

## **"The philosophy of the history of Peter Kropotkin: conservative romanticism"**

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Philosophical-historical views of P.A. Kropotkin are studied in post-Soviet Russia in the writings of various researchers of philosophy of XIX and XX centuries. But these studies have mostly exclusively philosophical orientation, concentrating mainly around the issue about positivism in the views of Kropotkin. Meanwhile, as noted by M. D. Rakhmaninova, he made his study of human history mainly retrospective, i.e. with all the features of the historical path of social life, its tendencies and specific characteristics. As though he was looking from a height of available historical experience at the entire history down to most ancient times, and on this basis he did his own unorthodox conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, the philosophy of history of P. Kropotkin is interesting and important not only in philosophical but also in the historical and socio-political context. And this is significant above all, as possibility to open his philosophical-historical conception and to find its place, and also we would see an tendency of his social-political views in general and his anarchical views in particular.

The philosophical-historical conception of Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin was changing with a change in its social and political views from the liberal-constitutional to anarcho-radical, and then to the anarcho-reformist.

But because he followed a developed, bright and extraordinary philosophical-historical conception when he became a theorist of anarchism, we will consider his historical-philosophical concept exactly in correlation with his anarchical socio-political views.

Kropotkin's Interest to the philosophy and the history was not accidental and it was formed long before he became an anarchist. Although at the beginning, during his studies at the Page Corps, Kropotkin's views were not scientific. In them there were mainly a system of values, poetical, ethical-aesthetic principles. "The infinity of the universe, the greatness of nature, a poetry and the eternally pulsatory life - Kropotkin wrote - these created more and more impression to me, and everlasting life and harmony of nature immersed me into such rapturous ecstasy, which young individuals so crave."<sup>2</sup> These elements will always prevail in the future in the anarchic socio-political views of Kropotkin.

In the days of his youth works of A.I Herzen, N.A. Dobrolyubov, N.G. Chernyshevsky have

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<sup>1</sup> Рахманинова М. Д. Кропоткин и Штирнер: современность как точка встречи полюсов анархизма // Вопросы философии. 2013. № 4. С. 99-111.

<sup>2</sup> Кропоткин П. А. Записки революционера. М., 1966. С. 120.

formed critical attitude towards reality in Kropotkin. The range of his interests was already a very wide and varied, but although initially was quite chaotic - the philosophy and ethics, literature and art, sociology and political economy, science, and familiarity with the banned literature (articles of magazines "Kolokol", "Polar Star", the works of N. G. Chernyshevsky, N.V. Shelgunov and others).

But the fundamental influence Alexander Kropotkin has had at his younger brother Peter. "Sasha was strongly ahead of me in the development and encouraged me to evolve" - P. Kropotkin recalled. "To this end, he put one after the other philosophical and scientific questions, sent me whole scientific thesis in his letters, woke me up, advised me to read and learn".<sup>3</sup>

The constant exchange of views in correspondence helped to adjust subjects for study; and when Alexander has gone a way of criticism out of orthodox religion till the materialistic laws of philosophy, he pulled by his brother after him: "Read ... Büchner, Vogt, Bacon, Heraclitus, Hume - all this will benefit ... As for the idealists, you may do not read them; except with a critical purpose, or for fun or for historical purpose".<sup>4</sup>

From the very beginning, young Peter Kropotkin was trying to reconcile their personal political, religious and moral value orientation and objective, scientific-educational principles. This feature of the initial evolution Kropotkin worldview was delineated even before he was engrossed in the natural sciences, and Naturalism has become one of the defining features of his entire outlook.<sup>5</sup>

Though naturalism entered into worldview of the young Peter not only under the influence of his older brother Alexander but by typical way for the era of Russian intellectuals of the sixties. It was going through an acquaintance with the famous work of the German physician and philosopher, vindicator of natural-scientific materialism Ludwig Buchner (1824-1899) "Force and Matter", which was reprinted many times at Russian and other European languages, through the work of like-minded L. Buchner - Karl Vogt (1817-1895) "Blind Faith and science" (Hesse, 1855). There is information that Kropotkin studied "Physiology of Common Life" of English positivist philosopher J.G. Lewis (1817-1878), as well as book of Lewis and John Stuart Mill, "Auguste Comte and positive philosophy" (SPb., 1867).

However, the starting point of the ideological evolution of Peter Kropotkin was his initial interest not to the natural sciences as is commonly believed, and not even to geography but to a history. In his library there were two parts of "Educational book of Russian history" of S.M. Soloviev,

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<sup>3</sup> Солонович А. А. Кропоткин // Михаилу Бакунину. 1876-1926. Очерки истории анархического движения в России. М., 1926. С. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Петр и Александр Кропоткины. Переписка. Т. 1. М.-Л., 1932-1933. С. 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> Гольдман Э. П. А. Кропоткин // П. А. Кропоткин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине смерти П. А. Кропоткина. Чикаго, 1931. С. 52.

he was interested by book "History of Russia" of A. Lamartine (even he was going to translate it) , published in 1855, which indicates the degree of interest of Peter Kropotkin exactly to a historic thematic.<sup>6</sup>

Namely earlier study of philosophy and history to a large extent determined the nature and direction of P. Kropotkin's anarchism, including, influenced the formation of his philosophical-historical conception in the period of early radical anarchism of the thinker.

A notable feature of the social-political views of the mature Kropotkin became an orientation at their scientific grounding. As wrote the well-known anarchist Russian-born Emma Goldman, "Peter Kropotkin was one of a major world greatness - as a scientist, a philosopher and sociologist, as a writer." He [Kropotkin] felt "a deep respect for a labor," and he was "... more proud of his handiwork, than of his great contribution in science and in anarchical philosophy".<sup>7</sup>

Biographer of P. A. Kropotkin, a Russian historian, anarcho-syndicalist and anarcho-federalist, N. K. Lebedev wrote in 1931 about Kropotkin, that he put the main purpose of his life a dissemination of ideas socialism without a State and developing scientific foundations of anarchist ideology. He wanted to show all the world that anarchy was not synonymous with chaos and disorder, but on the contrary, is an ideal social order, according to the findings of modern science.<sup>8</sup>

In his early anarchical socio-political views Peter Kropotkin adhered to the ideas of radical reconstruction of society. He preached the doctrine of intrinsic value of spiritual-creative life of the individual, he justified and defended the rebellious passions in human nature. KHe denied state coercion and advocated the organization of society on the principles of voluntary agreement. His social ideal was communism without a State (anarchical) .

Initially Peter Kropotkin did not see any positive role for the state in the development of society and considered that any power, even freely chosen, would be evil. Accordingly, the establishment of anarchist communism was supposed to happen, according to Kropotkin immediately after the social revolution. And this ideal society should be a federation of free industrial communities (communes) where a person, guided by the rules of solidarity, gets all the possibilities for a complete and comprehensive development. At the same time, as emphasized by another biographer of Peter Kropotkin – V. A. Markin,- Kropotkin thought anarchy would not be a chaos, disorder and

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<sup>6</sup> Сафронов О. С. Петр Алексеевич Кropоткин как теоретик и пропагандист анархизма, как историк: дис. ... канд. ист. наук. Воронеж, 2000. С. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Гольдман Э. П. А. Кropоткин // П. А. Кropоткин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине смерти П. А. Кropоткина. Чикаго, 1931. С. 224-225.

<sup>8</sup> Лебедев Н. К. Что дал миру Кropоткин // П. А. Кropоткин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине смерти. Чикаго, 1931. С. 13.

permissiveness, but a true order, which is formed naturally as a result of self-organization of society.<sup>9</sup>

A characteristic feature of anarchist social-political views of Peter Kropotkin was their romanticism, acquired under the influence of Western ideas of enlightenment and romanticism, and, if we talk about Russian impact, then, first of all, it was under the influence of the works of Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

This is certainly true if we mean by social-political romanticism proclamation of need and objective law for create a society of universal justice, arranged at the same time in accordance with his own ideal concept about it.

Of course, this direction of thought was within the overall pan-European philosophical and historical tradition.

Та же цитата:

Стремление к построению идеального общества было характерно, прежде всего, для европейских общественно-политических деятелей нового и новейшего времени. Еще просветители XVIII в. мечтали о царстве разума. Хотя мечтал о нем и Робеспьер, и «последние монтаньяры» в 1795 г., и Бланки, и европейские террористы XIX в. Мечтали о всеобщем счастье и террористы в нашей стране, в том числе и большевики, осуществлявшие красный террор. Сильный соблазн заставлял их прибегать к изуверским средствам, на которые сквозь розовые очки смотрели западные наблюдатели, такие как Теодор Драйзер или Ромен Роллан, ожидавшие построения идеального общественного устройства в новой России.<sup>10</sup>

### **Social concept of Peter Kropotkin -**

#### **influenced by the ideas of anarcho-reformist progress**

Such intentions to build an ideal society were characteristically, above all, for the European public-political figures of new and contemporary times. As early as in XVIII century the representatives of the Enlightenment dreamed of the kingdom of the mind. And Robespierre, and 'last Montagnards' in 1795, and Blanqui and European terrorists of the XIX century dreamed about it. So and terrorists in our country dreamed of universal happiness and so Bolsheviks dreamed about it making the red terror. The strong temptation forced them to use gruesome methods. Western observers, like Theodore Dreiser or Romain Rolland looked at them through rose-colored glasses. They expected that just here there would be realized their hope of building an ideal social structure in New Russia.

But Peter Kropotkin sought not only to a better social-political structure. He dreamed of the absolute perfection of the new social order. Kropotkin in his speeches and printed works preached, in fact, the waiting of "paradise on earth", which moreover should be reached immediately. Русский

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<sup>9</sup> Маркин В. А. От географии к анархизму // Труды комиссии по научному наследию П. А. Кропоткина. Вып. 1. М., 1992. С. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Мкртчян А. А. П. А. Кропоткин и Западная Европа // Новая и новейшая история. М., 1991. № 2. С. 61.

философ Николай Александрович Бердяев считал эту мечту составной частью русской идеи (имея в виду, конечно, не только земной, рукотворный рай).

Опять цитата из той же статьи:

At the same time, Kropotkin sought not only to a better social-political structure. He dreamed of an absolute perfection, in fact, about the "paradise on earth", which would be also to achieved immediately. N. Berdyaev thought this dream was a composite part of the Russian idea (meaning, of course, not only the earthly, a man-made paradise).

Initially, vague hints of P. Kropotkin on the construction of a new bright future of mankind resembled the dreams about the other world. Indeed, Kropotkin's anarchical agitation wore distinctive features of the preaching of the "kingdom of God" on earth, where there would be neither disadvantaged nor humiliated or exploited people.

In addition, initially he drew perfect social order not so much in the future (he was unable to draw a detailed picture of the future society), but this ideal he had seen in the past. This also applied to a primitive society, and to Greek city-states, but above all - the medieval city communes. After studying the level of development of the community base, and their impact on the progress of society, Kropotkin believed that the Middle Ages was a period of rapid progressive development.<sup>11</sup>

So he wrote about the Middle Ages: «The more we get to know the medieval town, the more we see that it was not just a political organization for the protection of well-known political freedoms. It represented an attempt - on a larger scale than has been done in the rural community - of close union for mutual aid and support, for objectives of consumption and production, for the sociable life in general - it was not imposing on people shackles of a State, but by providing, on the contrary, full freedom for the manifestation of the creative genius of each individual group of people in the arts, crafts, science, trade and political order".<sup>12</sup>

According to Peter Kropotkin, the basis of society, which existed until the XVI century. in Europe, was the customary law, the arbitral tribunal, government and communal ownership. Every member of society has been a member of a community, a guild, organized on voluntary principles. Kropotkin concluded that thanks to all these elements - a liberty, an organization from the simple to

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<sup>11</sup> Гомаюнов С. А. Философско-исторические взгляды П. А. Кропоткина в контексте отечественной мысли конца XIX — начала XX в.: несостоявшийся диалог // Труды Международной научной конференции, посвященной 150-летию со дня рождения П. А. Кропоткина. М., 1995. Вып. 1: Идеи П. А. Кропоткина в философии. С. 56-71.

<sup>12</sup> Кропоткин П. А. Взаимная помощь как фактор эволюции. Минск, 2006. С. 194.

the complex, the fact that production and domestic exchange were doing by craft unions (guilds), external trade was conducted by a city as such, and the purchase of major commodities were also doing by the city itself, which distributes them among citizens along self-cost - and thanks also to the spirit of pushfulness, developed by such institutions, - the medieval cities during the first two centuries of its free existence became centers of well-being for all of its population, unprecedented centers of wealth, high development and education.<sup>13</sup>

In a letter to A. M. Atabekyan in April 22, 1919 Peter Kropotkin idealized medieval society and argued that "this was a flowering of civilization, scientific, intellectual, artistic, commercial and - it was especially in the first two centuries when the export trade still was in hands of the city (Osudarj Great Novgorod), but not by individual merchants. Freedom to leave a Commune and go into another one was absolute. Only because of it there was possible the development of rationalism in the XII century and then revolt against papal authority and the Catholicism, Communist communes of Moravian's Brothers, and so on."<sup>14</sup> But at the same time, according to Kropotkin, in conjunction with community-based movement was another process - it was a formation of a state, which arose as a result of decomposition of commune's property and the emergence of private ownership, as well as a result of appearance of hereditary political, judicial and religious authorities. Thus with the emergence of a State humanity has gone down the wrong path of development.

Peter Kropotkin so evaluated the role of the state in this period: "To destroy the independence of cities: to plunder the rich trade and craft guilds; to concentrate in its hands the entire external trade of cities and to kill it; to take into their own hands the internal management of the guilds and to subordinate the internal trade and all production, all crafts, in all the smallest details, to the flock of officials and thus to kill an industry, and arts; to strangle a local selfgovernment; destroy the local militia; crush weak people by tax for the benefit of the strong ones and to devastate a country by the war - such was the role of the nascent state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in attitude to the city's unions. The same, of course, happened in the villages, among the peasants. Once a State felt strong enough, it hastened to destroy the rural community, bankrupt peasants, who was provided by its tyranny, and to plunder of communal lands.

Of course the historians and political economists, consisting in the pay of a State, have always been taught us that the rural community represented an outdated form of land ownership, which prevented the development of agriculture, and that therefore it was condemned to disappear under the

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<sup>13</sup> Крoпoткин П. А. Современная наука и анархия // Крoпoткин П. А. Хлеб и воля. Современная наука и анархия. М., 1990. С. 418.

<sup>14</sup> Почин. 1921. № 1. С. 2.

"influence of natural economic forces." Politicians and bourgeois economists keep saying it until now, and, unfortunately, there are even revolutionaries and socialists (pretending for name of "scientific" socialists), which are repeating this fable that they memorized in school.

А между тем это самая возмутительная ложь, которую только можно встретить в науке. История кишит документами, несомненно показывающими всякому, кто только желает знать истину (относительно Франции для этого достаточно хотя бы одного сборника законов Даллоза), что государство сперва лишило сельскую общину независимости, всяких судебных, законодательных и административных прав, а затем ее земли были или просто разграблены богатыми, под покровительством государства, или же конфискованы непосредственно самим государством».<sup>15</sup>

Даже наиболее ярким примером совершенного государства, при этом, по Кропоткину, была Римская империя, так как в ее столице были сосредоточены все сферы жизни: экономическая, политическая, юридическая, религиозная и культурная. Между тем, древнегреческие полисы, по его мнению, государствами не были.

Современная европейская цивилизация, считал Петр Кропоткин, возродилась на развалинах Римской империи среди германских, кельтских, славянских и скандинавских племен. В XVI в. в Европе возникли государства, которые подчинили себе местную жизнь, ликвидировали самоуправление, общинную и гильдейскую собственность, способствовали передаче этой собственности в частные руки. Лишенные экономической независимости, ставшие составной частью административного аппарата, сельские общины и ремесленные гильдии к XVII-XVIII вв. сделались тормозом экономического развития. Такая политика, в свою очередь, привела к тому, что в Европе, по мнению Кропоткина, стала разрушаться промышленность, деградировать торговля и сельское хозяйство и, в конечном счете, это привело к буржуазным революциям. А всяческая поддержка государством нового класса эксплуататоров – буржуазии, при одновременном подавлении свободы деятельности рабочих союзов, привела, в свою очередь, к ряду революций в середине XIX – начале XX вв.

Как отметил С. А. Гомаюнов, для обоснования такой философии истории Петр Алексеевич Кропоткин чаще прибегает не к позитивистскому методу выявления достоверных фактов, а к методу реконструкции возможной, вероятностной истории. При этом Кропоткин не опирается только на факты, даваемые историческими источниками, поскольку полагает, что авторы источников всегда имеют «видимое пристрастие к драматическим сторонам истории»,

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<sup>15</sup> Кропоткин П. А. Современная наука и анархия // Кропоткин П. А. Хлеб и воля. Современная наука и анархия. М., 1990. С. 434-435.

преувеличивают внимание к сфере борьбы. При этом мирная работа, т. е. сфера приложения закона взаимной помощи, остается в тени. А «ясные и солнечные дни теряются из виду ради описания бурь и шквалов». Далее Кропоткин обосновывает такое положение тем, что исторические документы чаще «имеют дело с нарушениями мира, а не с самими миром».<sup>16</sup>

П. А. Кропоткин сформулировал философско-историческую концепцию «общественного прогресса», согласно которой развитие общества происходит путем скачков и эволюций; социальная революция является в ней закономерным этапом, скачком, ведущим в конечном итоге к полной ликвидации всех государственных институтов.<sup>17</sup> Но именно мирное время, как отмечает Кропоткин, – время, наполненное трудом и человеческим общением, – является показательным для исследования человека и общества.<sup>18</sup>

Проецируя свою философско-историческую конструкцию на реальные общественно-политические события, Петр Кропоткин приходит к выводу, что надо или ждать самоуничтожения цивилизации, или обобществить экономику и ликвидировать государство. Для чего необходимо вернуться к экономике, основанной на различных видах общественной собственности, к выборному правлению и самоуправлению.

Более того, в письме П. А. Кропоткина к Л. Л. Балашову от 12 апреля 1919 г. говоря о нарождающемся в Англии профессиональном представительстве взамен существующего представительного правления и о необходимости вызвать к жизни сельскохозяйственное представительство в России, Кропоткин видит в этом прогрессивный поворот назад к средневековому гильдейскому устройству.<sup>19</sup> Таким образом, можно говорить, что в обоснование своих анархических общественно-политических взглядов П. А. Кропоткин положил философию истории консервативного романтизма.

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<sup>16</sup> Кропоткин П. А. Взаимная помощь как фактор эволюции. Минск, 2006. С. 126-128.

<sup>17</sup> Желтов В. В. История политических идей. Кемерово, 2002. С. 462.

<sup>18</sup> Рахманинова М. Д. Кропоткин и Штирнер: современность как точка встречи полюсов анархизма // Вопросы философии. 2013. № 4. С. 99-111.

<sup>19</sup> [ОР РГБ](#). Ф. 218. Карт. 686. Ед. хр. 20, Л. 2–3.