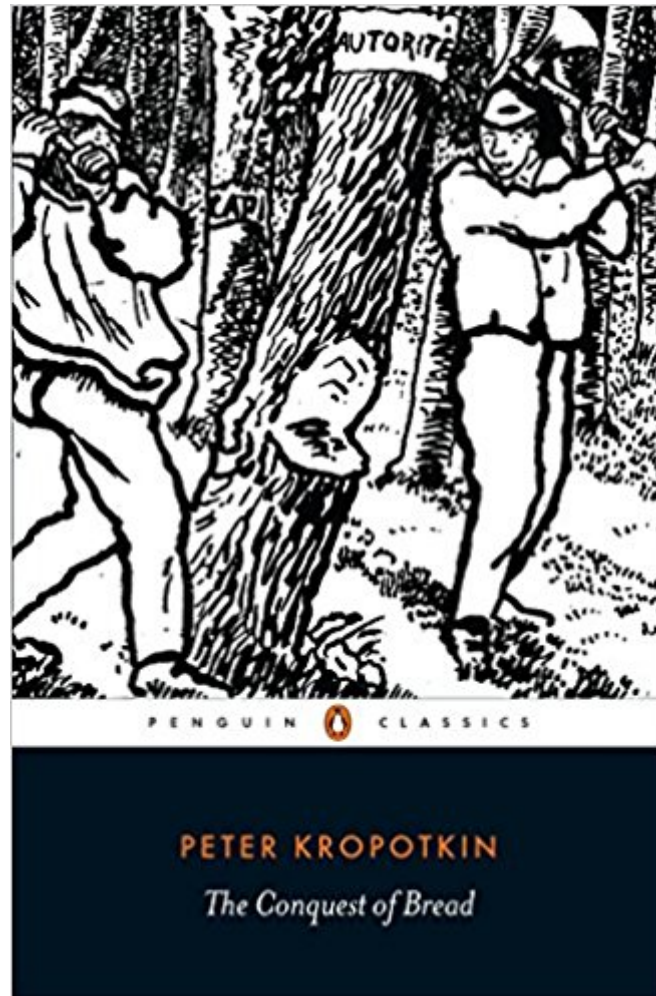




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The Conquest Of Bread (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

"Well-being for all is not a dream." In this brilliantly enjoyable rallying-cry of a book, Kropotkin lays out the heart of his anarchist beliefs—beliefs that surged around the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and that have a renewed relevance and poignancy today. Humane and thoughtful, but also a devastating critique of how modern society is organized (with the brutal, narrow few clinging onto their wealth and privileges at the expense of the many), *The Conquest of Bread* is a book to be argued over, again and again. For more than sixty-five years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,500 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

PETER KROPOTKIN (1842-1921) came from a major aristocratic Russian family but turned his

back on it to embrace a life of imprisonment and exile in pursuit of his beliefs. His major works are *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*. His funeral was marked as the last permitted gathering of anarchists in the USSR. DAVID PRIESTLAND (introducer) is the author of *Red Flag* and *Merchant, Soldier, Sage*. He teaches at St Edmund's Hall, University of Oxford.

There are plenty of self-professed "anarchists" and "socialists" oblivious to the need for dialectics; don't be one of them. There is no need to fetishize history. This book is not perfect. This book is okay, and that's it. To begin with, it's loaded with outdated and destructive modes of thinking. For example, Kropotkin briefly describes the history of the privatization of land. However, like many others at his time, he later argues that it is not only advantageous, but necessary to transform (raze, cut and plow) all "fallow" or uncultivated land in order to create productive land. Ironically, this very same idea was used to justify the confiscation and privatization of public lands by mercantile and later capitalist classes both on the domestic front and in missions of imperialization. This mode of thinking (i.e. land possesses no inherent value in its natural state, and its true "value" can be derived from its relationship with other commodities in the market) might be seen as a sort of precursor to contemporary concepts of land value which have led to the current patterns of ecological ruination. This is just one example, but he likewise appropriates many other "ruling ideas" throughout his writings resulting in one of the most fatal flaws of the entire book which I will explain below. According to Hegel, the totality of human thought and experience operates according to a logic of its own, independently of human will. Later on, Marx would argue that Hegel's description of the dialectic can find a parallel in the sphere of production. Using the above model, Marx would go on to explain that one of the critical flaws of capitalism is that it subjugates reason to the demands of the market as it develops into ever new and novel forms. The result is that human "needs" are simultaneously manufactured by these developments. Since capitalism did not arise out of thin air, but rather emerged out of historical processes operating according to their own internal logic (i.e. Mostly independent of human reason or will) this concept can further be expanded to all human history. Material dialectics might therefore be understood to be the study of the history of humankind's relationship with the material world (and to that extent, humanities alienation from the material world), in order to reveal its implicit connection with the development of human society. Kropotkin, on the other hand, unironically advocates for the creation of a new "science" which he dubs the "physiology of society" whose sole task is to discover the most efficient means for effectively subordinating human beings to this endless movement of human desires (or "needs" in his words), hence why this book can be characterized as ahistorical.

More clearly put, Kropotkin's ideal society is predicated upon a structuralist defense of the independence of human needs, which means one of two things: A. Kropotkin is aware that the logic of human needs are not self-evident, and thus he is offering an apologetics of alienation. Or, B. He is completely devoid of historical consciousness, and has no idea that he is defending but another form of separation. In opposition to Kropotkin's project is the communism of Marx, which is not conceived of as a static reorganization of society, but of a reorganization of consciousness which resultantly "abolishes everything that exists independently of individuals" (Marx, *The Materialist Conception of History*). Don't get me wrong, the book wasn't entirely devoid of insightful concepts and explanations, and Kropotkin, for all the other shortcomings in *Conquest of the Bread*, had at least enough historical prudence to reach one major insight; revolutions need to satisfy the basic needs of all people: food, clothing, shelter and water. As Guy Debord once said of anarchy, in *"The Society of the Spectacle"*, a read far more relevant to our times and one which I highly recommend: "Bakunin [wrote] in 1873, when he left the Federation Jurassienne: 'During the past nine years, more ideas have been developed within the International than would be needed to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to invent a new one. It is no longer the time for ideas, but for facts and acts.' There is no doubt that this conception retains an element of the historical thought of the proletariat, the certainty that ideas must become practice, but it leaves the historical terrain by assuming that the adequate forms for this passage to practice have already been found and will never change."

Well, technically it is an anarchist-communist classic, as Peter (Petr) Kropotkin is considered an ideological founder of communist anarchism. But I find this work a bit dry, perhaps outdated. Some of his other books, essays and articles are more interesting, shorter and still very relevant...but this one is free (public domain), thanks ^%.

This book stands boldly against what I was taught about how America functions. I was thrilled and scared and looking over my shoulder to make sure reading this book would not get me arrested or philosophically assaulted by my fellow Americans. Yes, take a moment and imagine a world system where everyone worked for the needs of everyone and profit was not the driver nor enslaver it now is. Thought provoking - empowering - frightening - convicting - exciting.

A good primer on anarcho-communism, as long as you remember that it is written at the turn of the

last century during the beginning of the industrial revolution. I also suggest "mutual Aid: a Factor of Evolution" if you like this book, and also if you don't.

The text is really small and it seems like the print job on this wasn't great. That being said, this is a classic book in anarchist thinking and it should be read by anyone attempting to understand early anarchist thought before diving into the more modern anarchist thinkers like Bookchin or Chomsky.

Very good read so far. A little hard to understand because of the old English writing style.

In this short but brilliant read, Kropotkin lays out his vision of a revolutionary Anarchist society. A must read for anyone interested in radical politics.

Everyone should read this.

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