‘NOW WE HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM THE LAW’

Thoughts Towards a Genealogy of Anarchism

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What would a genealogy of anarchism reveal? No doubt many diverse and discontinuous themes. Here I foreground just one of these themes, but one that, however distant it might seem, remains a *sine qua non* of the radical's cause. I suggest that although anarchism, as a modern political philosophy, stands opposed specifically to the modern state and its laws, it is able to mount this critique thanks to an ancient tradition of Gnostic-apocalyptic thought that looked to the passing of this world and the coming of a new one.

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Having first set up this difference between everlasting cosmos and the imminent apocalypse as significantly divergent orientations in thought, I then move on to unpack the core terms of Gnostic and apocalyptic thought, as well as to demonstrate their close relation. For this, I mine the work of

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¹ 1 Corinthians 7: 31.

² Cohn (1970) already establishes a connection between ancient apocalypticism and medieval religious-political militancy by way of the underworld of popular religion – for example, Thomas Müntzer, leader of the German peasants' revolt of 1525, is shown to have operated almost exclusively with categories drawn from the eschatological tradition: pp 234–51. In addition to focusing on the modern, rather than medieval, significance of apocalypticism, my own interest is less historical-sociological than Cohn's and more genealogical-ideational.

Jacob Taubes, a thinker who has done much to influence the recent explosion of interest in political theology in continental thought and to demonstrate the power of Carl Schmitt's thesis that all concepts of the modern state are secularised theological concepts.³ Following this, I turn to the apostle Paul as the key figure in the transmission of this Gnostic-apocalyptic tendency and, in particular, as the one who first calls explicitly for a break with law. I do not mean that Paul calls for a breaking *of* law. As is well known, Jewish law in Paul remains necessary and intact. Law is, rather, somehow deactivated or rendered inoperative.⁴

Reading Paul as the nullifier of natural law in this way brings us to Alain Badiou's territory, for it is Badiou who has demonstrated that Paul is the first systematic thinker of the event, of that which breaks with the law-bound order of things and thus makes possible a completely new relation, which is really a *non*-relation, to law – a form of life somehow beyond the state.⁵ Positing Pauline thought as ancestral to anarchism is no doubt unusual. Paul is usually cast as the great institution builder and (new) lawgiver of the early church. But for Badiou, Paul is the founder of universalism because Paul first sees clearly that the idea of the universal finds no distinctions in those it addresses. If this is correct, then attempts to think beyond the law right up to and including anarchism are in Paul's debt too. Law is particular. As that which is due, law is a matter of knowing your place. Law is concerned with justice and justice differentiates.⁶ Thus the universal, in finding no distinctions, is *alegal*. More than this, with regard to the existing order of things, it is *illegal*. This order is the state of things, and Badiou intends the double meaning here, referring both to the state as political institution and as the status quo. Law and state are co-implicated so that thinking beyond the law means also to think outside the state, and vice versa. For Badiou, then, Paul is the first to break with legalistic thinking – not only with Jewish law but also with Greek natural law, with the idea of the cosmos as a totality within which everything is defined by its (fixed) place in the whole. That Paul is able to conceive of his law-governed world in terms other than law is, in Badiou's judgement, both stunningly original and completely necessary to contemporary attempts – to which

³ Schmitt (2005), p 36.

⁴ Nor do I mean that Paul's thought is reducible to Gnosticism or apocalypticism. Paul differs from this tradition in that his eschatology focuses on living *in* the end-times, not on the end as such. Also, for Paul, those who are 'in Christ' already inhabit redeemed time ('now that we have been delivered from the law'; 'for the form of this world *is* [already] passing away'). Nonetheless, Paul agrees with the Gnostic judgement of 'this world' as fundamentally demonic. Thanks to Suvi Alt for pointing out that this needed to be made clear from the start.

⁵ Badiou (2003). There has been an upsurge of interest in Paul in continental philosophy in recent years. For alternative readings to Badiou's, see Lyotard and Gruber (1999) and Agamben (2005). Agamben's reading is an explicit rejection of Badiou's; for a defence of Badiou against Agamben, see Žižek (2003), pp 107–12. For wider reflections on 'Paul's New Moment', see Milbank et al (2010) and Caputo and Alcock (2009).

⁶ As Foucault (1988), p 64 reminds us, the Greek 'word νομος (the law) is connected with the word ποιμαίνω (shepherd): the shepherd shares out, the law apportions'.

anarchism would be central – to envision law in the service of life against life lived under the law.

In order to clarify the stakes of Badiou's thesis, which valorises the Pauline break with natural law, I then contrast it with a counter-reading that rather emphasises the cost of the Gnostic tendency found in Paul. This is Eric Voegelin's dark thought that Western modernity, as well as being driven by it, has also been fatally undermined by the forgetting of natural law to which attempts to make Gnostic categories immanent in history have led.⁷ Voegelin has little or nothing to say about the pre-Christian sources of Gnosticism or about Paul, except to say that traces of the Gnostic 'heresy', which for Voegelin is not so much theological as ontological, are to be found in the apostle.⁸ Yet Voegelin is significant for this investigation in that he posits the pagan cycle of birth and death as a 'fundamental principle of existence', and thus views the Gnostic idea of an eschaton that will finally break with eternal recurrence as something like existence's 'counterprinciple'.⁹ Hence his implacable opposition to immanentised forms of Gnosticism, which, as precisely 'dream worlds', are incapable of rational action, of politics properly (that is, classically) understood.¹⁰

Finally, I explore linkages with Gnostic-apocalyptic thought, and with Paul, of modern anarchism. I emphasise that the idea of a radical break with the order of things remains a possibility for thought due to this tradition and its systemisation in Paul. Calling the apocalyptic revolution 'a revolution of the imagination', John Collins argues that it entailed a challenge to the world that both engendered dissatisfaction with existing order and generated visions of what might be.¹¹ Suggesting that the world as it now stands is not the end, apocalypticism would indeed seem fundamental to getting beyond the 'cosmological conviction' that posits the eternal return of the order of things.¹²

⁷ Voegelin (1952).

⁸ Voegelin (1952), p 126.

⁹ Voegelin (1952), p 167.

¹⁰ Although the discussion here is not intended to be normative in the way that Voegelin's clearly is, it is worth coming clean that its orientation is opposite to Voegelin's. Rather than foregrounding what was lost in the course of the Gnostic 'heresy', which seems nostalgic at best, I would rather understand what new horizons were opened up by it.

¹¹ Collins (1998), p 283.

¹² Despite their differences, I link both the principles of natural law and eternal return to 'cosmos' in order to contrast it with the Gnostic-apocalyptic view (itself not self-identical, as shall be shown). Speaking very broadly, eternal recurrence is the idea of the return of all things, whereby change or becoming is caught up in an over-arching cycle of the same. This very ancient view is modified somewhat in Hellenistic cosmology, where the chaos-within-order characteristic of eternal return gives way to a more benign cosmos governed by law. 'Natural law' is thus the dominant form of cosmological thinking in the Greco-Roman world and, by extension, in Western thought. But it is related to eternal recurrence by sharing this deeper orientation towards a purely immanent cosmos that the Gnostic-apocalyptic event breaks with (given the latter's concern with the transcendence of 'this' world in 'another' world).

Lastly, by way of introduction, a note on method: Throughout my discussion, I pursue a genealogical approach in the sense that no attempt is made to show that the Gnostic-apocalyptic alternative to natural law is either necessary or normative, only that it exists and that this existence, though accidental, opens up the field of possibility occupied by anarchist thought and practice to this day.

Eternal Recurrence or Coming Apocalypse?

The centrality of an all-encompassing and enduring cosmic order to pagan religion and myth generally was the subject of the book that first brought Mircea Eliade to attention: *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.¹³ Eliade argued that:

The chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional societies and the man of the modern societies with their strong imprint of Judaeo-Christianity lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists he is connected only with History.¹⁴

What is this 'Judeo-Christian' ancestry of Eliade's 'Historical' modern 'man'? Eliade's 'cosmological conviction' was central also to Mesopotamian myth but, as shall be shown, was modified especially in Judaism by monotheism, and in particular by the sharp distinction drawn between Yahweh and the created universe that reached its peak in Jewish apocalypticism.¹⁵ This standard account of the Jewish sources of apocalypticism does not preclude earlier emergences. Indeed, Norman Cohn has argued that it is 'incontestable' that the main source of Christian apocalypticism, and of its Jewish forebears, was Zoroastrianism.¹⁶ While not disputing Eliade's view that, until this point, all ancient peoples 'agreed that in the beginning the world had been organised, set in order, by a god or by several gods, and that in essentials it was immutable',¹⁷ Cohn sees a 'major turning-point in the history of human consciousness' occurring, when:

¹³ Eliade (1971).

¹⁴ Eliade (1971), pp xiii–xiv.

¹⁵ Collins, (1977), p 129; see also Loew (1967).

¹⁶ Cohn (1995), p 230. While Collins doesn't dispute the influence of Persian – that is, Zoroastrian – symbolism on Jewish apocalypticism (especially the periodisation of history), he does not feel that the Jewish genre can be regarded as simply borrowing because of the ways in which it is adapted to the requirements of Jewish monotheism: Collins (1998), pp 29–33.

¹⁷ Cohn (1995), p 232. More specifically, the myth that, in one form or another, 'flourished over vast areas of the ancient world' said that though 'cosmos has always been threatened by chaos and always will be, yet [it] has always survived and always will': Cohn (1995), p 65.

Some time between 1500 and 1200 BC Zoroaster broke out of that static yet anxious world view. He did so by reinterpreting, radically, the Iranian version of the combat myth [which, as in other Indo-European mythologies, symbolised the eternal conflict between universal order and chaos]. In Zoroaster's view, the world was not static, nor would it always be troubled. Even now, the world was moving, through incessant conflict, towards a conflictless state. The time would come when, in a prodigious final battle, the supreme god and his supernatural allies would defeat the forces of chaos and their human allies and eliminate them once and for all. From then on the divinely appointed order would obtain absolutely ...

Unheard of before Zoroaster, that expectation deeply influenced certain Jewish groups – as witness some of the apocalypses ... Above all it influenced the Jesus sect, with incalculable consequences.¹⁸

Since genealogy is concerned not with origins that reveal the truth of the past, but with the series of chance mutations that help understand the present, the question 'When did apocalypso-Gnosticism first emerge?' is not – and indeed could not be – my question. It is nonetheless interesting to see that Nietzsche, that great genealogist, agrees on Zarathustra's singular importance and the challenge that his Manichaean view of the cosmos laid down to the previously all-encompassing truth of eternal recurrence (which is why he, Zarathustra, must be made to be the one to reaffirm it in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*).¹⁹

Concentrating not on its homogenous origin but on its heterogeneous genealogy, the first thing to note is that, despite the significance of the apocalyptic inheritance of the West, 'cosmological' approaches are, of course, intermixed to a considerable extent. Thus Eliade pointed to the persistence of eternal recurrence in 'popular' Christian religion in Europe right up to the twentieth century. And Collins has also noted, in a much earlier context, the gradual Hellenisation of Jewish apocalypticism as evidenced, for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon.²⁰ This led to a greater emphasis on the cosmos in the Jewish apocalypticism of the Hellenistic age and to a corresponding decline of the terms of Old Testament prophecy (where prophecy had emphasised obedience to God rather than accommodation to the order of the cosmos and divine *interruption* of that order rather than wise interpretation of it). Yet, although the cosmological and apocalyptic approaches have not been pure or distinct from each other historically, separating them out is important

¹⁸ Cohn (1995), pp 232–33.

¹⁹ Nietzsche (2005); Nietzsche (1989), pp 327–28. And not only must a cosmos seen in terms of good and evil be overcome, but so also one viewed as drawing to a close with the triumph of the former over the latter. For Nietzsche, the (eternal) truth of recurrence must be proclaimed over this first attempt to expunge the chaos of becoming.

²⁰ Collins (1977).

heuristically.²¹ As Collins argues concerning the endless debates on its ‘origins’, above and beyond apocalypticism’s complex borrowing from other sources, it is ‘a phenomenon in its own right’.²²

We now return to those specifically Greco-Roman cosmologies that dominated antiquity – and that, in Taubes’ opinion, lacked the conceptual resources to articulate a radical break with the order of things, limited as they were by the givenness of social and political order that an orientation towards cosmos suggests. In support of Taubes’ thesis, it is notable that even Cynicism, that most revolutionary of Greco-Roman forms of life, remained very much within the confines of natural law precisely because it sought to be true to the injunction to live according to nature. As Michel Foucault shows, in their battle against the world, the Cynics claimed that ‘there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life’.²³ Yet this radical rejection of custom represented by the Cynic life did not break with nature, being rather an intensification of ‘natural’ life. Although the Cynic was non-conformist, his non-conformity was underpinned by a deeper principle of conformity to nature: ‘No convention, no human prescription may be accepted in the Cynic life if it does not conform exactly to what is found in nature, and in nature alone.’²⁴ And of course this living according to nature, if in less radicalised form, was a very widespread tenet of the Hellenised world. It was central, for example, to the Stoic conception of the wise man who thereby places himself in harmony with the cosmos.

Given the strength of the Greco-Roman world’s adherence to the cosmological principle, the break with this principle – which he believed was a Jewish revolt – was, for Nietzsche, history’s key conflict to date. Nietzsche thought that nothing had yet matched in importance the moment in 63 BCE when worldly Pompey, conquering Jerusalem, encountered an enemy easily defeated in battle but in possession of an other-worldly God that would ultimately prove victorious even over mighty Rome:

²¹ Another example of the overlapping of these approaches is the ‘Hellenistic-Gnostic’ dualism of body and soul, with the latter being valorised in, for example, both Platonism and Paul: Boyarin (1994), p 61.

²² Collins (1975), pp 33–34. See also Collins (1998), pp 20–21. Of course, by setting up something like a binary opposition between apocalypse and cosmos, I risk making my discussion an easy target for deconstruction, which would easily demonstrate that, far from being essentially different, each pole implies the other. Yet, by adopting a genealogical perspective, it is not at all clear that this is the case. Cosmological visions did not require apocalypticism, persisting for many centuries quite untroubled by thoughts of the world’s end. When it did arrive, as shall be shown, apocalypticism likely did so for no other reason than the experience of exile – in other words, due to pure accident or contingency in history. Apocalypse and cosmos, then, are not so much conceptual opposites as divergent subjective possibilities. That one or the other subjective path has been taken is of the utmost importance for who ‘we’ moderns are, as Nietzsche in particular reveals.

²³ Foucault (2011), p 340.

²⁴ Foucault (2011), p. 263.

'Rome Against Judea, Judea Against Rome.' To this point there has been no greater event than this war, this posing of a question, the contradiction between these deadly enemies. Rome felt that the Jews were something contrary to nature itself, something like its monstrous polar opposite ...

Which of them has proved victorious for the time being? Rome or Judea? Surely there's not the slightest doubt. Just think of who it is people bow down to today in Rome ...²⁵

For Taubes, too, as I detail below, the critical resources necessary to thinking beyond the boundaries of natural law that are lacking in Greek philosophy are drawn instead from Jewish, though also Persian,²⁶ eschatology, from the apocalyptic-Gnostic idea of an entirely other-worldly God that promises a break with the order of the cosmos and the coming of new things. In the vision in the Book of Daniel (c 165 BCE), for example, Daniel sees the Ancient of Days take away the dominion of the ruler of this world, 'To consume and destroy it forever'. Rule over the earth is then given to the Messiah that comes from without this world, the Son of Man:

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven! ...
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.²⁷

Although ancient Gnostic texts are lighter on the imagery of judgement than Jewish apocalyptic writings, they too condemn this world as a place of alienation (literally, an alien place) for the enlightened, looking instead to the coming of the *deus alienus* (the alien God) from afar.²⁸ And, as in Jewish prophecy, this new God will then found a new earth:

²⁵ Nietzsche (1994), First Essay, Fragment 16.

²⁶ Persian forms of Gnosticism are usually placed under the heading of Manichaeism.

²⁷ Book of Daniel 7: 13–14. The periodisation of history into four kingdoms followed by a divinely appointed end of history is found throughout the Near Eastern region in the Hellenistic age. It has been persuasively argued that this schema is of Persian origin: see Collins (1975), p 29. Collins (p 30) argues that Daniel is also an adaptation of a Babylonian oracle. Interestingly for our purposes, it seems that this 'four kingdoms' narrative was, from the beginning, used to serve the political purpose of each 'nation' that adopted its symbolism of a final end to tyranny and the dawn of a new age. In the case of Daniel, Collins (p 31) argues that the aim was to inspire Jewish resistance to the Hellenistic king.

²⁸ This contrast between apocalypticism and Gnosticism is reflected also in the apocalyptic tendency to see the flesh and spirit 'as cosmic forces locked in combat in the last days' and the Gnostic imagery, which rather sees the flesh as taken possession of by the divine in the experience of gnosis and duly transformed: Boyarin (1994), p 66.

He ... descended to the earth, [where] the hand of Evil, of the Lord of the House, lay heavy upon them. And when wickedness oppressed them, they beheld his radiance, and some of the celestial fruits appeared to them, the strength and name of the Ineffable One Who is all light was revealed to them ... And when they beheld him, the lords of the worlds were confounded ...²⁹

By late antiquity, however, the 'cosmological conviction' was very much in the ascendancy. As has been shown, even Jewish apocalypticism had been Hellenised during this period, moving from prophetic rupture of towards attunement to the cosmos. For Taubes, there is no doubt that it is Paul who breaks this hegemony of generalised natural law thinking.³⁰ Taubes argues that the letter to the Romans is effectively a declaration of war on the Caesar because the *nomos* (law) zeitgeist that Paul attacks in this epistle was the secret of Imperial hegemony itself.³¹ Taubes thus offers a profoundly *politico*-theological explanation for why Paul is so focused on overcoming the law in his epistle to the Romans. I will cite Taubes at length on this topic because, in his series of lectures on Paul from which the following quote is taken, he knows he only has a short time to live. The force of his position on Paul, based on a lifetime's reflection, therefore comes through very strongly:

I want now to present this thesis, that the concept of law ... is a compromise formula for the Imperium Romanum ... [T]here was an aura, a general Hellenistic aura, an apotheosis of *nomos*. One could sing it to a Gentile tune, this apotheosis – I mean, to a Greek-Hellenistic tune – one could sing it in Roman, and one could sing it in a Jewish way ... [T]his sort of thing brings law and order to the Roman Empire ... and in [it] everybody participated equally ...

[W]hat [does] Paul mean when he says 'law' [?] Does he mean the Torah, does he mean the law of the universe, does he mean natural law? It's all of these in one. Everything is bound up with everything else. But that's not Paul's mistake, it's due to the aura. Because Paul looks as though he shares in the same universality. That's what it says in Bultmann. Nothing of the sort! He [Paul] clammers out of the consensus between Greek-Jewish-Hellenistic mission theology, a consensus that, it seems to me, was very, very widespread. Paul is a zealot, a Jewish zealot, and for him this step is a tremendous one ... It isn't *nomos* but rather the one who was nailed to the cross by *nomos* who is the emperor! This is incredible, and compared to this all the little revolutionaries are *nothing*. This transvaluation turns Jewish-Roman-Hellenistic upper-class theology on its head, the whole

²⁹ *Ginza Rba* (2011) (the canonical prayer book of the Mandaean), Chapter 48.

³⁰ Taubes (2004).

³¹ Blumenfeld (2001), p 283 is diametrically opposed to Taubes on this point: Paul 'is the ideological guardian of the processes and structures of imperial power. Paul's political objective was to make the empire endure, to ward off its decay by steeling it with a Christian ribband'.

mishmash of Hellenism ... [T]ransvaluation of all the values of this world. This is nothing like *nomos* as *sumum bonum*. This is why this carries a political charge; it's explosive to a high degree.³²

So Paul's critique of law is no mere dialogue with a certain pharisaical tendency in the Judaism of his day; it is, rather, a critique of his entire 'Mediterranean environment'.³³ And it is precisely because this project is so far ranging, so *transvaluing*, of received values that Taubes claimed both that Nietzsche discovered in Paul the model for his own Overman and that Nietzsche had been his (Taubes') best teacher with regard to Paul.³⁴

The Eschatological Imagination

In his earlier *Occidental Eschatology*, Taubes' three key terms are apocalypticism, Gnosticism and eschatology.³⁵ In Taubes' use of these terms, apocalypticism refers to mythological accounts of an end of the world, while Gnosticism – which he calls apocalypticism's 'kindred spirit' – operates in a more philosophical vein to take up the theme of estrangement from the world that apocalypticism introduces in theoretical, ontological speculations.³⁶ In other words, both apocalypticism and Gnosticism are formed in likeness by their shared orientation towards eschatology, the third key term, which is the concern with end times or last things. The God of apocalypticism and the God of Gnosticism inaugurates eschatology because he challenges this world and, in the process, the world begins to draw to an end.³⁷

Taubes summarises the Gnostic-apocalyptic vision as follows. If law and fate rule the cosmos, and the cosmos, as represented since classical antiquity, is a harmonious totality (by this point, the earlier form of the 'cosmological conviction' – which, as Cohn has shown, saw the cosmos perpetually threatened by chaos – has given way to Hellenistic cosmic accord),³⁸ then apocalypticism opposes the entire cosmos for its autonomy from the divine.³⁹ The world stands in very opposition to God and, by extension, God is wholly other to the world. After all, if opposition to the world is to be founded, then a God who himself is estranged from the world

³² Taubes (2004), pp 23–24.

³³ Taubes (2004), p 27. For an opposite view, see Boyarin (1994), p 106. For Boyarin, Paul's 'primary motivation', far from being to break with the tenets of generalised Hellenism, is rather 'a passionate desire that humanity be One under the sign of the One God – a universalism, I have claimed, born of the union of Hebraic monotheism and Greek desire for unity and univocity'.

³⁴ Taubes, 2004, pp 26, 79.

³⁵ Taubes (2009).

³⁶ Taubes (2009), p 36.

³⁷ Taubes (2009), p 40. 'The vision of a new heaven and a new earth is one of the most powerful apocalyptic evocations of salvation.' Collins (1977), p 140.

³⁸ Cohn (1995).

³⁹ Taubes (2009), pp 9–10.

is required.⁴⁰ When this unknown God appears in the world, he is thus a stranger in and to it.⁴¹ But this does not make him powerless. For he places the very being of the world in question; contesting both its validity and finality, he annihilates the world.⁴² The alien God who is wholly other to and unrecognisable in the world is effectively the non-existent God, but this means not-yet-existing, and as such offers the promise of new things.⁴³ This is a God that both crushes the world and, in so doing, reveals himself as the 'new God', as Marcion called him.

As attested by its etymology, apocalypse is therefore not only destruction but also *unveiling*. Alongside its form-destroying principle (Paul: 'the form of this world is passing away'), it also contains a principle of *formation*.⁴⁴ Although these principles are in tension with one another, this tension is constitutive: both poles must be present, even if one remains only latent in a particular moment. For if the annihilating principle is absent, the frozen form of things cannot be surpassed. But if there is no redemptive reformation, the annihilating principle leads to nihilism, to the abyss of pure violence.⁴⁵ But the positive principle is not only necessary, it is even implied by its negative twin. In being not of this world, the new God is not only arrayed against it but provides a perspective on it. What was purely and simply World, containing all within itself in the form of a totality, now has the possibility, from this new perspective outside it, of becoming *this* world, of being limited in some way.⁴⁶ And this delimited world opens up the space, makes possible in thought, *another* world. The negation of the world allows its positive replacement by a new one; the opening up of the necessity of the cosmos allows the idea of human freedom.⁴⁷ For the schism between God and world runs through the individual himself in the sense that, while his body is earthly, his spirit (*pneuma*) is that divine spark that links him to the otherworldly divinity.⁴⁸ Man is not entirely of this world; his spirit looks to return to God in a process of redemption that breaks with the natural order.

⁴⁰ Taubes (2009), pp 17, 39.

⁴¹ While cosmological thought is immanent, 'channelled through the natural human processes of thought, apocalyptic revelation is ecstatic, conferred from outside ... [T]he wisdom and righteousness which bring immortality are not prevalent on earth.' Collins (1977), p 139.

⁴² Taubes (2009), p 10.

⁴³ Taubes (2009), pp 10, 39.

⁴⁴ Taubes (2009), p 10.

⁴⁵ Taubes (2009), p 10.

⁴⁶ Taubes (2009), p 28.

⁴⁷ Or, to modify Taubes' claim at this point, if not freedom, then at least the idea of human agency. For while the cosmos admits of no lasting change and so all is determined, apocalypse – at least in Jewish prophecy – allows that by hearing and obeying God's commands, in other words by willing and acting, human beings can be participants in world-historical change (if not its architects). In sum, apocalypse is arguably a less passive form of determinism than eternal return: Collins (1975), p 33.

⁴⁸ Taubes (2009), p 38.

As already indicated, the Gnostic-apocalyptic vision emerges against the backdrop of a very different cosmology that dominated classical antiquity. This view of the cosmos emphasised the eternal cycle of birth and death, and worshipped the gods of nature accordingly.⁴⁹ Dionysius in particular epitomises the destructive-creative impulse represented cyclically or 'naturally' rather than teleologically or supernaturally. The coming apocalypse first introduces the idea of History, of the cycle of birth and death as itself caught up in an over-arching directionality. History is inaugurated by that which breaks with necessity and nature, with the eternal return. Time now appears not as that which is directed back towards its origin but as aiming at that 'which has not yet been but will be'.⁵⁰ And while the cycle of nature, eternal recurrence, means that all being is only becoming, a coming into and exiting of being, the world as History moves towards a new order that, once gained, will not be lost. Now there is Creation→History→Redemption.⁵¹

This brings us back to the theme of a God who is entirely other to the world, a God who is thereby arrayed against the world and who promises a new one. While God and world are undifferentiated in naturalistic pagan thought, in apocalypticism they are made distinct through their separation.⁵² Reunion of God and world is then the telos that this separation opens on to. Reunion, however, will be a coming together of God and world, this time in freedom rather than in (pagan) necessity.⁵³ For nature and necessity are now valued negatively; the unity and totality of the ancient cosmos are now a 'wall against which we collide in desperation',⁵⁴ even in open rebellion, as in the flowing passage from the Gnostic *Ginza*:

The Soul, the soul speaks:
Who cast me into the Tibil, the earth,
who chained me in the wall?
Who cast me into the stocks,
which matches the fullness of the world?
Who threw a chain round me,
that is without measure?⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Taubes (2009), p 11.

⁵⁰ Taubes (2009), p 12.

⁵¹ For more on this linear conception of time and history in contrast to eternal return, see Eliade (1971), pp 141–47. See also Puech (1969) and Voegelin (1952), pp 118–19. Also in Zoroastrianism, time moves forwards. Standing apart from timeless eternity, the cosmic struggle between the good and evil gods (Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu) occurs within the 'limited time' that has as its conclusion the destruction of Angra Mainyu and the final, eternal banishment of the forces of chaos from the cosmos: Cohn (1995), pp 82–83.

⁵² An anonymous reviewer argued against Taubes on this point: gods and goddesses were often understood in antiquity to lead a separate life from, and to be on the world indifferent to, the world of men and women. From this perspective, apocalypse marks a dramatic *entry* of god(s) into the historical world rather than their disappearance from it.

⁵³ Taubes (2009), p 15.

⁵⁴ Taubes (2009), p 38.

⁵⁵ *Ginza Rba* (2011), Fragment 6.

Where and when does this ideational structure of apocalypso-Gnosticism emerge? Taubes is clear that it is the experience of exile in Mesopotamia of the Aramaic-speaking peoples, perhaps the first of its kind, which is its material base. Not only Israel experiences exile. Indeed, the symbols of apocalypticism, such as the image of the son of man or the redeemed redeemer, are primarily Persian. But as Persia becomes the power in the region, as its own experience of exile fades, the force of its negation of a world that it now prospers in weakens.⁵⁶ The Jews, meanwhile, nurture the apocalyptic vision as their marginalisation persists.⁵⁷ Collins places the main site of emergence of apocalypticism later, in the Hellenistic period, where he claims that the common experience of the demise of national monarchies across the Near East led to widespread disruption of traditional social orders and their codes of meaning. The subsequent sense of alienation was reflected in the upsurge in this period of messianism and the revival of ancient myths. 'Underlying all of these phenomena is a new world view in which the present is valued less than the remote past or the idealized future.'⁵⁸ In other words, messianism, then as now, was epiphenomenal on political weakness, and whether this was primarily the experience of exile or of suzerainty is perhaps not significant.

Yet Taubes makes a strong case for exile. As divinities of nature, pagan gods are also gods of place. Exile, for Israel especially, breaks this link. Along with his people, in exile God himself is 'torn from the earth' and becomes instead the invisible God.⁵⁹ Unable now to nurture roots in the earth, the Jews had to 'anchor themselves spiritually'.⁶⁰ This movement from worldly to otherworldly divinity gives Israel 'the religious resources for the passion of revolution'.⁶¹ No longer invested in this world, positively the Jews could look to the coming of a new one. Negatively, in believing that this world draws to an end, apocalypticism devalues worldly ways. The darkness

⁵⁶ Zoroastrianism seems to have gone through a process akin to Christianity in this regard. Once it became the state religion of the Persian Empire around 500 BCE, Zoroastrian eschatology was modified to suit. Thus 'the making wonderful' of Ahura Mazda's final victory over the evil Angra Mainyu, which Zoroaster appears to have seen as imminent, was now postponed to the remote future. This revision was carried out by the scholar-priests of the Zurvanite heresy, which became the version of Zoroastrianism adopted by the later Achaemenian monarchs and also by the Sasanians: Cohn (1995), pp 98–102.

⁵⁷ Taubes (2009), pp 23–24.

⁵⁸ Collins (1975), p 220. Peter Sloterdijk (2010), pp 91–94 concurs that it was the Hellenic tyrannies that prompted the development of Jewish apocalypticism, as they highlighted the deficiencies of the previous prophecy-based 'processing of unhappiness'. The idea of the imminent end of the world is thus a response to the absence of even the slightest sign of improvement in the Jews' political situation under the Seleucids.

⁵⁹ Taubes (2009), p 18.

⁶⁰ Taubes (2009), p 25.

⁶¹ Taubes (2009), p 19.

of the world is a constant of Gnostic thought also,⁶² as in the following fragment from a Gnostic text on 'The Soul's Deliverance':

Hail to you, hail to you, soul, for you have departed from the world.

You have left corruption behind and the stinking body in which you found yourself, the abode, the abode of the wicked, the place which is all sin, the World of Darkness, of hatred, envy, and strife, the abode in which the planets live, bringing sorrows and infirmities; they bring sorrows and infirmities, and every day they cause unrest.

Rise up, rise up, soul, ascend to your first earth.

...

And curse this place the house of your earthly guardian.⁶³

Much later, but in the same vein, Paul states that demonic powers are the 'rulers of this world'.⁶⁴ This judgement informs Paul's pronouncement that each should remain as he is called – that is to say, in his existing vocation. 'This world is passing away', so worldly identities can no longer matter – or at least not in the ways that they once did.⁶⁵ This much at least in Paul is Gnostic. Indeed, Marcion, whose early Christian heresy was precisely an extreme form of the Gnostic judgement of this world as demonic (such that, for Marcion, the creator God of the Old Testament, as demiurge, is an entirely different God from the Father of Jesus Christ, who is the alien God), selected only Pauline epistles and the Gospel of Luke for his Christian canon.⁶⁶ Marcion believed Paul to be the only authentic apostle, and himself to be the true disciple of Paul.⁶⁷ In Taubes' view, it is indisputable that the Gnostic tendency in Christianity begins with Paul.⁶⁸ This view is shared by Badiou, who describes Marcionism as ultra-Pauline: 'By pushing [Paul] a little, one could arrive at Marcion's conception: the gospel is an absolute beginning.'⁶⁹ So despite the fact that Paul undoubtedly

⁶² Taubes (2009), p 29.

⁶³ Ginza Rba (2011), Fragment 4.

⁶⁴ Ephesians 6:12; Taubes (2009), p 29. Overall, there is less emphasis in Paul than in Jewish apocalypticism generally on demonic earthly powers. Although Paul looks forward to imminent Parousia in the manner of apocalypticism, this is offset by the cross as already 'realized eschatology'. Indeed, Boyarin (1994), pp 35–36 reads this difference in emphasis as significant enough to put Paul in a separate category from Jewish apocalypticism. Collins (1998), p 264 similarly suggests that 'Paul's eschatological revelation is not given in the form of an apocalypse, but is declared to be a *mystery*'. And Agamben (2005) agrees that the Pauline messianic concerns the time that it takes time to end ('a sort of suspended present time', in Kaufman's words, rather than the end times): Kaufman (2008), p 49.

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31; Taubes (2009), p 21.

⁶⁶ Taubes (2004), p 56.

⁶⁷ Badiou (2003), p 35; Taubes (2004), p 56.

⁶⁸ Taubes (2004), p 57.

⁶⁹ Badiou (2003), p 34.

complicates the Gnostic tendency by seeing the new time as contained already in the old, this tendency to condemn the world enters Christianity primarily through Paul. Along with it arrives the suspicion of (natural) law.

But it is in Paul's *explicit* rejection of the law that his development of Gnostic themes comes into its own. And it is here, too, that the irreducibility of Pauline thought to modern anarcho-revolutionism can be seen. Previously, apocalypso-Gnosticism had not tackled natural law – the fixed order of the cosmos – head on. It is rather that the eschatological perspective that apocalypso-Gnosticism opened up stood in stark contrast to the Hellenistic cosmos. Paul, however, in addition to being a Jew, was also a Roman citizen – and moreover, one who wrote in Greek and was familiar with its philosophical discourse. Paul was therefore able to bring this difference of perspective to bear in the form of an explicit critique of law-bound cosmologies, whether of the conservative Jewish or Greco-Roman type. And it is this Paul 'against the law' that Alain Badiou has done the most to unpack in terms of its philosophical and political implications.⁷⁰

Paul Against the Law

For Badiou, Paul is the first to clearly think the universal – which, in finding no distinctions in those it addresses, is crucial to attempts to think beyond law. If Badiou is correct in this description, then Paul is the crucial link between the initially apocalyptic-Gnostic break with the necessity of the cosmos and modern attempts – anarchism central amongst them – to imagine less law-bound worlds.

Badiou sees Paul as the first to identify that a truth has the structure of a universal singularity.⁷¹ In Paul's case (though Badiou wants only the Pauline form, not its content), the resurrection of Jesus as 'for all' (that is, not only for the Jews, but also for Greeks, women, even slaves!)⁷² is this universally applicable but absolutely singular event. Given this, Badiou is able to explain the centrality of the critique of both Jewish and Greek law to Paul's project, a project that Badiou summarises as 'disjoining the true from the Law'.⁷³ As that which breaks with the order of things, truth is 'subjective'. By definition, truth cannot be subsumed under any law – perhaps especially

⁷⁰ Badiou (2003), p 75.

⁷¹ Badiou (2003), p 13.

⁷² Galatians 3: 28.

⁷³ Badiou (2003), p 15. Badiou's radical disjuncture between the law, which puts the subject on the path of death (via the automatism of desire which the law induces), and truth, which brings the subject over to the side of life, is rejected by Slavoj Žižek (1999) for finding a non relationship between life and death where he should have found a dialectical one. For a useful discussion of this difference, see Kotsko (2008). Hannah Arendt's (2003) critique of the Pauline rejection of law is also relevant here. Influenced as she was by the classical republican tradition, Arendt wanted to associate, rather than disassociate, law and freedom, arguing that the idea of a break with law can only be liberating for living with oneself, never for living with others: see Barbour (2009).

Greek law, with its 'subordination of destiny to the cosmic order'.⁷⁴ Given that truth is indifferent to the 'state of the situation', it must be indifferent to the State too (in Paul's case the Roman Empire).⁷⁵ The truth, in other words, is anti-statist, or at least must keep its distance from the state, as the concretisation of extant order.

Badiou's study of Paul has much to say about Paul's universalising break with Jewish Law's fixing of truth to the communitarian site, a break that Badiou wants to rehabilitate in our time of, as he sees it, relativistic identitarian politics. But Badiou is clear also that Pauline thought constitutes a rupture with Greco-Roman natural law. Thus when Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians (2: 1–5), opposes spirit (*pneuma*) to the wisdom of (Greek) philosophy, his essential point, in Badiou's reading, is that the 'subjective upsurge' which is the form of emergence of every truth cannot be constructed as 'personal adjustment to the laws of the universe or nature'.⁷⁶ Truth doesn't accommodate itself to the cosmos, it breaks with it. Badiou's Paul has a very clear critique of Greek wisdom. *Sophia* is a cosmic discourse, aligning the subject with the fixed order of the world, matching its logos to being.⁷⁷ Badiou shares Taubes' interpretation of this discourse as a discourse of totality, one that views nature as a law-like 'ordered and accomplished deployment of being'.⁷⁸ Paul, argues Badiou – and here the continuity of Pauline with Gnostic categories is apparent – dismisses Greek discourse for presupposing that salvation is already given within the universe via the *sophia*, which allows mastery of the eternal truths of the totality.⁷⁹ For Paul, on the contrary, mastery – which is tied to law – cannot be a figure of liberation. The logic of salvation – and here Paul is completely Gnostic – is rather linked to the divine coming which, as far as this world is concerned, is illegal. As Badiou notes, Paul's claim in his first letter to the Corinthians (1: 29) that 'God has chosen the things that are not' is indeed foolishness for Greek wisdom, which is a discourse precisely on being.⁸⁰ In sum, when Paul declares that 'the world' has been crucified with Christ, this world is the Greek cosmos as that 'reassuring totality that allots places and orders'.⁸¹

That which codifies this allocation of places and orders is, of course, natural or naturalised law. For Badiou, the kernel of Paul's critique of law is that it always and only signifies a particularity or difference; law only addresses itself to those who obey its commands, not indifferently to all as a Truth demands.⁸² Given that the event – which for Paul is the resurrection –

⁷⁴ Badiou (2003), p 15.

⁷⁵ Badiou (2003), p 15.

⁷⁶ Badiou (2003), p 28.

⁷⁷ Badiou (2003), p 41.

⁷⁸ Badiou (2003), p 41.

⁷⁹ Badiou (2003), p 42.

⁸⁰ Badiou (2003), p 47.

⁸¹ Badiou (2003), p 71.

⁸² Badiou (2003), p 76.

is a singularity, and its application is universal, there is no place for particularity (for Greeks, Jews, etc) and thus no room for law either: 'What can measure up to the universality of an address? Not legality, in any case. The law is always predictive, particular, and partial.'⁸³ Badiou's Paul exposes the statist character of the law in the sense that the law seeks to control the parts of a situation by naming and enumerating.⁸⁴ Truth, on the contrary, must 'surge forth eventually', which means that it breaks with the state of the situation and so remains entirely unnameable and uncountable from within that situation. This, suggests Badiou, is how we should understand Pauline grace as

that which occurs without being couched in any predicate, that which is translegal, that which happens to everyone without an assignable reason. Grace is the opposite of law insofar as it comes *without being due*.⁸⁵

Grace has done with what is due, with that which is juridical or contractual, so it has done with the law too. Grace is superabundance; as that which is not due it is always 'in excess of itself' and will exceed the limits imposed by the law.⁸⁶

The Cost of Paul

A good way of clarifying the stakes of Badiou's thesis on Paul is to contrast it with a strong counter-reading: Voegelin's. This is a reading whereby the break with natural law, rather than revealing the universality of truth, instead involved passing on the dangerous strain of Gnosticism. This strain then comes to infect the whole of Western civilisation ('the essence of modernity [is] the growth of gnosticism')⁸⁷ with its disordering irrationalism.

Voegelin is not much interested in the emergence of Gnosticism, apart from to say that its origin is the 'pre-Christian area of Syriac civilization' and that its traces are found in Paul.⁸⁸ For Voegelin, the eschatological expectation of Parousia that the early church saw as an imminent historical event is slowly eroded by the ongoing absence of the second coming. The eventual result of this disappointment is the reinterpretation of eschatology from that which reorders history within history to that which is achieved supernaturally and therefore trans-historically. In other words, the historical

⁸³ Badiou (2003), p 76.

⁸⁴ Badiou (2003), p 76.

⁸⁵ Badiou (2003), pp 76–77.

⁸⁶ Badiou (2003), p 78.

⁸⁷ Voegelin (1952), p 126. For the counterpoint to this view, in which modernity is rather 'an immanent cosmos', see Taubes (2004), p 84.

⁸⁸ Voegelin (1952), p 26. Boyarin (1994), pp. 185, 290, n 5 agrees that Paul is a 'moderate "Gnostic"', somewhere between the monadic corporeality of the Jerusalem church and the extreme spirituality [which posits a radical dualism of soul and body] of the later true Gnostics'.

church now becomes the 'apocalypse of Christ in history', and no other fundamental change to the order of things is expected prior to the Last Judgement. Eschatology becomes effectively ahistorical, as in Augustine's haughty dismissal of literal belief in the millennium as a 'ridiculous fable'.⁸⁹

It is the Gnostic tendency, bursting forth at the end of the Middle Ages in the work of Joachim of Flora, that ruins this Augustinian picture for Voegelin.⁹⁰ Where the Augustinian church had brought natural law back in, re-establishing the order of the world that the early church had expected soon to pass away, the apocalyptic symbolism of the new Joachite vision undoes this good work. For Joachim's attempt to provide the immanent course of history with meaning (a meaning that Augustine's profane history altogether lacks) leads ultimately from humanism to Enlightenment and finally to the fully immanent Idea of History which, for Voegelin the Cold Warrior, is when things really go wrong. And they go wrong, above all, because now the notion that humanity finds fulfilment *beyond* nature, with its law-like rhythms of growth and decay, has shifted from the safely transcendent truth of Augustinian Christianity to the dangerously immanent truth of the Gnostic heresy and its Totalitarian descendents.⁹¹ Based as it is on the category mistake of making an other-worldly claim this-worldly, the 'immanentist hypostasis of the eschaton' is nothing but a 'theoretical fallacy'. 'The meaning of history ... is an illusion'.⁹² The Pauline break with natural law as a possibility for this-worldly transformation which Badiou celebrates is, for Voegelin, exactly what should be condemned.

Voegelin admits the potency of Gnostic millenarianism. Gnosticism 'most effectively released human forces for the building of a civilization because on their fervent application to intermundane activity was put the premium of salvation. The historical result was stupendous'.⁹³ But lost in this great explosion of human potential was the sense of the very order of things, which means that the house of Western civilisation is built entirely on sand. Voegelin's meta-analysis here is worth citing at length, since it goes to the heart of his difference from Badiou in enshrining eternal return as an absolute limit-point of human thought and action:

⁸⁹ Voegelin (1952), pp 108–9. Sloterdijk (2010), p 95 agrees that 'every introduction to the history of Christianity should be preceded by a chapter called "When Apocalypticism Fails" ... Christianity and gnosis are parallel phenomenon that mutually interpret each other insofar as both draw their consequences from the nuisance that the world (why not just call it the Roman empire from now on?) has proven to be resistant to its downfall.'

⁹⁰ Voegelin (1952), pp 118–20. Taubes (2009), p 86 agrees that 'Joachim's theology of history shatters the foundations of medieval theocracy', as does Cohn (1970) p 108, for whom Joachim is 'The inventor of a new prophetic system, which was to be the most influential one known to Europe until the appearance of Marxism'.

⁹¹ Voegelin (1952), pp 119–20, 132, 163.

⁹² Voegelin (1952), p 120.

⁹³ Voegelin (1952), p 130.

Specifically, the Gnostic fallacy destroys the oldest wisdom of mankind concerning the rhythm of growth and decay which is the fate of all things under the sun ... What comes into being will have an end, and the mystery of this stream of being is impenetrable ... Gnosticism, thus, has produced something like the counterprinciples to the principle of existence ... it has created a dream world ...⁹⁴

Paul, Nihilism, Anarchism

For Taubes, Paul's eschatological nihilism is precisely the resource that enables him to turn against the Roman Empire.⁹⁵ In the face of this empire and its emperor worship, Taubes maintains that Paul's principal aim is the forceful founding of a new people: 'my thesis is that ... the Epistle to the Romans is a political theology, a *political* declaration of war on the Caesar'. 'For Paul, the task at hand is the *establishment and legitimation of a new people of God*.'⁹⁶ Contra Badiou, Paul's apparent 'universalism' is for Taubes a distraction: 'Sure, Paul is universal, but by virtue of the "eye of the needle" of the crucified one.'⁹⁷ Taubes' Paul is a revolutionary whose 'universalism' is intended primarily to divide ('he is totally illiberal, of that I am certain').⁹⁸ The explosive political charge of his letter to the Romans is its head-on challenge to imperial Rome; anti-Caesarism is the key to understanding Pauline political theology.⁹⁹

If the nihilistic, anti-imperial political project that Taubes identifies in Paul is indeed present, then we have one reason for understanding Nietzsche's hatred of Paul. This loathing is usually explained, including by both Taubes and Badiou themselves,¹⁰⁰ as rooted in Nietzsche's growing awareness that Paul is his great opponent in the transvaluation of values, even if Nietzsche chose to hide this challenge by dismissing Paul as one who was poisoned by priestly resentment. But Nietzsche's judgement of Paul as revengeful surely also stems from his perception of Paul's nihilism – Paul is seeking to bring down the magnificent *imperium Romanum*, and *that* is his crime. After all, Nietzsche is an implacable opponent of the anarchism of his

⁹⁴ Voegelin (1952), pp 166–67. Voegelin's thesis here has echoes of Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* (2004), p 49: 'we *revenge* ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of "another", a "better" life'. Indeed, this theme has been picked up again recently in Sloterdijk's Nietzschean-inflected work *Rage and Time* (2001), p 94, where apocalypticism is defined as 'the religious form of abandoning the world' and condemned for killing off any civilisation or political instincts (if the end of the world is imminent, there is no future in which to invest; and if one's enemies will shortly stand condemned before God, standing up to them is unnecessary: p 92).

⁹⁵ Taubes (2004), pp 72, 132.

⁹⁶ Taubes (2004), pp 16 and 28; see also 40–41.

⁹⁷ Taubes (2004), p 24.

⁹⁸ Taubes (2004), p 24.

⁹⁹ For more on Paul's subversion of Empire, see Miller (2009).

¹⁰⁰ See Taubes (2004), pp 78–82; Badiou (2003), p 61.

own day for repeating this crime – that, precisely because the anarchist is riddled with resentment, he can think only of destruction, of tearing down:

Wrong never lies in unequal rights; it lies in the assertion of 'equal' rights ... What is *bad*? But I have already answered: all that proceeds from weakness, from envy, from *revenge*. – The anarchist and the Christian have the same ancestry ...

In point of fact, the end for which one lies makes a great difference: whether one preserves thereby or destroys. There is a perfect likeness between Christian and anarchist: their object, their instinct, points only towards destruction. One need only turn to history for a proof of this ... That which stood there *aere perennis*, the *imperium Romanum*, the most magnificent form of organisation under difficult conditions that has ever been achieved ... those holy anarchists made it a matter of 'piety' to destroy 'the world', *which is to say*, the *imperium Romanum* ... The Christian and the anarchist: both are decadents; both have an instinct of *moral hatred* of everything that stands up, and is great ...¹⁰¹

That this arch opponent of anarchism is a defender of eternal recurrence in opposition to all 'Jewish' thoughts of transcendence, that he substitutes the suffering Christ who promises new life in the next world for Dionysius whose suffering affirms life in *this* world, is perhaps the strongest defence of the argument that a genealogy of anarchism goes back to Gnostic-apocalyptic categories. And, of course, Nietzsche the genealogist *does* see that anarchism descends from the apocalyptic rejection of this world and the Gnostic longing for transcendence of it, and this is why he hates anarchists so much: 'The anarchist and the Christian have the same ancestry'.

Leaving Nietzsche to one side; regardless of whether the emphasis is placed on Paul's nihilistic-apocalyptic side, as Taubes does, or on his universalistic-Gnostic aspect, as Badiou prefers, we find agreement that Paul is the chief conduit by which the idea of a break with natural law reaches Western modernity. And when looking at seminal anarchist texts from the nineteenth century, when anarchism was emerging in its specifically modern forms, it is easy to find both of these aspects of the Pauline inheritance. First, of course, there is the nihilistic aspect that Taubes emphasised in Paul, here found in Mikhail Bakunin: 'Let us therefore trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternal source of all life. The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!'¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche (2004), Fragments 57–58. And as in the *Anti-Christ*, so also in the *Twilight of Idols* (2004), p 98: 'The Christian and the anarchist – both are *décadents*. – And when the Christian condemns, culminates and befouls the 'world', he does so from the same instinct from which the Socialist worker condemns, calumniates and befouls *society*: even the 'Last Judgement' is still the sweet consolation of revenge – the revolution, such as the Socialist worker too anticipates, only conceived of as somewhat more distant ... Even the 'Beyond' – why a Beyond if not as a means of befouling the Here-and-Now?'

¹⁰² Bakunin (1980).

Peter Kropotkin shares Bakunin's thirst for a clean sweep, if expressed in less Dionysian terms: 'Those who long for the triumph of justice ... perceive the necessity of a revolutionary whirlwind which will sweep away all this rottenness ...'¹⁰³

But the emphasis on a new world is more prevalent, overall, than the apocalyptic nihilism of divine violence.¹⁰⁴ Thus Bakunin argues that democracy, as the enemy not only of authoritarian government, but of government itself, represents a 'total transformation' of the world. This is 'an original, new life which has not yet existed in history', none other than 'a new heaven and a new earth, a young and magnificent world in which all present discords will resolve themselves into harmonious unity'.¹⁰⁵ Contemporary anarchism, too, makes much of the concept that 'another world is possible'. Indeed, this phrase is the slogan of the World Social Forum and the title of an anarchist network, a film series, a number of books and an interview with Noam Chomsky!

The ontological basis of this possibility of a new world for Bakunin is, in an immanentisation of the ancient apocalyptic's transcendent source, the non-existence of natural law. The human mind 'imposes the *form* of law on nature, since 'nature itself knows no laws'.¹⁰⁶ Kropotkin has Bakunin's rejection of natural law in common with him – there are only relations among phenomena and 'each "law" takes a temporary character of causality'. There is, therefore, no 'Law placed outside the phenomena: each phenomenon governs that which follows it – not law'.¹⁰⁷ As with Bakunin, and at one with Nietzsche at least on this point,¹⁰⁸ the chief intention of this exclusion of natural law was the negation of its divine author, but neither Kropotkin nor Bakunin was the first to exclude the knowable God who orders this world. For his part, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon makes the link between this exclusion of the known God and the coming of the new God, suggesting that transcending the extant order of the world does indeed require the ineffable, alien God of Gnosticism: '[S]tudying in the silence of my heart, and far from every human consideration, the mystery of social revolutions, God, the great unknown, has become for me a hypothesis – I mean a necessary dialectical tool.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Kropotkin (1927), p 36.

¹⁰⁴ The latter is today more likely to be articulated by millenarian groups and movements: see Wallis (2004).

¹⁰⁵ Bakunin, in McLaughlin (2002), pp 23, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Bakunin, in McLaughlin (2002), p 109.

¹⁰⁷ Kropotkin (2002), p 120.

¹⁰⁸ Following on from his first pronouncement of the death of God, Nietzsche (2001) immediately calls for the 'de-deification' of nature, arguing: 'Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities: there is no one who commands, no one who obeys, no one who transgresses.' (p 110)

¹⁰⁹ Proudhon (2004), p 2.

Although lacking (as far as I am aware) explicitly Gnostic formulations such as these, more contemporary forms of anarchism also see themselves as breaking with natural law, as Murray Bookchin makes clear:

Nature philosophy, such as I have advanced in my own writings, has its antithesis in an all-inclusive application of systems theory, reductionism as a mystique of a universal 'Oneness' ... [A]n ecological ethics based on freedom has its antithesis in deterministic doctrines of 'natural law' ... Ecology becomes a political movement and, most important, a means for changing the world, not passively observing it.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

It is not difficult to demonstrate the family resemblance of apocalypso-Gnosticism with modern anarchism. But the key point is that, regardless of the extent to which it has been taken up explicitly, the idea of a beyond to the cosmic order of things, of a break with natural law, remains a possibility for thought thanks to its ancient forebears in the apocalypso-Gnostic line. To confront a contemporary radical with their mythico-religious ancestors in thought might well cause some consternation, not to mention irritation. But when our thought is shown to have come down to us from impure sources and in bastard form, we see something important. As Foucault argues, one reason for conducting genealogies is precisely that they reveal that things that continue to have significance and value for us – even very familiar things – are neither self-identical nor necessary.¹¹¹ Where we expected to find 'lofty origins', genealogy instead reveals disparate and accidental emergences for which no one is responsible and in which 'no one can glory'.¹¹² And where we thought to find the linear development or timeless form of a thing, we instead find a series of accidents, errors and *discontinuities*. But to see contingency where before there was only necessity is surely to remain true to the natural-law-defying apocalyptic ethos itself – the order of this world is passing away.

¹¹⁰ Bookchin (2004), p xxxviii.

¹¹¹ Foucault (1977).

¹¹² Foucault (1977), pp 142, 150.

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