

## Medieval Cities, Heresy, Church and the Mutual Aid: first approach to the interpretation of Kropotkin

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**Abstract:** The contributions of Piotr Kropotkin to the field of evolution sparked a significant debate in the scientific community in the late 19th century. His perception of cooperation as a mechanism for overcoming obstacles and adapting to the environment raised new perspectives also in the social sciences. The Russian philosopher considered that his analysis of biology could also be applied to the historical study of societies. In this way, he argued that in the medieval period, as well as in other periods, mechanisms of self-improvement and self-defense against the powers of the time had been produced. Furthermore, as this text highlights, Kropotkin addressed the emergence of heresies that posed a rupture with the prevailing order.

**Keywords:** Kropotkin thought, social and historical theory, Medieval Heresy, Philosophy of cooperation

## Ciudades medievales, herejía, iglesia y ayuda mutua: primera aproximación a la interpretación de Kropotkin

**Resumen:** Las contribuciones de Piotr Kropotkin al mundo de la evolución generaron un gran debate en la comunidad científica a finales del siglo XIX. Su visión de la cooperación como mecanismo para superar obstáculos y adaptarse al entorno planteó nuevos puntos de vista incluso en las ciencias sociales. Este filósofo ruso consideró que su análisis sobre la biología podría aplicarse al estudio histórico de las sociedades. De esta manera, sostuvo que en la época medieval, así como en otras épocas, se habían desarrollado mecanismos de superación y autodefensa contra los poderes imperantes como el que sucede en los espacios urbano del medievo. Además, Kropotkin examinó, la aparición de herejías que desafiaban el orden establecido.

**Palabras clave:** Kropotkin pensamiento, teoría social e histórica, herejía medieval, filosofía de la cooperación.

When *The Origin of Species* was published, Piotr Kropotkin was only thirteen years old, and social Darwinism had scarcely emerged. It was not until later, primarily through the contributions of Herbert Spencer, who in 1864 published *Principles of Biology* and articulated the idea of the survival of the fittest around that book and other texts, that social Darwinism began to take hold. It is worth remembering that initially Spencer was very well received within the libertarian movement. His critique of the state and its use of coercive methods was perfectly aligned with the proposals for individual freedom advocated from anarchist platforms. Even Kropotkin himself praised Spencer when, after his arrest in Lyon in 1882 for subversive activities, he made this plea in court: "The prosecutor has said that I am the founder of Anarchy; then where do we leave Proudhon, Herzen, Spencer, and all the great thinkers of 1848?" (Kropotkin, 1931). Spencer is often considered the precursor of social Darwinism, applying evolutionary ideas in the animal world that could easily be applied to humans, culture, and societies through the nascent field of sociology before Darwin did<sup>1</sup>. Spencer seemed to be challenging the natural order, the supra-human order that had been given to Earth's inhabitants. During this upheaval, he developed a system of nuances that fit into the idea of "survival of the fittest," under a prism with three possible movements: involution, evolution, and dissolution (Spencer, 1876). The links between post-Comtean biology and sociology bore their first fruits, while initiating a dialectical path that would lead to many confrontations.

Spencer's evolutionary selection quickly became a kind of standard-bearer for nature's *laissez-faire*. According to this idea, "the fittest" would overcome the many obstacles they encountered. Kropotkin was aware of these debates, knew Darwin's work, had read it early on, and was also familiar with Spencer's contributions. Together with his brother Alejandro, they discussed these issues and corresponded regularly about the debates that biologists, sociologists, and philosophers were leading (Kropotkin, 1899). Both Alejandro and Piotr were aware of the latest developments in these fields, following the debates between Spencer and August Weismann<sup>2</sup>, especially with the help of Charles Frantzévitch Roulier, who was the director of the Moscow Zoological Museum. According to Piotr Kropotkin, Roulier greatly influenced his brother in 1858, a year before the publication of Darwin's book, and similarly instilled in him an interest in the natural sciences, as well as the proposals Roulier referred to as *transformism* in the animal world (Kropotkin, 1899).

Darwin's theories were not well received by the more conservative sectors, who strongly criticized his contributions from their many platforms. Ultimately, evolutionism challenged most of the creationist dogmas, and Darwin was soon accused of being a denier and acting against Christian faith. The controversy between the naturalist's followers and other scientifically inclined theologians led to several public debates and encounters. Some, like Huxley, claimed with some irony that they preferred to descend from a monkey than from educated men who denied the reality of science (Lucas, 1979). In 1863, Huxley published *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, in which he articulated a discourse stating that humans and apes had shared a common ancestor. The controversy was ignited, and the relationship between species not only undermined creationist allegories but also caused a storm in British society. "A lord and a primate sharing a common ancestor?" Some must have wondered incredulously.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to publishing Spencer's works at the end of the 19th century, some anarchist media in Spain such as *La Escuela Moderna*, *Estudios*, *Prometeo* also widely disseminated his studies on creation, evolution, and the foundations of sociology (Soriano-Madrid, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> German evolutionary naturalist.

Darwin continued his studies and hypotheses on the origin of human beings, their membership in the animal kingdom, and the influence of other factors such as the environment, behavior, and conduct on them. His popularity grew until he passed away in April 1881. Barely ten days after his death, Piotr Kropotkin published a commemorative text on Darwin's life and work. The Russian scientist added the following controversial words: "Darwin demonstrated that all this variety of animal and plant forms that we can observe on our terrestrial globe is not the work of a creator who had fun creating a polymer today, a fish tomorrow, and a man or a monkey the day after tomorrow" (Kropotkin, 1882). According to Kropotkin, humans were nothing more and nothing less than animals. In this text, he recognized the "struggle for existence," but with a meaning that clearly differed from what liberalism wanted to explain. He also worried about the use of the adaptation to the environment of a worker and the waste made by a bourgeois as an example, asking, "Who is better adapted to the environment?" Undoubtedly, in 1882, Kropotkin showed signs of what would later become the focus of his theories on mutual aid, although at that time, he referred to it as solidarity. Kropotkin acknowledged that Darwin's theory was the result of the times and the common work of scientists like him, as well as names like Spencer, Wallace, and many others, without taking away from Darwin's merit.

Not long after the publication of his text on Darwin, Piotr Kropotkin was arrested and imprisoned in France. In the autumn of 1882, he had moved from England to France and continued with his propagandistic and writing activities in the Lyon area (Woodcock-Avakumovic, 1950). At that time, Lyon was a politically active city, and the presence of the Russian anarchist raised all kinds of suspicions and surveillance. The workers' revolts in the area and the revolutionary activities of the miners in Monceau-les-Mines ended up doing the rest; Kropotkin was arrested in a major operation against the anarchist movement. In January 1883, a trial against Kropotkin was held in Lyon, accusing him of belonging to the International, which was then illegal in France. While he was imprisoned, he continued to collaborate with various publications on topics related to anarchism or geography. Faced with the numerous difficulties posed by this lack of freedoms, some colleagues, and scientific societies such as the Académie des Sciences offered to provide him with materials with which to continue his studies (Woodcock-Avakumovic, 1950). The process became internationalized, and the unfounded accusations led to the emergence of a campaign in favor of his release. Within various Anglo-Saxon scientific societies, it was considered to give him public support. In this way, a good number of professors from universities in London, Cambridge or Oxford signed in favor of his release, as did associations such as the Royal Geographical Society or the British Museum. The Russian government and its agents in France were pressuring to prevent his release, but he was finally released in January 1886.

His time in prisons in France and Russia motivated the publication of specific works in which he criticized the living conditions of those who ended up there. Apparently, among the characters who signed for his release were Victor Hugo, the writer who was also responsible for delivering the manifesto to the Minister of Justice, and the evolutionist Alfred Russel. It is noteworthy that Spencer's surname also appears in this campaign, which is still debated as to whether he joined the plea or not, and that Huxley, one of Darwin's disciples, clearly signed the document<sup>3</sup>. Thomas H. Huxley, who would later take Darwin's theories to the extreme. For this English biologist, competition and the "law of the strongest" manifested as an essential element of evolution and was a

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<sup>3</sup> Avakumovic and Woodcock assert that the original document preserved in Archives Nationales (Paris), see: BB/24/875 Dossier 3238 Affaire du prince Kropotkine condamné pour avoir participé à l'organisation de la Fédération anarchique yonnaise.

characteristic condition of nature. This natural and competitive evolution, based on an innate continuous contention, left no room for different interpretations, as he understood that the strongest and most adaptable imposed their natural itinerary in time. Huxley used Spencer's arguments and set a new controversy around the corner. Darwinism and social Darwinism had strongly influenced academic debates and scientific societies, so dismantling their argument was not easy. The scientific dispute escalated when, in the late 1880s, Thomas Huxley published *The struggle for life: a programme* (Huxley, 1888) in which he took Spencer's ultra-individualism to the extreme. The contributions of Huxley and other scientists fit perfectly with the political-economic liberalism of the moment, refuting, from the principles of socio-biology, any alternative that might go through common and collaborative approaches. The issue was not minor, as it takes us back to the first debates and controversies of human existence and its relationship with nature. Huxley's text was a declaration of principles in favour of social Darwinism. According to Cappelletti (1989), the text annoyed Kropotkin so much that he decided to respond in the same medium by publishing a series of articles in which he could refute Huxley's ideas and those of some of his predecessors, perhaps in clear allusion to Spencer.

In this way, between 1890 and 1896, Kropotkin published a collection of articles in the British magazine *The Nineteenth Century* analyzing mutual aid among animals (Kropotkin, 1890a), among savages (Kropotkin, 1890b), among barbarians (Kropotkin, 1892), in the Middle Ages (Kropotkin, 1894), among modern humans (Kropotkin, 1896a), and among us, referring to his contemporaneity ((Kropotkin, 1896b). After a few years, in 1902, those texts formed the basis of what would be one of his main works: *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. The work soon gained great popularity; Kropotkin's observations on the behavior of different species of animals in northwest Asia, between Manchuria and Siberia in the 1870s, were fundamental. The text did not deny the existence of a struggle for control, dominance, and command of certain resources, especially food, but despite this, he also observed in the behavior of many animals an unwritten law that generated mutual aid between animals and individuals, and even between different species, such as in some migratory birds facing certain adversities. Cooperation, which was also observable among humans, strengthened an argument in an extremely tense and tumultuous political stage. Piotr Kropotkin did not discard Darwin's natural selection, but he fully opposed the Rousseauian version, Marxist materialism, and the emerging *social Darwinism*. His reflections on biological and human mutualism and altruism soon found an echo among some biologists.

It does not seem easy to think that Kropotkin's contribution is, in summary, also a plea that positions itself against theoretical individualism. In this sense, the conclusions he describes in the epilogue of *Mutual Aid* seem to follow this line (Kropotkin, 2016). According to his observations of the animal world, it finds in association the best tools for the struggle for life. The Russian anarchist believed that those animal species that had minimized individual interest or struggle had achieved greater development. Moreover, he understood that these species were more willing to change, progress, and ultimately, evolve. This idea was perfectly compatible with some of Darwin's evolutionary postulates; it simply placed the driving force on aid and cooperation. At the same time, it broke with a branch of science that had even gained some acceptance in many libertarian circles. It is worth noting that before Darwin, evolutionary proposals such as Herbert Spencer's were already documented. We could even think that the epistemological evolution of anarchism, according to Kropotkin, was itself a *cooperative evolution* in whose dialectical debate, the shift from individualistic tendencies had also occurred. Despite the existence, mainly among Proudhon's followers in the United States, of individualist anarchism, Kropotkin affirms that its discourse is not widely accepted

among the working masses (Kropotkin, 1910). To some extent, he homologates this discourse with what he calls "intellectual" anarchism, which, in the orbit of ultra-individualism, can cross the political and ideological line that leads towards the economic individualism advocated by classical liberalism. Indirectly, Kropotkin addresses the ideological evolution of the common political cause of anarchism, which leads it towards what was called *anarcho-communism*, and which will dialectically clash with the bets of the libertarian world that approach Stirner, Nietzsche, or the Spencer.

Kropotkin concluded in *Mutual Aid* that cooperative and altruistic sociability was a key factor in human evolution. Human networks and federations are, like in other animal species, the fundamental factor not only for group survival, but also as an essential element for human progress. The state, strengthened in the process of liberal revolutions that preceded this debate, breaks overnight many of the ties that individuals had created among themselves. Therefore, it is an extremely dangerous element, as it leaves individuals helpless before the new structures subjected to the power of the state and capital. According to this view, federal principles have already shown great achievements in the Greek *polis* or in some medieval cities. This gave more than enough reasons for Kropotkin and others to try to make sense of new societal models that moved away from impossible utopias in this period, when the paradigm of so-called liberal or parliamentary democracy was established, from biology, history, or sociology. *Mutual Aid*, for its author, is not exclusively a factor of evolution, but also a natural, innate act in many animals, as understood by the Russian scientist. It is present among human beings in such diverse places as Oceania and Finland, from prehistoric tribes to Jewish heterodoxies in 19th-century Eastern Europe. This concept will end up conditioning a good part of Kropotkin's thought and anarcho-communism.

Kropotkin was arrested for his political activities just as he was preparing to write his report on his explorations in Finland and on glaciers. During his captivity, the Academy of Sciences provided everything necessary for the scientist to continue his research in prison, providing him with the books and reports he needed. He had a lot of time and used it to read history books. The anarchist geographer recounts in his *Memoirs* (Kropotkin, 1899) that in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg, the continuous succession of political prisoners had allowed for the creation of a library filled with a wide range of content. Kropotkin's family, especially his brother who was deeply affected by the terrible news of Piotr's arrest, devoted themselves entirely to his needs. Piotr Kropotkin read history books with great passion and expanded his knowledge, among other things, about the history of Russia. He was amazed by some historical accounts and the past of some of the cities in the area. Of these cities, Pskov, which was located on the banks of the Velikaya River and became an autonomous republic between 1348 and 1510 before being "swallowed up," for lack of a better word, by the great and emerging Russian state, attracted much of his attention. This all-powerful state emerged from the union and conquest of the Duchy of Moscow, the Republic of Novgorod, and what was left of the Mongol Empire. The city, not particularly large, had become a symbol. Situated halfway between Moscow and the Baltic Sea, Pskov had experienced numerous military episodes in which control over it was disputed. The area was strategically important and, therefore, after belonging to the all-powerful Republic of Novgorod, it was taken by the Teutonic Knights.

This narrative, which was meant to end with his subsequent release, had become a symbol in Russian literature of the time, Pskov liberated by Alexander Nevsky, whose action was even depicted in the eponymous 1938 film directed by Sergei Eisenstein, and which had already been immortalized, including the mythologized Battle of the Frozen Lake Peipus, which would later be featured in numerous works. An epic battle on a frozen

field. In *Modern Science and Anarchy*, Kropotkin interrelates, among other works, what he considers to be the dual origin of anarchist social conception (Kropotkin, 1901). On the one hand, the criticism and struggle against authority and hierarchies, while on the other, the search for "progressive" precedents and experiences in historical past that serve to shape an anti-authoritarian horizon. According to this paradigm, since ancient times, the history of humanity has been full of examples in which the ills generated by the fact that some, whatever their status, possess authority over others are denounced and evidenced. In this sense, he understands that there are numerous experiences in prehistoric and ancient times in which tribes and clans self-organized against *autoritas*. Similarly, as human history progressed, he locates, around rural communities and guilds and associations of all kinds, examples of such disparity and resistance.

Kropotkin finds the Middle Ages to be a particularly interesting period, in which numerous free cities emerged, and numerous religious heresies and heterodoxies appeared in the Catholic geographic space, not only providing a dogmatic alternative within Christianity, but also providing an alternative to one of the most authoritarian powers of the time. In several of his texts, he refers to urban spaces as autonomous spaces, but he also refers to some precedents, which we will briefly describe here: the Christian-Armenian sects of the 9th century, the Hussite antecedents, and the early Anabaptists. In these precedents, the recovery of horizontal practices and direct attacks against any hierarchy can be observed. Kropotkin indicates in various works that the culprits of the destruction of what he calls mutual aid practices are the modern states, which annihilated the remains of autonomous institutions that existed previously, especially from the 15th century onwards. The all-powerful modern states that emerged from then on unleashed a dominator process that has been *in crescendo* to this day with little opposition. In this authoritarian itinerary, under Kropotkin's perspective, the state, the church, and later capitalism will end up forming a single earthly and mental power in some cases. The State, with a capital will self-regulate as the only power capable of imparting order, justice, and, why not say it, violence; the monopoly is theirs.

During the Middle Ages, many religious groups interpreted God as a kind of spiritual guide. Some of these groups openly rejected ecclesiastical authority and the institutional church. Their practices and beliefs were considered heresies or sects at many times. Several have given rise to well-known movements, which from the present day are practically invisible in history in general or in the history of religions. There were so many that they would warrant a specific study, so in this text, we can only offer a few glimpses of those that particularly catch our attention. In 1910, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published Kropotkin's entry on "Anarchism" (Kropotkin, 1910), in which he made a historical journey about the concept, referring to Zenon in Greece as the foundation of free communities, and to some references from the Middle Ages, such as the Bishop of Alba, Marco Girolamo Vida, in his first dialogue *De dignitate reipublicae*. But it is worth making a first stop on those he also cites in that text "Anarchism" as direct antecedents of the movement in Armenia in the 9th century: the Tondrakians, who were named after being native to the volcanic area of Tondrak in the Kingdom of Armenia (Kurkjian, 1959). For almost two centuries, between the 9th and 11th centuries, this sect had a high presence in the area. In summary, the Tondrakians, grouped in the demarcation that gave them their name, began to gain followers, and develop customs that the Armenian Gregorian Church did not accept.

The *practices* of the Zarehavantsi, considered their founder, and their followers rejected some of the basic tenets of Christianity, including rituals and sacraments. Soon, a large part of the peasants in the area shared these beliefs and were resistant to the feudal and fiscal principles imposed by the local landowners (Nersessian, 1988). Tondrakian

women played a significant role in these communities in love and marriage practices. They also preached principles of communal property and legal equality among their followers. The Tondrakians could be considered a movement not exclusively religious; in addition to carrying the values that other heresies in the area had previously held, they also showed great energy in their struggle against Byzantine domination, but equally, and this cost some of their members their lives, they strongly opposed the expansion of Islam in the area where they were present. The writings of the Armenian mystic Grigor Narekatsi are one of the few contemporary testimonies of the movement that have been preserved. The spoke of them and left us their main contributions. But this is not the only reference that the Russian geographer makes to historical heretics. He also considers the Hussites and the Anabaptists, direct predecessors and even libertarians *per se* for their communist and egalitarian tendencies.

In *Mutual Aid*, in which he makes multiple references to the Middle Ages (Kropotkin, 1908), Kropotkin considers in some way that the Greco-Latin world is overvalued, and that the Middle Ages, especially the medieval free city, represents a precious fabric whose constitution is the responsibility of the multiple threads of guilds and free associations of the time. In those cities, including the Pskov, they federated and united with each other with a pact of solidarity very similar to that made by individuals in the constitution of trade associations. In Pskov, there was a citizen assembly at that time, also called a "market assembly" because of the place where it was held, in which a multitude discussed public affairs energetically until they reached a decision accepted by all. In these institutions, different interests were represented, and they even became decentralized, forming assemblies in neighbourhoods far from the markets, decentralizing decisions and creating a federation of assemblies that would greatly attract Kropotkin's attention. Over time, as was already happening with the dominance of the Novgorod republic in the area, these institutions disappeared and were replaced by a much more hierarchical and autocratic noble or royal power. In fact, when the area lost autonomy and was dominated from Moscow (something that Kropotkin knows perfectly well), it became a peasant wasteland where the great Moscow landowners lived off the rents of the land.

In *Modern science and anarchy*, it is argued that the traditional or collective currents to which we have alluded manifest themselves in uprisings such as those in Lyon, Saint Étienne, and Narbonne in 1871. This trend can be traced back to what is called medieval European communalism, which was stifled during the development of modern monarchy and royal absolutism (Kropotkin, 1901). In his article on "mutual aid in medieval times," published in 1894, Kropotkin adds that in the sixteenth century, new barbarians emerged and halted all subsequent cultural development for at least two or three centuries. They enslaved the individual and destroyed all interhuman ties, proclaiming that only the state and the church have the monopoly on uniting disparate individuals. Who are these barbarians? They are the state, the triple alliance of the military leader, judge, and priest (Kropotkin, 1894), or in other words, the modern state. Despite adversity, Kropotkin also highlights some liberating spaces from the power of the modern state, an impulse towards freedom or mutual aid that he considers innate, manifested for example among preachers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In *The State and Its Historic Role* (Kropotkin, 1897), Kropotkin writes that during the sixteenth century, "modern barbarians came to destroy all the civilization of medieval cities. These barbarians did not completely annihilate them, but halted their progress for two or three centuries, launching it in a new direction, in which humanity is struggling at this moment without an escape route. He adds, "All ties between men were destroyed by declaring that only the state and the church should be, from then on, the bond of union between individuals; that only the church and state had the mission of looking after industrial, commercial, legal, artistic, and emotional

interests, for which the men of the twelfth century used to join directly". One of the personal positions on this element would be the Hussites, especially a character whom Kropotkin cites in his texts and of whom we had not had much information until now: Petr Chelčický.

The figure of Lev Tolstoy is fundamental in the rediscovery of the Czech thinker. In 1885, the German version of Tolstoy's book, which had just been censored in Russia, titled *What is my Faith?* was published. In this text, Tolstoy reflects on the use of violence by the Church and the State to achieve their goals. He believes that oppression is completely incompatible with the teachings of primitive Christianity and therefore contrary to any Christian of goodwill. Kropotkin, through Tolstoy, reached this Czech monk who developed part of his work and life during the Hussite Wars. Chelčický's work evidently sparked interest among Tolstoyans and Kropotkinians, particularly his criticism of the Taborites (one of the Hussite factions) for their use of violence and lust, which had diverted their discourse into a diabolical drift. Apparently, Tolstoy could not access the original writings of Chelčický, but he could approach his thinking through some of the Slavic literature books. In this way, he learned that Chelčický practically did not read Latin, had no university education, and yet was interested in reading Wycliffe and attending the disputes and preaching of the Hussites, especially those that were taking place in Prague. There, he encountered Jakubek and the heterodox of the area, seeking refuge and answers to his concerns. Chelčický criticized the obligations of debts and commerce, which gave certain power to some over others, thus generating a material dependency in favor of lenders over their debtors. Also, his rejection of these coercive practices, considered immoral, theoretically places him as one of the first pacifist positions, along with the previously mentioned Waldensians, from whom he also inherits an attitude of poverty that includes a rejection of property.

In his writings, it does not seem difficult to find identifying references to the worldly condition of the inhabitants of towns and cities. The *common people* to whom he directs part of his texts, and in which he interweaves a satire against the ruling nobility, against oppressive systems, and against all types of injustices (Wojciech, 1997; Fudge, 2000). Chelčický's vision seems unique and disconnected in its chronological context, anticipating some criticisms, and visualizing some of the programs that radicalized groups and sectors will develop in the coming centuries. Chelčický's break with the Hussites occurred in 1420 when, in different theological and moral disputes in the academic environments of Prague, a large part of the theologians sided with the most radical and justified not only their cause but also their methods. The Hussites were not a homogeneous movement; they had followers of Hus with significant spiritual and political discrepancies. The Taborites represented the socially most impoverished sector of the rural areas and the less favoured trades in the cities. Within their ranks, radicalism and the demand for profound changes are much more evident. At the beginning of the twenties, he would have written *On Spiritual Warfare* (Chelčický, 1421), "a plea against the Taborites and the violence they were practicing daily. The fundamental argument was simple: academics and religious leaders in Prague used violence and coercion in clear materialistic aspirations, moving further and further away from faith and belief. The use of force and aggression is completely unacceptable. In his proposal, he adds that the Taborites, with their use of violence, have been deceived by evil, incarnated once again by the figure of the Devil.

The perception of this radical Hussite is more than suggestive, their condemnation of violence is resolute and extends to the different factions involved in the Hussite wars (Denis, 1978). They even add that although some had initiated revolutionary reforms such as wealth distribution or the abolition of debts, their methods had a great dependence on



the use of terror and soon new burdens were established against the peasants to maintain their own system. These peasants, in many cases followers of the Taborites in whom they had trusted for certain feudal and fiscal liberation, ended up being prey to terrifying pressures from the most violent hosts of the Hussites to force them to contribute economically to the cause they considered common. Contrary to Kropotkin, or perhaps clarifying the chronology, they consider that already in the 14th century, cities had been freed from the yoke of feudal power, and a clear illusion of false freedom had been configured within them, partly fueled by the use that the new monarchies made of them. Cities, since the late Middle Ages, had acquired a high degree of autonomy, in many cases facilitated by the legal prerogatives of the monarchies with a clear intention: to weaken the power of warlords. Over time, once the ties of dependence and vassalage that were typical of other times had been reduced to a minimum, the inhabitants of the cities saw how a patrician class took control of them and kept for themselves, under different oligarchic formulas, the control of such a suggestive business. During the late Middle Ages and the early years of the so-called Renaissance in the Germanic regions, there were widespread uprisings of the peasantry against the landowning nobility, even generating a *libertarian outbreak* that caught the attention of two of the main theorists of anarchism: Bakunin (Bakunin, 1977) and Kropotkin (Kropotkin, 2023). The victory of the state over the communes of the Middle Ages and the federalist institutions of that time was not immediate. There was a period in which this result was in doubt. An immense popular movement, religious in its form and expressions, but eminently egalitarian and communist in its aspirations, emerged in the cities and fields of central Europe. Kropotkin refers to this idea and refers to the jacqueries of 1385 or the English uprising of 1381.

In *The State and Its Historical Role*, there is a strong emphasis on the argument that Roman law and the Church had broken with the spirit of the free commune, which had a clear federalist character, and had been abruptly and violently replaced by discipline, authority, and hierarchy (Kropotkin, 1993). The different brotherhoods that emerged in the medieval communes represent a complete denial of Roman centralizing power. This is almost identical to the concept of heresy and the centralizing power of the Church. Together, the state and the Church fought against the political autonomy of the city and even the spiritual autonomy of heresy. However, in the late Middle Ages, the city, in some cases, no longer represented the power of the merchant and commercial bourgeoisie. Therefore, the focus is placed on what happens at a small scale, in neighborhoods and streets, where popular assemblies are also held to make decisions and discuss issues. In many cases, the representation of the city comes from the neighborhoods that compose it, as if it were a living organism where all together contribute and influence the final decisions. The struggles of the late Middle Ages were a fight for the freedom of individuals, their cities, their agreements, and their unions with each other, and with others. The modern states deployed all their strength to end this initiative. The state, the priest, the king, or the judge were all aligned in this same direction.

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