoted in Phillip Boardman, *Patrick Geddes – Maker of the Future* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1944), p.359.
- 25 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 26 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, pp.209–10.
- 27 Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex*, rev. edn. (Walter Scott: London, 1901), p.290.
- 28 Ibid p.290.
- 29 Ibid p.290.
- 30 Ibid p.287.
- 31 Elisée Reclus, *Why Anarchists Don't Vote*, from *Mother Earth*, (ed.) Emma Goldman (Anarchy Archives, An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism. CD copy burned 3 October 2001).
- 32 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 33 Elisée Reclus, *The Modern State*, in Clark and Martin, p.210.
- 34 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, p.186.
- 35 Elisée Reclus, *Evolution and Revolution*, (3rd edn, International Publishing Company, London, 1886), p.1.
- 36 Elisée Reclus, *Evolution, Revolution, and the Anarchist Ideal*, in Clark and Martin, p.154.
- 37 Ibid p.154.
- 38 Ibid p.155.
- 39 John P. Clark and Camille Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, p.26.
- 40 Ibid p.26.
- 41 Ibid p.27.

- 42 Elisée Reclus, *The Future of our Children*, reprinted in Joseph Ishill (ed.), *Elisée and Elie Reclus – in Memoriam* (The Oriole Press: Berkeley Heights, NJ, 1927), pp.331–5.
- 43 Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom*, pp.129–31.
- 44 Elisée Reclus, *The Ideal and Youth* (James Tochatti: Liberty Press, London, 1895), p.9.
- 45 Ibid p.10.
- 46 Ibid p.10.
- 47 Ibid p.13.
- 48 Elisée Reclus, *Progress*, in Clark and Martin, p.237.
- 49 Ibid p.239.
- 50 Elisée Reclus, *The Great Kinship*, trans. by Edward Carpenter, introduction by Anne Cobden-Sanderson (The Oriole Press: Berkeley Heights, NJ, 1933), p.1.
- 51 Ibid p.1.
- 52 Elisée Reclus, *On Vegetarianism*, in Clark and Martin, p.174.
- 53 Elisée Reclus and Ernest Crosby, *The Meat Fetish: Two Essays on Vegetarianism*, (rev. edn, A. C. Fifield: London, 1905), p.30.
- 54 Elisée Reclus, *The Feeling for Nature in Modern Society*, in Clark and Martin, p.127.
- 55 Ibid p.126.
- 56 Elisée Reclus, *The History of Cities*, in Clark and Martin, p.182.
- 57 Ibid p.198.
- 58 Ibid p.189.
- 59 Ibid p.192.
- 60 For a celebrated critique of the effect of such planning on the modern city, see Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1965).
- 61 Elisée Reclus, *The History of Cities*, in Clark and Martin, p.193.
- 62 Ibid p.195.
- 63 Ibid p.197.
- 64 Elisée Reclus, *Anarchy*, in Clark and Martin, p.140.
- 65 Ibid p.140.
- 66 Ibid p.141.
- 67 Ibid pp.143–4.
- 68 See Frank G. Novak Jr, *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence* (Routledge: London and New York, 1995), esp. pp.27–30.
- 69 Geddes Archive T-GED 2/2/3.
- 70 Volker Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA and London, 2002), p.13.

- 71 Ibid pp.31–46.
- 72 Frank G. Novak Jr, *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes*, p.23.
- 73 Geddes Archive T-GED 2/2/39.
- 74 Geddes Archive T-GED 9/2074.
- 75 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/7/35.
- 76 Undoubtedly influenced by the theories of climate change put forward by the self-educated fellow Scot James Croll, whose major work, *Climate and Time*, was published in 1875.
- 77 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/1/19.
- 78 Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis*, p.20.
- 79 See for example Siân Reynolds, *Geography and Idealism: Patrick Geddes's anarchist friends: Elisée Reclus, Pierre Kropotkin* www.patrickgeddes.co.uk (last accessed 20 April 2005). Sadly, this article is no longer available online.
- 80 Geddes Archive T-GED 3/7/35.
- 81 Murdo Macdonald, 'Patrick Geddes: Environment and Culture', in Walter Stephen (ed.), *Think Global, Act Local: The Life and Legacy of Patrick Geddes* (Luath Press: Edinburgh, 2004), p.77.
- 82 For example, Geddes turned down a knighthood on 'democratic' principle in 1912. He accepted in 1931, shortly before his death, thinking that it may help him finance his projects.
- 83 Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes*, p.67.
- 84 This would fail in modern Greek pronunciation as 'eu' is pronounced 'ev' or 'ef'.
- 85 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, The Making of the Future Series (Williams and Norgate: London, 1919), p.87.
- 86 Ibid p.88.
- 87 Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, ed. by the Outlook Tower Association, Edinburgh and the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction, London, (new and rev. edn, Williams and Norgate: London, 1949), p.150.
- 88 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, p.100.
- 89 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *The Coming Polity: A Study in Reconstruction*, The Making of the Future Series (Williams and Norgate: London, 1917), p.v.
- 90 Patrick Geddes, *The Conditions of Progress of the Capitalist and the Labourer* (Co-operative Printing Company Ltd: Edinburgh, 1886), p.7.
- 91 Ibid p.7.
- 92 Ibid p.9.
- 93 Patrick Geddes, *An Analysis of the Principles of Economics (Part 1)* (Williams and Norgate: London and Edinburgh, 1885), p.28.
- 94 Ibid p.28.
- 95 Patrick Geddes, *The Conditions of Progress*, p.30.

- 96 Ibid p.32.
- 97 Ibid p.35.
- 98 Ibid pp.25–6.
- 99 Ibid p.34.
- 100 Patrick Geddes, *Co-operation versus Socialism* (Co-operative Printing Society Ltd: Manchester, 1888), p.11.
- 101 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *The Coming Polity*, p.153.
- 102 Here, as in much of his writing on thought and memory, he is drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, particularly the relationship between reality, perception and action in *Matter and Memory*, authorized trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (George Allen and Unwin: London and Macmillan: New York, 1911).
- 103 Patrick Geddes, ‘*The World Without and the World Within: from Sunday Talks with my Children*’, in *Cities in Evolution*, pp.205–13.
- 104 Ibid p.208.
- 105 Ibid p.208.
- 106 Patrick Geddes, ‘Civics: As Applied Sociology 1’, in Helen E. Meller (ed.), *The Ideal City* (Leicester University Press, 1979), p.79.
- 107 Ibid p.80.
- 108 The concept of conservative surgery was the source of another recent misjudgement. Klauss and Rignall see Geddes as ‘more of a “conservative revolutionary” than a man of the Left’. John Rignall and H. Gustav Klaus with Valentine Cunningham (eds), *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left* (Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, 2012), pp.5–6.
- 109 Again, this reflects the influence of Bergson. ‘But to reach the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness, continuing and retaining the past in a present enriched by it, thus escapes the law of necessity, the law which ordains that the past shall ever follow itself in a present which merely repeats it in another form, and that all things shall ever be flowing away.’ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p.313. In the same way, Geddes develops a theory of history that is both evolutionary and transformative.
- 110 Geddes Archive T-GED 4/6/6.
- 111 Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *A Contribution of Social Science towards Industrial and Social Relationships*, T-GED 3/1/16.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis*, p.73.
- 116 This insistence on the importance of technological progress and new forms of industrial society is a significant difference between him and the post-industrialism of writers like Coomaraswamy who combined

anti-capitalism with anti-industrialization, something that Geddes rejected. For a short summary of Coomaraswamy's views see Alan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, pp.123–44.

117 Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*, pp.37–8.

118 Patrick Geddes, 'A Botanist Looks at the World', in *Cities in Evolution*, pp.216–17.