

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

# 什么是所有权？

## *What is Property?*

*Proudhon*

蒲鲁东

Edited by

DONALD R. KELLEY

and

BONNIE G. SMITH

中国政法大学出版社

PIERRE – JOSEPH PROUDHON

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*What is Property?* is one of the most notorious and influential works of social criticism of the nineteenth century and certainly the best-known book by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, revolutionary author and contemporary of Marx. Proudhon's short answer to this question "Property is theft" was even more notorious, linking private property as it did with the worst features of "bourgeois" political hegemony and exploitation. Yet because of the eagerness of later admirers to place Proudhon in one later tradition or another (socialist, utopian, anarchist, fascist, etc.) the intellectual qualities of his book have never been fully appreciated; nor has his critique of the institution of property been situated properly in the context of nineteenth-century political thought in general. This new translation, with a critical and historical introduction to these neglected aspects of Proudhon's "diabolical work" (as he called it), tries to do justice to the work of this subversive critic who himself, through his assault on the central institution of modern Western society, spent his whole life in quest of social justice.

# 剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

# CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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To the memory of  
Sanford Elwitt and Charles Freedeman,  
*Dix-nueviémistes par excellence,*  
who had their own answers

## Introduction

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *What is Property?* (1840) appeared at a crucial point in modern French history. Just ten years before, during the "three glorious days" of revolution in July 1830, the Orleanist monarchy had been founded with a fanfare of liberal bombast and high hopes, in some quarters, of fulfilling the aims of the first French Revolution. "What is the Third Estate?" the Abbé Sieyès had asked in 1789; and his answer – "Everything" – seemed now on the point of fulfillment, with the nation finally and truly united under the general will and according to the principles of liberty and justice. For a time this political dream of bourgeois hegemony, pursued within the framework of constitutional monarchy, was shared by workers as well as members of the propertied elite, who were following François Guizot's famous advice – "Enrich yourselves!"

Before the decade was up, however, the July Monarchy seemed to many observers to have degenerated into a tyranny of wealth and status hardly better than the Old Regime. Love of liberty had turned into a "religion of property." The ruling principle was neither equality nor fraternity but sheer "egoism"; the nation celebrated by Guizot, Michelet, and others had become a scene of class struggle between owners and workers – the haves and the have-nots or, in the parlance of the day, the *prolétaires* versus the *propriétaires*. The vision inspired by the *Trois Glorieuses* had become a social nightmare that portended another, perhaps more fundamental, round of revolution against another corrupt regime, with another basic question posed, most notoriously by Proudhon, about the excluded part of the society.

Radical opposition to the "bourgeois monarchy" took a variety of forms, ranging from vague and sentimental reformism to covert and revolutionary action but agreeing on the centrality of the "social question." Most conspicuous in this opposition were the Christian and utopian schools of "socialism," especially the followers of Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, who projected grandiose visions of a just society, drawing on widespread resentments but without posing any really basic threats to contemporary institutions (not even to property, as Proudhon complained about the Fourierists). By 1830 the emergence of working-class movements gave support also to more subversive and "communist" doctrines, which aspired to complete the program of 1789 by promoting an authentically social and at least implicitly proletarian revolution. For many social critics, "labour" began to replace "property" as the central problem to be confronted, and indeed as a seminal issue in the revolutionary movements of 1848.

A significant turning point seemed to be reached in 1840, when conditions and events conspired to heighten anxieties, resentments, and outright "misery" (*misère*, signifying poverty). An economic slump in 1839-40 helped to produce what by September was virtually a general strike in Paris. A month later there was an attempt to assassinate the much-maligned King Louis Philippe, as Guizot emerged as the dominant figure in the ministry of Count Molé and continued to pursue a conservative and manipulative policy to preserve political stability and bourgeois hegemony. Behind this façade of law and order the social question not only loomed but received all kinds of dramatic literary treatment and publicity. The appalling conditions of the working class were most vividly portrayed and statistically measured in Louis Villermé's groundbreaking *Tableau of the Physical and Moral State of the Workers Employed in the Cotton, Wool, and Silk Industry* (1840), which stressed the need for bourgeois control of the proletariat but held out little hope for improvement.<sup>1</sup> It was at this time, too, public attention was stirred by three more inflammatory manifestos provoked by the same problems: Louis Blanc's *Organisation of Labour*, Etienne Cabet's *Voyage to Icaria*, and

<sup>1</sup> *Tableau de l'état physique et morale des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine, et de soie.*

Proudhon's *What is Property?*<sup>2</sup> All of these works were concerned in one way or another with the question of property, as indeed, at just this time, was the young Karl Marx; but none of these went quite as far as Proudhon in giving the answer (echoing the radicalism of 1793), "Property is Theft!"

Who was this P.-J. Proudhon? A man of the people – "child," he preferred to say – a self-made intellectual, one of the last of the *philosophes*, and a revolutionary anarchist. Through his sensational explorations of the social question that tormented nineteenth-century France, Proudhon created, out of an initial scandal, a tradition of social, economic, and political thought that, however overshadowed in the twentieth century by Marxism, has persisted down to the present day. Having suffered extreme poverty more than once, Proudhon was in a better position than many observers to criticise and perhaps to theorise about this question; having risen in social scale from peasant and printer's apprentice to author, investment counsellor, and political activist, he could appreciate the growing antagonism between the "proprietors" and the "proletarians"; and having endured political persecution for his subversive views, he was anxious to infer connections between the social question – poverty, class division, and proto-revolutionary ferment – and the behavior of government. All of these themes met in the debates over the institution of private property, which became the subject of Proudhon's most provocative book as well as the obsession of a lifetime.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was born in Besançon in 1809, the produce of "pure Juristic soil" and a family that had been poor but, he proudly declared, free "from time immemorial" (*Mémoires*, 15). He came from the "unfortunate" (*maudite*) branch of the family – the one destined, he later wrote, "to lawsuits, prison, poverty, and revolt" – as distinguished from the "fortunate" (*bénigne*) side that had produced an impressive line of churchmen and lawyers, including his cousin, J.-B.-V. Proudhon, Professor of Law at the University of Dijon, who was later to be a target of the younger Proudhon's criticism. Pierre-Joseph's character and inspiration derived not only from his peasant-proletarian heritage but also from a larger national sentiment ("O

<sup>2</sup> Blanc, *Organisation du travail*; Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*; and see Christopher Johnson, *Utopian Communism in Europe 1839–1851: Cabet and the Icarians* (Ithaca, 1974), 66.

patrie, patrie française,” he chanted, “patrie de la liberté” [*Mémoires*, 15]) produced by the Revolution and from the Catholic religion as it appeared to his innocent and idealistic eyes. Yet in the end it was only the “proletarian” part of the people that he chose to celebrate and to champion.

Proudhon received a good classical education at the Collège Royal in Besançon (1820–27), but he was shaped as much by his restless travels, job-hunting, and personal contacts, including, in 1829, a six-week infatuation with the “bizarre genius,” Charles Fourier, whose ideas he was later to attack. By then Proudhon was already a republican, on the road to his own peculiar brand of Christian socialism. In these years before finding his social calling, Proudhon experienced not only poverty but also a variety of personal troubles that tormented him, though without undermining his essential optimism. In 1833 the death of his brother Jean-Etienne, as a result of his military training, turned Proudhon irrevocably against the established order. In 1836 Gustav Fallot, his close friend in Besançon and Paris, also died; and two years later another friend, Lambert, committed suicide. With Lambert, Proudhon had formed a printing firm (Lambert & Co.), which marked his promotion from apprentice to master but which kept him on the edge of bankruptcy and served mainly to give him another taste of economic and professional failure. At this time (around 1838) Proudhon also went through some sort of sexual crisis, the last evidence of this aspect of his personal experience before his marriage ten years later (Woodcock, 33). Toward women in general Proudhon’s attitude was fairly characteristic of his age, on the one hand idealising them in almost chivalric style but on the other denying them any place on his socialist agenda – and at one point proposing bluntly to “exclude them from society.”

Drawn increasingly from the provinces to Paris, where most of the action and almost all the talk was to be found, Proudhon shifted his sights increasingly from his own tormented and deprived *Moi* to the equally miserable *Société* at large. Proudhon grew up in a climate of extraordinary political cross-winds and storms marked above all by two very different “revolutions” – that of 1830 producing the July Monarchy and the revolution of 1848 (“revolution without an idea,” as he later called it) which brought about the defeat of socialism. His *What is Property?* appeared, then, in the heyday both of bourgeois ascendancy and of rising socialist protest; and it must be understood

in the context of a generation not only torn by class resentment but also informed by simplistic (and "utopian") solutions to the social question, which Proudhon reformulated in his own peculiar, ultimately "anarchistic" way.

For some, like Guizot and Michelet, the victory of 1830 seemed to be the fulfillment of the first French Revolution; for others, like Louis Blanc and Karl (or, in these years, "Charles") Marx, its betrayal. The July Monarchy was the arena of the liberal drive for wealth and power, a renewed Christian religiosity, the communitarian dreams of the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists, the embryonic communism of Cabet and Marx, the launching of Positivism, the emergence of the new science of political economy, and widespread fear that the nation created by the revolutions of 1789 and 1830 was splitting into two warring classes – the rich and what Saint-Simon famously called "the poor and most numerous" – that were headed for another and even more fundamental explosion. It was in the context of this social and intellectual turmoil that Proudhon hatched his first scheme of social redemption, which was the achieving, or the restoring, of community and sociability through the abolition of what was at once the source of the rampant and unsocialised egoism of the July Monarchy and the institutional keystone of bourgeois government – private property.

"My public life began in 1837," he wrote in his Rousseauian *Confessions*, "in full Orleanist corruption" (*en pleine corruption philippiste* [*Mémoires*, 44]). The year before he had begun work on a project which he hoped would qualify him for the triennial scholarship given by the Academy of Besançon in the name of J.-B. Suard, a local luminary and impenitent royalist who died in 1817 and whose widow administered the fund. On 31 May 1837 Proudhon, boasting of his "working-class" origins, addressed his first letter to the Academy, outlining his heaven- and earth-storming project of finding "new ways in philosophy" and of creating "a complete system joined to religious and philosophical beliefs" (*Mémoires*, 43). The topic was "On the Utility of the Celebration of the Sabbath," but Proudhon was awarded only a bronze medal. The winner of the prize was Proudhon's older friend and correspondent and soon to be professor at the University of Besançon, Jacques Tissot, whose book, also published in 1840, treated "suicide mania and the spirit of revolt, their causes and their remedies," in a properly objective (i.e., statistical),

yet conservative fashion.<sup>3</sup> Proudhon found this treatment of a fundamental social evil inadequate and regretted that his own contribution (published by Lambert & Co.), which linked the institution of a day of rest to "a political system based on social equality," had not received such recognition. It was in the course of this work, however, that he found (as Marx was also finding) his way not only to philosophy but also to a solution of the social question – that is, in the new science of political (some called it "social") economy.

He would try again, this time with better preparation. Coming across the topic of political economy in the catalogue of the library of Besançon, Proudhon later recalled, "I began to read" (*Mémoires*, 46). The reading notes he took from about this time afford extraordinary insights into his mental and emotional development at this crucial period of his life.<sup>4</sup> These notes contain not only extensive passages copied out of books and his critical reactions (carefully marked "P") but also comments on various lectures he attended in Paris (by Michelet, Théodore Jouffroy, Jules Simon, and others), revisions and drafts for his work in progress, and occasionally personal revelations and social criticism. They portray him on an emotional roller-coaster moving from highs of philosophical speculation to lows of psychological despair and social protest and form a fascinating gloss on – or hypertext to – *What is Property?*

Some of these manuscript notes concern his earlier work on the sabbath (for which he consulted the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot) and another on general grammar, which reflected his belief that the study of languages and philosophy was essential to an understanding of human nature and its social discontents. This work carried on the universalist investigations of language begun by the Port-Royal grammarians and by Condillac's work on the origin of language. Proudhon soon became aware that the new discoveries in comparative linguistics made such speculations obsolete, and he turned to more "positive" approaches. He already possessed a fine knowledge of Latin – indeed claimed normally to think in this language and adorned his rhetoric

<sup>3</sup> Tissot, *De la manie du suicide et de l'esprit de révolte, de leurs causes et de leurs remèdes* (Paris, 1840).

<sup>4</sup> Bibliothèque National, Manuscrits français, N. A., 18255–18263 ("Economic. Notes, Extraits et fragments"), including 25 *cahiers*, with Proudhon's own index (MS 18257, ff. 1–3), but not yet described in a published catalogue. The essential references here will be identified by volume and folio numbers.

with classical tags – and he made preliminary efforts to learn the elements of German and even Sanskrit as well. In his writings he frequently resorted to old-fashioned philological and etymological arguments to demonstrate the antiquity or embeddedness of particular institutions or practices, such, most notably, as “theft.”

But his attention was soon directed to more frontal approaches to social philosophy. “I am reading the *Spirit of the Laws* of Montesquieu,” he wrote on 8 December 1838 (MS 18256, f. 5); but unfortunately, he added, there was “nothing further from scientific method” than this old classic, at least for his purpose, which was nothing less than “to found a new philosophy.” Four months later he noted, “I have begun reading the *Social Contract*” (MS 18256, f. 93). With Rousseau’s work he was more impressed, especially for its “powerful, vigorous, and energetic” style; as for its thesis, that was “as bold as it is possible to express, even today.” Proudhon had reservations about Rousseau’s theory of a “pure” state of nature, but in a literary and polemical way he had obviously found a model, and a dangerous one at that. As a friend wrote, “You are not Rousseau”;<sup>5</sup> but Proudhon, afflicted by his own sort of anarchic egoism, would never heed such warnings and continued stubbornly in his quest for equality – and, in this connection, recognition.

He studied many other classics as well, including Hugo Grotius, to whom he assumed Rousseau to be responding (MS 18256, ff. 76–84); Sieyès; members of the Scottish school, beginning with Thomas Reid (in Jouffroy’s translation); and going on to other fashionable German philosophers, especially Kant and Hegel (also in translation, of course). He was also much struck by Vico’s philosophy of history. He did not care for Vico’s views about the significance of “barbarism” or his cycles (*cours*), but he did agree wholeheartedly with his axiom that the order of ideas followed the order of things (MS 18256, f. 68). Like virtually all of his French contemporaries, Proudhon read Vico’s *Science nouvelle* in Michelet’s translation, and it is interesting that Proudhon was also attending Michelet’s lectures at just about this time (25 Nov. 1839, 6 Jan. 1940 [MS 18256, f. 104; 18258, f. 33]). Again it was less Michelet’s substance than his style – and the crowds he attracted to the Collège de France – that seems to have made the greatest impression.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondance*, I, xiv–xvi.

Proudhon's major concern in these studies, however, was with the Eclectic philosophy of Victor Cousin, which dominated the academic culture of France under the July Monarchy (MS 18256, ff. 12–23; 18257, ff. 137–42). It was mainly through Cousin's writings, translations, and influence (encouraging Michelet's translation of Vico, for example, and Edgar Quinet's of Herder) that Proudhon derived his knowledge of non-French thought. Proudhon was not lucky enough, he lamented, to have a personal acquaintance with Cousin or other leaders of academic culture (Guizot, Villemain, etc.), but he did attend the lectures of such disciples of Cousin as Jouffroy and Simon, and he studied Cousin's own works with intensity, regarding them as the ideological basis of liberal hegemony and exploitation.

Cousin's method, too, was exploitative. "Cousin takes from everyone," Proudhon complained; "he modifies, adds, adjusts, and then he calls himself a philosopher" (MS 18256, f. 14). "Monsieur Cousin always says the best things in the world," he added, "but he does nothing." Cousin's point of departure was the Cartesian principle, "I think, therefore I am"; and in the opinion of Proudhon and other critics of Cousin, this *Cogito* led directly to the materialist concern with the *Moi* – the gross egoism – of the "bourgeois monarchy." What made this unsociable attitude worse was the Cousinian view of history, which found its legitimacy in the past, especially in the victors, and more especially in the beneficiaries of the Revolution of 1830. In general, as Proudhon had learned from Simon (who had opened his course by declaring his allegiance to this school), "The principle of Eclecticism is that there is nothing absolutely false in history" (MS 18256, f. 145). Proudhon came finally to scorn Cousin as a "charlatan" in "perpetual confusion" and to associate him with the contemptible notion of deriving principle from historical contingency. This was an immoral way – as Marx also charged – of basing philosophy on history, which (as Guizot and other liberals also taught) was the story of the winners.

More directly tied to – and responsible for – the social question than the official philosophers of the July Monarchy were the jurists; and much of Proudhon's study was devoted to the technical works of legal apologists and commentators on the Civil Code such as Charles Toullier, Charles Comte, and A.-L.-M. Hennequin as well as his late cousin, J.-B.-V. Proudhon (MS 18256, ff. 84–89, 23–39; MS 18258, ff. 3–7). Here Proudhon found the intersection between the

two main tendencies which had produced the social question of his own time: the authoritarian method that justified all institutions on the bases of the Civil Code (and the Charter of 1815 which authorized it), the unchecked growth of selfishness as expressed in the principle of private property formulated by this same Code, and especially the fundamental confusion underlying the social question: "Property," he wrote: "The whole question is enclosed in these words: *property, possession*. Possession is for all, property for none" (MS 18256, f. 41v). This was exactly the thesis of his forthcoming book.

But if the jurists were the masters of the law of property, the political economists were the masters of its reality; and very much like the young Marx, Proudhon experienced a turn – almost a conversion – to this new form of social science. "The first philosophy [the name traditionally given to metaphysics] is nothing else than economic Science," he confided to his notebook; and indeed *la Science économique* "presides over, follows, and therefore envelopes all other sciences . . ." (MS 18255, f. 43). In this conviction Proudhon turned especially to the writings of J.-B. Say, Charles Comte, Destutt de Tracy, Joseph Droz, and other contemporary economists, though again he read their books with a skeptical eye and cutting analysis (MS 18257, ff. 166–74; MS 18256, ff. 23–39, 59–64, 41–49). These men, too, he judged harshly, calling both Say and Comte "imbeciles." If anything they were worse than the lawyers and theologians in their defense of inequality and injustice. "I have spoken with small respect for jurisprudence," as Proudhon admitted in *What is Property?* "I have been pitiless in criticising the economists, for whom in general I have no liking . . . , [and] I have severely blamed the Christian church, as I am obliged to do."

Proudhon was not exaggerating when he boasted, "I have read a hundred volumes of philosophy, law, political economy, and history" (Haubtmann, 219), but more than erudition went into the making of *What is Property?* His notebooks also reflect a terrible confusion of personal distress and social outrage. In *Le National* he read many tragic stories of deprivation and death. In early February 1840 he reported the case of a sixteen-year-old girl from Tally-sur-Meuse who had died of starvation (MS 18257, 85), and he contrasted this with the 100,000 fr. salary of Mlle Rachel, a popular French singer (a reference which he retained in *What is Property?*). "The poor are

dying of hunger every day," he lamented. At this same crucial time he also wrote: "I have been agonising and giving way to the pressure of my needs and the feeling of being abandoned to an unfortunate future. I see the impossibility of escaping my troubles, which come from the ignorance of the people and the bad will of those who abuse and oppress my forces." In this state of mind, identifying his own ego with the *Pauvre Peuple*, Proudhon found a new identity. "I am not an author," he wrote (MS 18257, 84). "I am a proletarian . . ."

Yet Proudhon's depressive states alternated with intellectual euphoria, and his reinflated ego gave him renewed confidence in his philosophical and political destiny. "My conscience is mine," he wrote; "my justice is mine, and my liberty is sovereign" (*Mémoires*, 33). From the standpoint of such eclectic egoism Proudhon went off in search of his social program. "I do not invent ideas," he declared arrogantly; "I see, I judge, I write" (*Mémoires*, 44). His notes show him struggling with the rhetorical tactics of his subversive thesis, consciously taking Sieyès's "What is the Third Estate?" as his inspiration, drafting and crossing out several versions until he got it right (MS 18256, f. 105v-6r). But always "La propriété c'est le vol." And – again crossed out and then repeated – "What a revolution in ideas!" These phrases were all retained in *What is Property?*

Sometimes Proudhon thought of his book as his political testament and framed it as his last will (MS 18256, f. 73):

Pierre Joseph Proudhon, printer, to all these present and all those disinterested and of good faith, I am . . . etc. I bring a new truth, a new Gospel, an *Evangelium novum*, or at least I offer a deplorable example of human folly. However, if I am not deceived, I have done a great service to humanity, which is to show better than any one [the reasons for] the impossibility of establishing equality and fraternity among men.

Yet Proudhon insisted and always would insist that he was no revolutionary; he was only a philosopher who was revealing a truth rooted in human nature and showing how "reform should be from the bottom up and not from the top down" (MS 18256, f. 41).<sup>6</sup>

His position set, his learning marshalled, and his arguments

<sup>6</sup> "J'ai montré que la réforme devait être commencée par le bas, et venir du haut, et non par le haut d'en bas."