

Crispin Sartwell (ed.), *The Practical Anarchist: Writings of Josiah Warren*

New York: Fordham University Press, 2011, 240pp. ISBN 978-0-8232-3370-0

There exists a serious – and, in my view, embarrassing – dearth of work on the native American anarchist tradition within the contemporary anarchist studies milieu, much of it fuelled, I suspect, by the worst kinds of lazy generalizations and uncritical Eurocentric prejudices. For example, I have often heard comrades speak of Warren, Spooner, Andrews, and Tucker as though they were a single, monocephalic being known as the ‘American individualist,’ a being that was mostly irrelevant to the international anarchist movement of its day and has since been co-opted by right-wing libertarian ideologues to justify capitalism. So, too, have I witnessed them adamantly refusing to entertain the possibility that the Transcendentalists or the Abolitionists were anarchists of a fashion, even though Hippolyte Havel himself claimed John Brown as one in the November 1928 issue of *The Road to Freedom*. It is into this morass of dogmatism that Crispin Sartwell dares to plunge with his groundbreaking new book, *The Practical Anarchist: Writings of Josiah Warren*.

Those who are familiar with Sartwell’s work know that he has long been a voice crying in the wilderness on behalf of the forgotten tradition of Yankee anarchism. (At the first North American Anarchist Studies Network conference in 2009, Professor Sartwell suggested that William Lloyd Garrison had anarchistic leanings and was practically lynched.) With *The Practical Anarchist*, Sartwell provides the scholarly world in general and the anarchist studies milieu in particular with much-needed proof that none of us really know what we are talking about. The writings of Josiah Warren, many of which the book makes available for the first time, conclusively demonstrate that an anti-statist and anti-capitalist – that is, *anarchistic* – form of thought existed in the United States as early as the 1830s.

In his Introduction, Sartwell helpfully summarizes Warren’s ideas along four basic themes. First, Warren was committed to ‘Individualism, as an ontology and as a science; that is, as a statement of what there is and of the principle of finding out what there is, by ever-finer appreciation of the specificities of every event, thing, or person’ (pp.5-6). As Sartwell points out, although Warren’s ontological and methodological individualism makes him one of the most extreme of the American anarchists, it simultaneously places him within a long and august tradition that includes Heraclitus, the Cynics, the medieval nominalists, Thomas Reid and other Scottish common sense philosophers of the eighteenth century, Emerson, Nietzsche and Heidegger (p.8). Closely related to, but distinct from, Warren’s ontological and methodological individualism is his belief in ‘the sovereignty of the individual; that is, each person is to have absolute control over his own body and actions, at his own cost and responsibility’ (p.12). As Sartwell notes, this conviction is a secularized outgrowth of the Protestant




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belief in the absolute sovereignty of God, which in turn necessitates the absolute freedom of the individual.

Although Warren was an extreme individualist, he was nonetheless opposed to capitalism, holding among other things that ‘the profit motive devours people and the economy [and] ... is an indulgence in greed, not a natural condition of human beings’ (p.15). Instead, Warren believed in ‘Cost as the limit of price; that is, the price of something should be fixed by the cost of producing it, measured by the labor or pain expended in producing it, rather than by what a given person is prepared to pay for it’ (p.14). Consequently, he advocated ‘the labor note as circulating medium; that is, the only rational medium of exchange is a representation of a certain definite quantity of labor of a certain type, which is equivalent to a certain quantity of a commodity’ (p.17). In other words, Warren essentially supported a sort of mutualism that will be familiar to readers of Proudhon. It is worth noting, however, that Proudhon did not publish *What is Property?* until 1840, whereas Warren had established the first ‘Time Store’ based on mutualist principles in 1827 in Cincinnati. The point of the Time Store was to compensate each individual with the equivalent of her actual production. ‘This is Warren’s “socialism”’, Sartwell writes, ‘his way of addressing the emerging polarization of class along the lines of ownership in labor, which many American radicals of the era regarded as a mode of ownership in persons or a development of slavery (i.e., ‘wage-slavery’)’ (pp.18-19).

Much more could be said about Warren’s fascinating political and economical ideas, but I strongly encourage readers of *Anarchist Studies* to investigate them on their own. In the meantime, I reiterate my praise for Crispin Sartwell for filling a conspicuous gap in anarchist studies scholarship and providing this extremely important collection of writings by an intrepid (if underappreciated) early anarchist thinker.

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### **Theresa Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada: Art and Criticism, 1914-1924***

Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, 280pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6626-4.

Paris Dada has long been considered not so much in its own terms, but as an appendage to either the Zürich Dada which presaged it or the Parisian Surrealism it developed into, and as lacking as political art in respect to both. Papanikolas’ book is novel not only in focusing on Paris Dada as a central moment in its own right, but in identifying anar-

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