

# THE NEW GLADSTONE REVIEW

*an occasional e-journal*

*July 2022*

*Issue No. 15*

*Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry  
for bookish people of philanthropic inclination*

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## Editorial

This issue has missed the usual quarterly deadline, so I am relying on the description *an occasional e-journal*, with the next issue probably being posted in December. The delay has been due to my having had a very busy six months, mostly because of completing the writing of a sizeable book.

Although this journal is not overtly concerned with politics, recent history has resulted in our being unable to ignore the widespread impacts of Covid19 and global climate change. And now, another critical global concern has dominated not only the newspaper headlines, but our day to day living. The Russian assault on Ukraine, in combination with the other two crises, has emphasised how small our planet is, and how against all the odds we must collectively, and urgently, restore/establish global harmony if we are not, carelessly, to bring an end to civilisation by default. In that frame of mind, I have ventured to highlight the nature of two attitudes to the war. As article 1 is an opinion piece, I don't expect all, or perhaps many, readers to agree with my analysis. But it may provide insights into an approach to addressing conflict that rarely gets an airing

I am pleased to include in this issue items from two guest contributors. The first is from my wife Barbara, now in a nursing home, who when in retirement took a course at Newark Art College, and produced some very interesting forms of three dimensional and photographic art. For over 20 years the photos have lain, undisturbed at the bottom of a drawer. But re-discovering them recently, I was impressed by their quality, and Barbara has happily agreed to my featuring a small selection of them here. The second, from Frances Thimann, is a review of a book which relates the harrowing experiences of those delivering vaccines by dogsled in snowbound Alaska, almost a century ago – with inevitable parallels to the recent challenges of Covid19. I am most grateful to both contributors for adding welcome interest and stimulation to this issue.

Other articles are a brief account of the life and work of Peter Kropotkin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian aristocrat with remarkably polymathic interests and ideas; and a playful enquiry into the multiple meanings of the letter X. Plus added 'seasoning,' provided by some more limericks. *BM*

## Opinion Piece

### 1. *The war in Ukraine: militancy, humanity and morality*

The aim here is to consider two contrasting approaches to bringing the conflict to an acceptable conclusion. But, first, we need to take stock – a macabre form of accounting when on one side of the ‘balance sheet’ the losses are counted in deaths, injury and devastation. At the time of writing, it seems that the data shown below (mostly from the UN) are the most reliable available.

**Very rough estimates of numbers of people killed: 24 April – 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2022**

**Ukraine’s soldiers: 10,000 killed** **Civilians: 6,000 killed** (300 children); **5,000 injured** (500 children)

**Russian soldiers: 20,000 killed**

**Total deaths: approx. 36,000**

Now, about three months after the start of the Russian invasion, deaths amount to over 40,000 - probably a vast underestimate – that is, of children (babies even), women and men (those in the prime of life, the elderly and the sick, each with their unique visions of happiness and love) – lives all callously ended by what appears to be the sick mentality of one person. And this doesn’t include all the torture, rape and utter destruction of cities. Moreover, it seems likely that most of those 20,000 Russians were probably as much innocent victims of this conflict as the Ukrainians

The opinions of *establishment* sources – western governments, leaders of established churches, retired military men – envisage the conflict continuing for ‘a long time.’ Putin, it is said, doesn’t understand anything but force – he won’t lose face, so it will go on until the bitter end. Given such pronouncements from ‘on high,’ this appears also to be the opinion of most ‘men and women in the street,’ from whom there is, justifiably, enormous admiration for the sheer courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people. But it seems almost inevitable that, at the final reckoning, prolonging the military action will *not* be thought to have been the best course of action.

The reaction of western governments is that, showing solidarity with Ukraine, we should supply them with more and more weapons, with ever greater capacity to kill ‘the enemy,’ in the belief that Ukraine will be victorious – i.e. ‘win the war.’ This is a view advanced by Mr Johnson, Ms Truss *et al* whose support does not inspire much confidence, not least because it seems evident that both have self-serving motives for tough-talking. With tens of thousands dead, millions harmed physically and emotionally and cities reduced to piles of rubble, any ‘victory’ would be decidedly *pyrrhic* – hollow and without any sense of noble achievement.

Is there a more-mature, more humane approach to resolving such international disputes? Indeed, given the interconnectedness of the increasingly ‘small’ planet we inhabit, almost all such conflicts are now of *global significance*. For a start, it is very unlikely that most people have any desire to kill anyone: but by bad luck substantial numbers are born into countries governed by political regimes with malign, nationalist intents. Moreover, it appears that few wars are actually ever *won* – because resentment smoulders in the minds of the ‘defeated,’ who often plan their reprisals soon after. And tragically, the encouragement of an aggressive mentality, can arouse the capacity to *hate* – and this has clearly spilled over, encouraging misguided (usually young) men to commit savage war crimes.

There have been some hints of a readiness to negotiate an end to the war, which have been dismissed because of disagreements over an agenda. Most people (including the ‘establishment’ referred to above) assume that this will, in any case, be the final act. But, difficult as it would be, both sides need to sit at the negotiating table as soon as possible, on the basis of *everything* being up for discussion, including Ukraine’s borders. Virtually all rational people believe Putin’s claims are seriously flawed,

but diplomatically it makes sense to bend over backwards to hear them. Such discussions would give time for reflection, and the opportunity to explore how some concessions might be achieved amicably.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must surely abandon the idea that we can change people's minds by force. The most radical counter to violence involves non-violent resistance and civil disobedience (as employed by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, and advocated by the Quakers). Apart from its moral strengths, this is surely *more courageous* than taking orders to kill from someone sitting behind a desk. In a worst case scenario, such people would rather be remembered for trying to show that harmony can overcome hatred, than to be a 'war hero' famed for killing many 'enemies.' Above all, it's important to look beyond the numbers game – counting up how many will be killed before it's considered 'that's enough.' Most Ukrainian civilians would surely consider that 'enough' should be *now*. And with all that diplomatists and psychiatrists have learnt about the way people's minds work, there's got to be a better way of resolving disputes than fighting to the bitter end.

As Simon Jenkins claimed (Guardian, 9.06.22 in an article headed: The West's calls for a total victory in Ukraine can lead only to ruinous escalation): *'From the moment a conflict becomes too hot, war fever distorts reason with emotion. Fuelled by the media it poisons every bid for peace with the cry 'too many have died to allow compromise.'* Despite Ukraine's earlier successes, Russia's vast superiority in numbers of combatants and weapons – and the realisation that negative impacts on the global economy are having serious effects on the lives of many, especially the world's poorest - give added force to Jenkins' prediction. Mr Zelenskiy's ambition to drive Russia off all Ukrainian soil (which might in fact be all that's left) is *'ever less plausible;*' while the inflammatory comment of the newly-appointed UK General Chief of (army ) Staff that there is a *burning imperative to forge an Army capable of fighting alongside our allies and defeating Russia in battle* is seriously misguided.

Ultimately, and sooner rather than later, people need to be weaned off the aggressive, nationalistic attitudes that in earlier times were summarised by the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his description of human life as *selfish, nasty, brutish and short* –and that *everyone is the enemy of everyone else*. Instead the urgent need is to adopt the kinder, cooperative approach advocated by Peter Kropotkin, the 19th century Russian philosopher (see article 5 of this issue). It now seems that the primitive mindset that has proved serviceable for nations to 'get along together' adequately, now has to change fundamentally if humanity is to *survive*. Species extinction has been proceeding throughout history and pre-history. As we think we're so smart, it would be remiss for this to be our own fate.

With my father having fought in the first world war (notably at Ypres) and my brother becoming a conscientious objector in the 1950s, I am well aware of the pros ad cons of each side of the debate. But I know from my experience of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), of which my late brother was a member, that it should not be imagined that peace-making is a soft option to military force. To illustrate this, the following is the statement of the Quakers' *Friends Ambulance Unit*, at the beginning of the war in 1939.

*We (aim) to train as an efficient Unit to undertake ambulance and relief work in areas under both civilian and military control, and so, by working as a pacifist and civilian body where the need is greatest, to demonstrate the efficacy of co-operating to build up a new world rather than fighting to destroy the old. ... we feel concerned among the bitterness and conflicting ideologies of the present situation to build up a record of goodwill and positive service, hoping that this will help to keep uppermost in men's minds those values which are so often forgotten in war and immediately afterwards.* This clearly shows no lack of courage – quite the reverse.

BM

## 2. Meanings of X

*Mystery, approval, disapproval, unknown, forbidden, sexual allusion, threatening, mathematical and scientific uses.*

As an inveterate wordsmith, I doodle with words as others do with drawings. Sometimes for amusement I explore the various meanings represented by a single letter. The simplest words consisting of just a single letter are: *I, a* and *o*, although the latter is usually followed by an *h*. But the most prolifically used letter is X, which for some reason has been chosen to signify a wide range of disparate, and sometimes, contradictory qualities. For example, all the following categories use X:

### *Approval*

- ❖ In voting, you are asked to put X in the box of a chosen candidate/s.
- ❖ X is also used as a representation of kisses, which may represent emotional attachment (and can be emphasised by increasing the number of them) or more routinely as a token of warmth, as often the case on Christmas cards. In 1763, the X symbol for kiss was listed in the Oxford English Dictionary and used by Winston Churchill in 1894 when he signed a letter.
- ❖ The X-Factor, in the world of entertainment, is a British reality television music competition, created by Simon Cowell. The X (apparently) signifies star quality.

### *Uses in Mathematics.*

- ❖ In marking a student's skills in maths, X means simply *wrong*.
- ❖ But, also in maths, X signifies the process of *multiplication*  $2 \times 3 = 6$
- ❖ In constructing a graph employing the *Cartesian coordinate system*, X is the *horizontal axis*, the vertical being the Y axis. It was first introduced by Rene Descartes, the 17<sup>th</sup> century mathematician and philosopher.
- ❖ X means 10 in Roman numerals. For example, thirty is represented XXX.
- ❖ X is used as an added dimension, e.g. 6 X 4 for an object 6 feet high by 4 feet wide
- ❖ x is also used in algebraic equations to indicate the unknown quantity the value of which is the outcome of the specified arithmetical procedures. For some reason, I can still recall, from my teens, the obscure quadratic equation:  $x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$ . That's not much use, except as a test of sanity!

### *Uses in science and medicine*

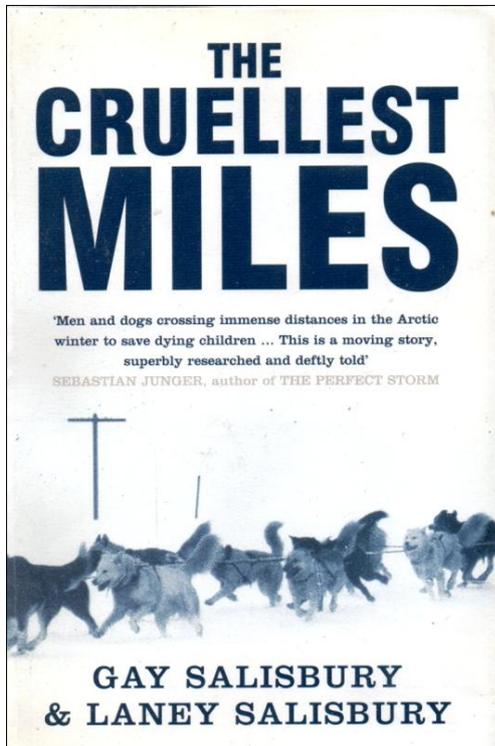
As new discoveries were made, but their true nature only barely understood, X seemed an appropriate adjective in naming them.

- ❖ Thus, X rays, also referred to as *Röntgen radiation* after the German scientist who discovered them in 1895, were so named to indicate that it was an unknown type of radiation.
- ❖ In genetics, each human cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes. The, so-called, X and Y chromosomes are one such pair, which are designated the sex chromosomes: they determine the



### 3. A review of **The Cruellest Miles** by Gay & Laney Salisbury

**Quarantine! Lockdown! Isolation! Disruption to social gatherings; rapid contagion, by a single touch or through the air, spread even by a healthy carrier; hands and faces to be washed frequently; difficulty in breathing; tubes inserted into the windpipe...**



Sometime last year I was listening to news of the Covid vaccines, in particular the Pfizer product and the difficulty of transporting and storing it at the required low temperatures - and something moved in my locked-down brain. I remembered a radio reading some years back about the dramatic transportation of a serum by dogsled in snowbound Alaska, almost a century ago.

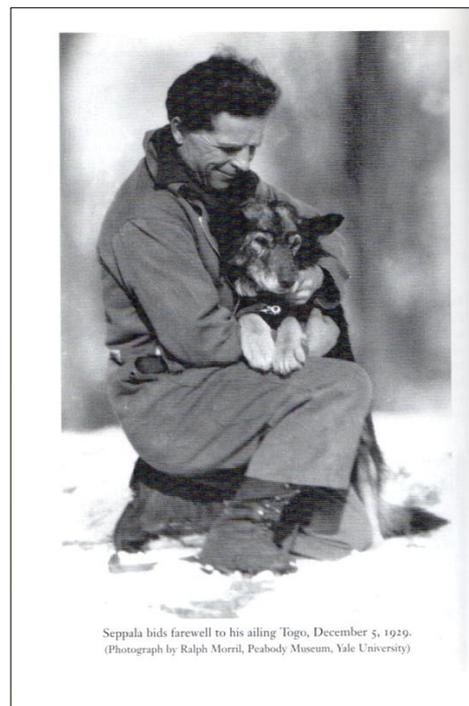
Luckily I remembered the title, and Bromley House Library had the book in stock and their mobile service was able to transport it to me, though sadly not by dogsled. It is one of the most exciting and moving stories I have read for a long time. It is also one with strange parallels to our own recent pandemic, much of the vocabulary familiar... But this disease infected mostly children.

In January 1925, the small town of Nome, in remote northwest Alaska on the Bering Strait experienced an outbreak of diphtheria, a terrible disease which attacked the throats of children, mainly, and caused a horrible

death by suffocation and strangulation. There was an effective serum but supplies had almost run out in Nome, and this was the middle of winter, and a particularly severe one.

There were no roads nor trains in that area, air transport was not yet possible in such low temperatures, the seas were frozen. Some supplies of the serum were available in Anchorage, a town hundreds of miles to the south, and this could be taken some distance north by train towards Fairbanks, another small town over 600 miles to the east of Nome. After that, the only way was by dogsled.

A relay of 20 drivers was organised. This book is the story of that run. It is moving and amazing in equal measure. The heroism of the drivers (mushers, from French *marche!* or *marchons!* the term used by the French Canadians) and the unbelievably close relationship with their animals was extraordinary. The conditions were extreme (temperatures reached 50/60 degrees below zero at times, in blizzard-strength winds.) Sometimes only the dogs knew what to do,



how to find the trail lost under many feet of snow, and sometimes by their intelligence and courage they saved their drivers' lives.

The whole United States followed the progress of the serum over 647 miles as the national press picked up the story. It took five and a half days and nights, and the serum itself had to be massively packaged up and then warmed at each roadhouse where the drivers would stop for food or sleep, and to hand over to the next. Even after such a run, the serum was still effective when it finally reached its destination.

Some of the dogs died (they never gave up), and some of the drivers suffered cruelly with frostbite. Afterwards they all became national stars and heroes, and a statue was erected in New York's Central Park of the lead dog whose team actually took the serum into locked-down Nome.

The book contains many contemporaneous pictures and photos, all in black and white (and many shades of grey) depicting some of the lead drivers and their dogs, the sled teams working in desolate snow- and icescapes. There are also chapters on the Eskimo communities in the area, the development of air transport, and other related themes, but what will remain in the mind is the story of the historic serum run, and the unquestioning heroism of both men and dogs. 'I just wanted to help, that's all', said one driver.

Published by Bloomsbury, London, 2004

This review first appeared in the Bromley House Library online newsletter in March, 2021. A copy of the book is held in Bromley House Library, Nottingham.

*Frances Thimann is the author of four volumes of short stories: Cello and other stories, 2008; November Wedding, 2012 (Pewter Rose Press); A Change of Direction, a chapbook, 2019 (Mantle Lane Press); and The Clock Museum, 2021 (Chaffinch Press.) Her story Shells received the Society of Authors' ALCS Tom-Gallon Trust Award in 2017'.*



## 4. Accidental Art

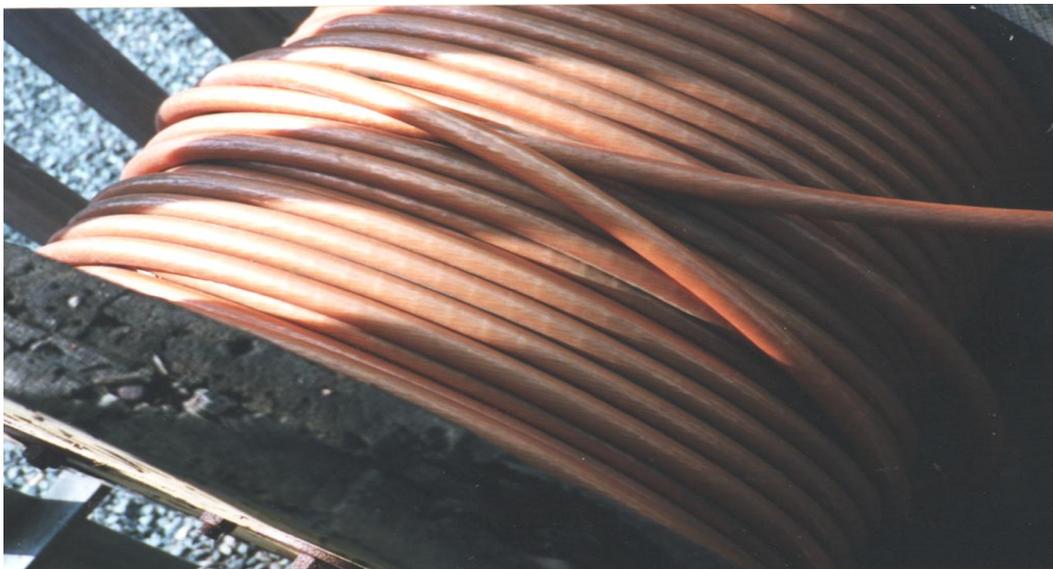
### Photographs by Barbara Masters-Mepham

The idea that art is all around us, and waiting to be discovered, appeals to Barbara. She took the photos on the next two pages (a small selection) in about 2000, soon after the power station at Staythorpe, near Newark, had been demolished. Recently retired from her job as a secondary school teacher, she was then a part-time student at the Newark Art College.

Having both an 'eye' for, and the skill to select, vivid depictions of discarded lumber and tackle, she produced some images that are beautiful in both their random configurations and subtle colours. And some, perhaps, seem uncannily menacing, like aliens from outer space!







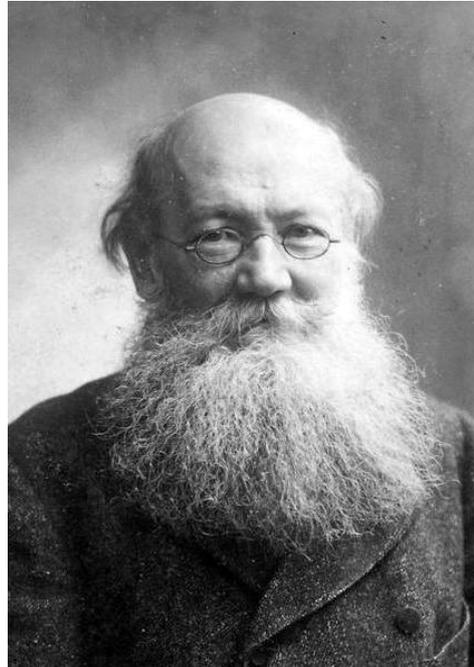
## 5. Peter Kropotkin and Mutual Aid

### The biological basis of human morality

When, from a British perspective, we consider the current state of world affairs- the war in Ukraine, our own highly divided society, both socially and economically (and in those of our traditional allies, such as the USA and France), the threats of global pandemics and the adverse impacts of global warming etc, etc – it is hard to see a path to better times, or even the recovery, for those who experienced it, to the friendlier social environment of the immediately post-war years. The aim of this short article is to consider a strategy for regaining a more peaceable global society, which was envisioned by a little-known Russian philosopher of eccentric but endearing character.

For some historians, the present state of the world might recall the mood of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the dominant theory of human nature was that it was essentially selfish, with our lives notoriously summed up by philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the phrase: *selfish, nasty, brutish, and short*, with *everyone* being *the enemy of everyone else*.

When Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the competitive side of human nature – exemplified by the rigorous capitalism that characterised the Industrial Revolution – was still, for many, the normal mind-set: and such attitudes reflected in phrases such as *the struggle for existence* and *survival of the fittest* were assumed to describe a crucial factor in the evolutionary process. For, the term *fittest* (in the phrase which had been introduced by the philosopher Herbert Spencer by analogy with success in the world of business) described those individuals who are *most reproductively fertile* – and thus effective in transferring their genes to future offspring (although genes had not then been 'discovered.'). Even Tennyson, in his poem *In Memoriam* (1850), felt confident in describing Nature as *red in tooth and claw*.



However, in marked contrast, Prince Peter Kropotkin interpreted the way in which the *struggle for existence* operated quite differently. From an aristocratic Russian family, it was expected that he would spend his life in military service. But when he graduated in 1862, at age twenty years, *he used his rank to choose a post that would allow him to pursue his interests in evolution, natural history and politics*, which led him to undertake a *50 thousand mile trek through Siberia*. In the course of this, *he observed what appeared to be altruism and cooperation among both animals and peasants of the region at every turn*.<sup>1</sup> He interpreted this cooperation as a way of both animals and people protecting themselves against the harsh environment they all experienced, and wrote: *In all these scenes of life I saw Mutual Aid and Mutual Support carried on to an extent which made me suspect it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species and its further evolution*.<sup>2</sup> Kropotkin did not deny the presence of competitive urges in humans, but he didn't consider them to be the driving force of history.

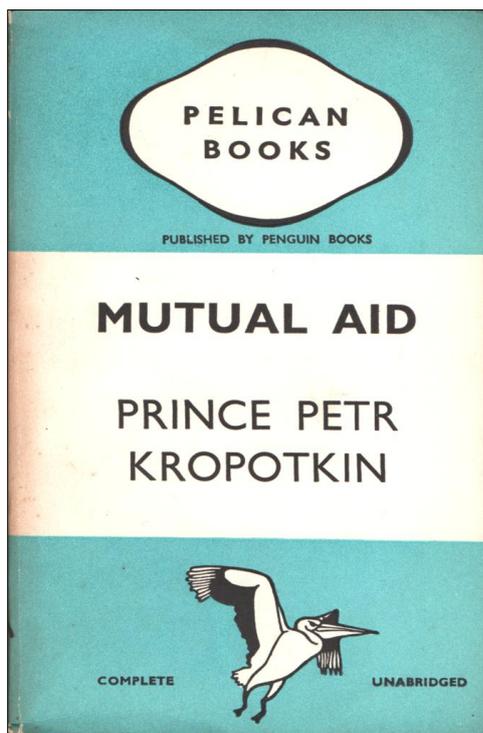
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<sup>1</sup> Dugatkn LA (2006) *The Altruism Equation*. Princeton University Press. p. 26

<sup>2</sup> Kropotkin P (1939) *Mutual Aid: a factor of evolution*. Harmondsworth, Penguin. p.13. [Originally published in 1902]

He concluded his argument as follows: *In the practice of mutual aid, which we can trace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions: and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support – not mutual struggle – has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race.* Although written over 120 years ago, the cogency of his thesis could be no more relevant than now- in our stricken world, seemingly at the mercy of a maelstrom of global conflicts - in which the hapless poor bear the brunt of misguided militancy and failed economic theory.

But also countering the Hobbesian pessimism, other philosophers, such as David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith, argued that *moral sentiment*, perhaps now best expressed as *compassion*, was intrinsic to human nature. For them, compassion – not reason, religion or custom – is the basis of ethics. As is often the case, a middle course between the extremes described might be nearer the truth, because we are, inevitably, selfish to a degree, for having *too* little regard for one's own welfare would deprive us of any capacity to be compassionate to others.



According to Wikipedia (2021), Kropotkin (1842– 1921) was a *Russian anarchist, socialist, economist, sociologist, revolutionary, historian, zoologist, political scientist, human geographer and philosopher.* Without doubt, he was a veritable polymath! Of these accomplishments, his characterisation as an ‘anarchist’ might raise some concerns. But in no way did he believe, or behave, in the manner which is usually understood by that term – a violent, bomb-throwing zealot. Indeed, his ‘respectability’ is indicated by the fact that he was invited to write the article on *Anarchism* for the 11<sup>th</sup> edition (1910) of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. By chance, I happen to own the complete set of this edition, making it possible for me to reproduce below the introductory paragraph of the five

page, double column entry.

In this article, we see expressed in a concise form, the philosophy of someone who believes in a society of freely associating individuals whose actions are underpinned by the natural desire to cooperate with others. Perhaps in very small groups, with largely common interests and concerns, the harmony so described might be possible. But I suspect that most of us would conclude that, in the heterogeneous global community to which, like it or not, we now all belong, this is merely a utopian fantasy. Even so, since most of us only engage with relatively few others, whether in person or by email etc, Kropotkin’s optimistic libertarianism may have some merits.

In truth, changed attitudes that pervade the global community are a crucial factor in ameliorating the current crisis in world affairs. Simply throwing money at problems, even if that were an option, is not enough – or even necessary. But cultural change, as e.g. represented in relatively recent times by the recognition of women’s rights, the abolition of slavery, the equality before the law of people of all

racism, religious faiths and cultural traditions, the acknowledgement of people's rights to exercise their chosen expressions of sexuality, and others, illustrate the way that respect for diversity and the natural habits of cooperation can revolutionise social norms. Some might regard such developments as fragile, and frequently infringed. But they are established in law, and serve as important symbols of advances in respect for human dignity that were the result of the efforts of several visionaries – the likes of Emmeline Pankhurst, William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King.

In essence, the important steps were those dependent on the conviction that all humans are members of the same species, the welfare and security of which depends on Kropotkin mutual aid. The simplest word for the desire to rebuild a more harmonious global society is *kindness*. And that seems to be a requirement not only to be practised randomly in *ad hoc* circumstances, but a necessity to extricate humanity from our current unprecedented predicament – which has in large part been brought about by aggressive rivalry and competitive behaviour.

The good news that Kropotkin announced was that it is a key part of our *human nature* to act unselfishly and with kindly intent – the attitudes that he observed in his acute studies of both animal and human groups when experiencing common threats to their survival, and nowadays is often evident in *the kindness of strangers*. I suggest that there could be no more challenging threats to the sustainability of human civilisation than those currently faced.

**ANARCHISM** (from the Gr. ἀν-, and ἀρχή, contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. In a society developed on these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the state in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international—temporary or more or less permanent—for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs. Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary—as is seen in organic life at large—harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the state.

From the Encyclopaedia Britannica 11<sup>th</sup> edition (1910)

BM

## *6. Limericks to raise a smile*

These eight limericks were selected from *The Penguin Book of Limericks*, compiled by E O Parrot (1983). A three page article on Limericks also appeared in Issue 14 of this Review.

<p>To Algebra God is inclined - The World is a Thought in his Mind It seems so erratic Because it's quadratic And the roots are not easy to find</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>J C B Date</i></p>	<p>There once was an eccentric old boffin Who remarked in a fine fit of coughing: It isn't the cough That carries you off But the coffin they carries you off in</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Anonymous</i></p>
<p>Isaac Singer (you probably know) Had a wish that his business should grow But inventers before him A few grudges bore him And thought him a real 'sew and sew'</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Peter Brookes</i></p>	<p>George Stephenson said: these repairs Are costing a fortune in spares I'll be out of pocket When I've finished this Rocket Unless British Rail raise their fares</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Frank Richards</i></p>
<p>Said Freud: I've discovered the Id Of all your repressions be rid It won't ease the gravity Of all the depravity But you'll know why you did what you did</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Frank Richards</i></p>	<p>There was a young man of Japan Who wrote verses that never would scan When folks told him so He replied 'Yes I know' But I always try to get as many words into the last line as I possibly can</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Anon</i></p>
<p>In Pinter's new play that's now running Our Harold has lost none of his cunning Throughout the three acts We hear just four facts But the pauses between are quite stunning</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Frank Richards</i></p>	<p>A careless explorer named Blake Fell into a tropical lake Said a fat alligator A few minutes later Very nice, but I still prefer cake</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ogden Nash</i></p>

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**BM**