
**Episode 1,047: Early Anarchists, from Godwin to Spooner — What Did They Believe?**

**Guest: Gerard Casey**

**WOODS:** I'm glad we're talking about this, because I think those of us who think of ourselves as so-called anarchocapitalists or anarchists in the Rothbardian tradition, we don't quite get what it means to be an anarchist in any other tradition because we feel like, okay, you're an anarchist, which means you don't favor coercive rules, but then you also are against all kinds of other forms of human association. Well, who's going to enforce your prejudices about those? Obviously some violent apparatus, so what kind of anarchist are you? But then on the other hand, those people look at us and say, *Well, you people want to have armed goons defending your private property. What kind of anarchist are you?*

So here's a great opportunity to sort all this out, and you've got several chapters in your book that cover this precise topic, *Freedom's Progress: A History of Political Thought*. We've talked about it a number of times before. So let's start with, you have a chapter on the anarchist prophets, and let's start there. There are two people in particular you introduce us to. I was going to say I can't tell which one's more peculiar, but I think it's quite obvious which one's more peculiar. Let's start with the less peculiar one. And in fact, let's see if you agree with me. Who's the less peculiar one here?

**CASEY:** William Godwin.

**WOODS:** Of course. All right. So what can you tell us about his view — for example, why would we not need a state? And then what is his view of property? Because it seems like when you're trying to understand and distinguish between these various people, it really comes down to their view of property.

**CASEY:** You're absolutely right. I think in many ways, when you're trying to figure out the various permutations and combinations that distinguish one kind of anarchist from another, property is really the key. And with a very broad brush, so-called left-wing anarchists tend to disregard or downplay the role of property if they don't eliminate it altogether, and that's one of the reasons why people from that tradition tend to get very hot under the collar when you say, "I'm an anarchist," and then you go on to say what you mean by it in the Rothbardian tradition. They say, "No, no, no. That's not anarchism." Because for them, it's part of the meaning of the term.

So William Godwin was a very interesting character. In his own day, he was immensely famous and he had about ten years of fame, and then he was completely eclipsed,

completely forgotten about. And even in the English-speaking world when people began to think about anarchism again, they sort of reinvented the wheel. And as I point on in my book, it's really irritating for him because he was the father of Mary Godwin, who became Mary Wollstonecraft, the writer of — whatever it is. Can't think of it now. Sorry, *Frankenstein — a*nd the father-in-law of Shelley. So he's known in this kind of relational fashion, so when people are talking about Shelley or others, they mention him in passing. But in his own day, he was the big name, and indeed, he was to some extent responsible for turning Shelley into an anarchist. So he's a very interesting guy.

But his notion of property again is very much — you'll find it echoing all the way through Europe. You'll find it echoed in the 19th century by people like Henry George. And his basic idea is that every human being is entitled to a share of the common stock of human possessions, not just a minimal amount that will keep him alive, but enough that would actually provide for his well-being. Now, he doesn't go into detail as to how this was to work out. George is famous obviously for the land tax, which was a way of sorting this out as he thought. Godwin doesn't actually go into details, but that's his sort of basic principle.

He's also interesting in that he thinks that human beings actually don't have rights. He is a kind of utilitarian before utilitarianism was invented, and he thinks that to talk about right is simply a *façon de parler*, just a way of talking about these things that doesn't have any real substance. So yeah, very interesting guy, and in a sense, anarchists ever since then have sort of reinvented Godwin's theories. The only anarchist I know of, by the way — this is to skip ahead, I suppose; we'll get to him in time. The only person who really picks up on Godwin is actually the Russian anarchist Kropotkin, and the reason for that is that Kropotkin lived the last 30 years of his life in Britain and became aware of it.

**WOODS:** He also takes the view with regard to the state that this form of association won't ultimately be necessary once — I don't know, is it a question of human beings grow morally and in intelligence to the point where they become aware of the ability of human reason to resolve their disputes? I don't know if it's a case of — because with him, I'm not as familiar with him — if it's a case of — I don't want to say quite the New Soviet man, but the idea of being that eventually we reach a state of moral evolution, whereby the state become unnecessary. I don't know if it's that, but it certainly is the Enlightenment faith in reason makes him think the state is not absolutely necessary. It's not a faded existence.

Which is interesting, because we have other people — I mean, Rothbard, for example — who's view — Well, Rothbard had sort of a mixed view of human nature, but one of his points about anarchism was precisely that human beings do have some bad qualities that seem to be encouraged by the state, and so that's why we need to not have the state, because you don't want people with these bad inclinations to have that kind of power. So all roads lead to there being no state. Whether human beings are good or bad, no state.

**CASEY:** Godwin is I suppose typically 18th century in his views here. He thinks that human beings are in principle perfectible, and what's I think most interesting about him is he's actually a social determinist. He thinks human beings are completely

determined by their social circumstances. This is a view of course that's now familiar to us from other sources. So what he thinks is that if human beings are inclined to do nasty things to each other, that's not in any way a consequence of their intrinsic nature. He wouldn't be a kind of secular Calvinist. It's rather that the social circumstances that surround him are wrong, so all you do is you change the circumstances and then people behave properly.

So the idea is if human beings are in the end perfectible, of course — and that's the problem — in the meantime, the state he thinks is a necessary evil. It's an evil, something we'd rather not have, but necessary given the present social circumstances in which we live. But he's fully confident that if we can change the circumstances, particularly of course if we take Godwin's proposals into account, then there will be great intellectual improvement and then in those circumstances, human beings won't relapse into indolence. They will do things because their circumstances — they won't just sort of hang around and freeload, and they would sort of work voluntarily and happily, sort of like the seven dwarves going, "Hi ho, hi ho, off to work we go," and everybody will be happy. Yes, I know what I think about that particular view [laughing].

**WOODS:** Well, now tell me about, let's say, the more — I don't want to say bizarre, but his philosophy is so out of the ordinary, the other figure in your chapter.

**CASEY:** Yeah, Max Stirner is an amazing figure. I don't know of anybody who was crazy enough like me to read his work, *The Ego and Its Own*. It's almost unreadable. And I couldn't even begin to try and read it in German. I suspect that the English translator made a heroic effort to make it sort of comprehensible, but it's very, very difficult. But in a way, Stirner is very useful, because what he does is he goes to the extreme. He effectively rejects pretty much everything except the naked ego, namely his own. He rejects human rights. He rejects society. And curiously enough, he rejects freedom. In other words, he thinks that the ego —

Well, sorry, let me make this point. He thinks that the ego is completely free and the freedom of the individual ego is such that it allows you — it doesn't permit you because there's no mention of morality here. Of course morality is rejected like anything else — it allows you in fact to subordinate other people and their freedoms to your own ends. It really is the epitome of the phrase "might is right," except that there really isn't any right when it comes right down to it. It's this really bizarre thing.

And here's an interesting personal anecdote. I actually had a Stirnerite in one of my lectures. He came up to me afterwards and said, "I'm a Stirnerite." And I said, "Seriously?" He goes, "Yes." And I said, "You know what that implies?" He goes, "Absolutely." And I said, "You know that if you're a Stirnerite, you have no principled grounds upon which to reject somebody else's misappropriating your property or your person." And he goes, "Absolutely." And I said, "You're prepared to live on those grounds?" And he said, "Yes."

**WOODS:** Okay, yeah, now you're having said that about that student means I have got to read this little passage, and you include this, with regard to his views on property. So Stirner says this: "The communists affirm that 'the earth belongs rightfully to him who tills it, and its products to those who bring them out.'" And this is Stirner

continuing: "I think it belongs to him who knows how to take it, or who does not let it be taken from him, does not let himself be deprived of it. If he appropriates it, then not only the earth, but the right to it too, belongs to him. This is egoistic right: it is right for me, therefore it is right." That's pretty stark.

**CASEY:** [laughing] It is. You really can't get more stark than that. It's in a way — I mean, one of my reasons for including Stirner is that so few people know about him, and there aren't that many Stirnerites, as you can imagine, because being Stirnerite sort of invites destruction. In a sense, you could of course defend yourself as a Stirnerite; it's just that if you're a Stirnerite and somebody attacks you, you have no moral position. You can't say it's wrong for you to be doing what you're doing or you oughtn't to do what you're doing. You are simply reliant on physical force, either your own or other people's to defend yourself. And in a way, the position isn't absolutely speaking self-refuting. It's not logically incoherent; it's just so practically impossible to actually live up to that particular principle that I don't see how anybody can actually manage it.

**WOODS:** And in particular, I don't see how you can really be an anarchist — at least you could say that maybe anarchism is your own personal preference, but if I as a Stirnerite think that the way that I find fulfillment is precisely by creating a state, staffing it, and lording it over Max Stirner, on what grounds can he object to that?

**CASEY:** He can't. My point is he has no moral position to object to it from. It's simply not possible. He can only as it were physically reject you, and that doesn't seem to me to be totally satisfactory.

**WOODS:** Not totally satisfactory, no. What is it that he contributes to the tradition of thought that we think of as anarchism?

**CASEY:** Well, I suppose it's the epitome of certain views taken to their sort of logical extremity. You have experience with this, as I'm sure I have had, when you're trying to argue with somebody. And one of the things you try to do is to find common ground. And you say, *Look, we both agree on this*, and then your argument will proceed. *Well, if you accept this, doesn't this other thing follow from it?* And the person may deny it or not, but the argument proceeds. The problem is when you talk to a Stirnerite, you say, *Well, shouldn't we respect each other's rights, at least in the minimal way,* which anarchists do — in other words, that I have the freedom to act in any way that I choose whether or not it's morally right or otherwise, but I have the freedom politically and legally to act in any way I choose provided that in so doing I don't infringe upon your liberty. And almost like 99.9% of people will agree with you on that and you can then proceed. But the Stirnerite says no, absolutely not. There are no rights.

And you find echoes of this, because see, remember Godwin rejects rights, and others from history before that, less so perhaps, but increasingly onwards, even if people won't come out and say it because of course the argument, while not being absurd, is kind of stark. A lot of people — like, for example, post-modernism effectively works on that principle. In other words, when you try to establish the common ground — you know, respect for others and all of the rest — it turns out that it's only their position and people who hold their position who are justified in complaining when they're badly treated. You, on the other hand, are fair game. So you get a lot of what I call

functional Stirnerites in the modern world, even if they're not as intellectually honest as Max Stirner himself.

**WOODS:** All right, let's go on to what you call the classical anarchists, and let's start with Proudhon. And it's been interesting to me to read some of this stuff, because I've been meaning to get to this for years and years and years, been meaning to get to it, trying to understand what they're saying and where they're coming from. And I thought that your explanation of his views on property at least — even though I don't agree with them, at least it makes some sense. I can see what he's saying. He's not saying that you can't have your own toothbrush — although perhaps there are people later on who would say you can't have your own toothbrush, but he doesn't take that view. So in his work *What Is Property?* what's the answer he comes up with to that question?

**CASEY:** Yeah, I mean, if people know anything about Proudhon, they think they have this inflammatory statement, "Property is theft," in mind. And of course they don't read anything and they don't understand what he's saying. But what he's rejecting, his position is a bit more subtle than it might appear from that catchphrase. What he's rejecting is the idea that you can have property in something, in land or in equipment or in tools or whatever it might be, in such a way that it gives you some kind of absolute possession.

So when I write about it, I distinguish between property L and property C. And so property L is — in other words, if you're actually using a piece of land productively and you're working on it and you're producing crops and so on, and you're living there and you're there all the time, as it were, then for him, that's the appropriate or that's a defensible kind of property, whereas if you owned, I don't know, 50,000 acres and you were renting most of it to other people and were collecting the rents, for him, that's not really a defensible kind of property. So yes, if you want to take it down to the absurd, you own your toothbrush because it's yours and you use it all the time, and your chair and your computer and your tools.

And remember, see, Proudhon came from a working-class background, so his model, the kind of working idea was the sort of carpenter going around with his bag of tools. The tools were his because he uses them all the time to work, but the idea he's rejecting is the idea of landlords owning vast swathes of territory and simply claiming rent from people they let it out to. For him, that's not property, and when he says property is theft, that's what he is rejecting.

**WOODS:** So how does he imagine society working in the absence of a state, which is something he favors?

**CASEY:** Well, yeah, of course Proudhon is associated with the notion of mutualism, and mutualism is the relationships that exist between A and B. If two people are friends, then that's a mutual relationship. I'm friends with you only if you're friends with me. It's hard to be friends with somebody if the person you're trying to be friends with isn't actually friends with you. So the idea he thinks is that human beings, if they're left alone outside the remit of the state, will spontaneously relate to one another in this mutually satisfactory way. It's not necessarily a utilitarian conception. People do it for friendship, for example, not necessarily because other people can provide them with goods and services, though they do that too.

And so he thinks that if you don't have coercive government, law and order will come around by each citizen. So instead of collective force, you have public force. Instead of standing armies, you have industrial associations. In place of police, you have identity of interest. In place of political centralization, you have economic centralization. And so he thinks all of these things will come about.

And I think this is actually a very important notion, because that's something that anarchists of the libertarian persuasion believe does in fact happen every day, by and large, that most of our relationships to other people are not based upon either coercion or upon the threat of coercion, that we do in fact spontaneously relate to other people because we recognize in them ourselves. And without killing ourselves necessarily or giving all our property away, we do relate to other people, and we will in fact go beyond utilitarian considerations to regard for other people, again, provided that the cost isn't enormous.

**WOODS:** So he's got a view of the economy that's different from ours and a view of property that's different from ours. So I guess as we go along, I kind of want to see what, if anything, does our tradition of thought draw from these people, or if we do draw from these people, is it merely coincidental.

**CASEY:** I don't think it's quite coincidental because, remember, at the start of our discussion, we were making the point that your attitude towards property is one way which anarchists of various stripes sort themselves out. So Proudhon, as we've seen, doesn't reject property completely. What he does reject, however, is a notion of property that libertarian anarchists would not be prepared to accept.

So let me give an example. Suppose I leave my house and there is nobody in my house, so it's not actually currently occupied by me. I'm not actually currently using it. Suppose I stay away for 25 years so that it's vacant for that length of time. In those circumstances, Proudhon would not consider the house to be my property. He would consider that I had effectively abandoned it.

Now let's take the other extreme. Suppose I leave my house to walk down the street to pick up my dog, who's sort of wandered off. So my house is absent, unoccupied, I don't know, for five minutes. And when I come back, I find somebody there who says, Oops, too bad. You've vacated your property. You abandoned it." Now, Proudhon is not insane enough to think that that would actually constitute some kind of abandonment, that your failure to actually use your house for those five minutes meant that it had ceased to be your property. So somewhere in between in relation to property, there is an appropriate use so that it continues to be your property. And then on the other side of that boundary, there is an inappropriate use so that it's no longer that way.

Libertarian anarchists, of course, consider that your rights to property extend across the board in lots of ways. You can destroy various things and so on. But one of the things of course that you can do with property is you can lease it out to somebody else. So one of the uses of my property and indeed one that would libertarian anarchists would be happy to accept is that I can rent my house out to other people. That wouldn't really be possible for a Proudhonian, because in doing that, you have as it were given up your use of the property, "use" here understood very narrowly in the sense of your own individual, personal use of the property. Of course in a larger sense

of use, you're continuing to use the property because you're deriving a rent from it. And so there would be the dividing point between, say, libertarian anarchists and Proudhonian anarchist.

**WOODS:** Let's, if you don't mind, skip over Bakunin just in the interest of time and go right to Kropotkin. So these names are hard to remember and distinguish between. But all right, so what are we dealing with now with Kropotkin? How does he differ or how is he the same as some of the others? Because then after that, if we have a little time I'd like to get to your chapter that includes the Anglophone anarchists, in particular Lysander Spooner, who's somebody a lot of listeners will be familiar with.

**CASEY:** So one point upon which various thinkers differ is, suppose you accept that human beings simply as human beings have a right to exist in some way and therefore a right to avail of food and shelter and water and all of the rest. One question that arises is how do we give effect to that. Is it done on the basis of deed, or is it done on the basis of need? Now, what I mean by that is when you are distributing or when whoever it is is distributing the various goods and services to people, do you take into account what people have actually done, what contribution they have made so that the distribution is somehow proportional to their contribution? Or do you think that, regardless of contribution, people have a legal right to some proportion of the distributed goods.

So Proudhon and Bakunin both think that the distribution of goods and services is somehow proportional to deed. You have to take into account what the individual you're thinking about has actually contributed.

**WOODS:** And this is where Kropotkin differs.

**CASEY:** Kropotkin differs because Kropotkin is an anarchocommunist, and here deed is irrelevant. He thinks effectively that there is no sensible way you can actually track the contributions that people actually make to the net developments or net production of goods in any economy, and therefore it's completely pointless, so that human beings regardless of their contribution — even if that could be sorted out, regardless of their contributions, have a need and distribution is to be made of the goods and services available in any society according to the needs of individuals and not to their deeds.

**WOODS:** So that really is the key thing, is what's — it's *a* key thing, figuring out how do people get what they deserve or need. And if Kropotkin's not going to speak in terms of deserve; it's more in terms of need, then, again, just in the interest of time — because the point of this is to get everybody to read your book, right? We cannot answer all questions here. They should be reading *Freedom's Progress: A History of Political Thought*. It's not an inexpensive book, but it's the equivalent of — I'm now saying five books. So when you look at it that way, it's actually a steal. Let's say a quick word before we move on about what anarchosyndicalism and how that differs from anarchocommunism.

**CASEY:** Yes. Again, so it's more a question of practicalities, because Kropotkin isn't really particularly enlightening on how you give practical effect to distribution of the available goods and services. And so anarchosyndicalism comes in at this point and

says, look, hang on a second. We already have voluntary associations in place. These are the trades unions. See, Kropotkin was in favor of doing this by voluntary associations but didn't really give you much of a clue as to how these were to be specified or how they were to come into existence or what you were going to do with them.

But the anarchosyndicalists said we already have trade unions, we already have these organizations of workers who come together in particular areas of the economy. And so what you do is you take the notion of distribution there and therefore you sort of localize it in the trades unions and the members of the trades unions are the ones who will have access to the resources that the trades unions associate with. The idea would be of course that you get rid of the capitalists and the trades unions operate the workers, and then in any particular industry, all of the workers in that industry will have distributed to them according to their need. So it should be like a very sort of localized version of the — I don't know what the adjective would be — Kropotkinian ideal.

**WOODS:** I've read a pretty good article on the difficulties of this system so I'll link to that at TomWoods.com/1047. All right, let's move onto, if we may, at least briefly — let's take on at least two or three of the Anglophone anarchists. And let's start with Josiah Warren and then get into Lysander Spooner. So these we sometimes call the individualist anarchists — not that they're the only individualists among anarchists, but certainly in the American tradition we would call these the individualist anarchists.

**CASEY:** Yes. Warren is particularly interesting because, given his dates, he actually precedes Proudhon, and so it's very interesting just from a historical perspective to see that he develops similar ideas. He also comes very close — I hope this doesn't shock anybody, but he comes very close to being a Stirnerite, because his notion of the individual is very radical. He rejects commonality so much and so avertedly that he almost makes the individual something that's completely suo generis, completely its own thing without any sort of relation to anything else. And I think most people would think that human beings all share this sort of common type or essence. In other words, you're a human being I'm a human being. Even those people who oppose us are human beings — that's in our more charitable moments. But Warren thinks that one exists at root are individuals and only individuals. Anything else is a collection, a composite mixture.

And he sees then, and we would of course agree with him on this one as libertarian anarchists, that the basic political problem is the perpetual attempt to subordinate the individual to groups. But taken to the extreme, I would argue that Warren's individualism is actually self-stultifying. It strangles itself. But I also think that Warren's writings are really worth reading, because it's the — especially for people in the U.S. and North America generally — because it's a Native American form of anarchistic thought, so rather than the classical European, Russian brand of anarchism, here we have your own thing as it were developed by one of your own people.

**WOODS:** I like, by the way, because I think some libertarians could stand to absorb the point, his point that in contrast to Stirner, there's no problem with associating with other people as long as these associations are voluntary. So he says, "No subordination can be more perfect than that of an orchestra, but it is all voluntary." So if you choose

to be involved with groups of other people, there's nothing wrong with this. This is not collectivism. There's no problem with that. In fact, that's even — this is a side point, but this is why I don't actually like calling libertarians individualists, because who says you have to be an individualist just to believe that people shouldn't initiate physical violence against other people? From that, how does it follow that I believe that the individual is the only thing that matters in the universe. That does not follow at all.

**CASEY:** No, this actually is a common error and it comes up all the time. In fact, I was speaking just this Saturday; I was speaking at a meeting of the European Students for Liberty in Belfast and, you know, in the question-and-answer period afterwards, I was saying, look, to be free considered abstractly is fine, but we actually want to use our freedom. And one way we use our freedom is in cooperating with other people. I mean, it may be that there are some people out there whose idea of human flourishing is, I don't know, to wear a bear skin and go live in the middle of the woods. But most of us actually want to associate with other people, want to have wives and husbands and children, want to have communities that we live in so that we can develop our talents. It's kind of really hard to play classical music by yourself if you're living up a tree. So you really do need to do that.

And in doing this, when we use our freedom — and we actually pay a price; we're cashing in part of our freedom in order to do it. But of course, that's not a problem provided, as we were just talking about here with Warren, provided that you do it voluntarily. If people were compelled at gunpoint to attend symphony concerts, it would be slightly problematic on the libertarian perspective. But hey, if I want to make a contribution, I don't know, to the Seattle Symphony or whatever and turn up on a Friday night for the old Sibelius concert, that's terrific. That's what life's all about.

**WOODS:** Indeed, indeed. So all right, I knew you and I agree on pretty much everything. So let's talk about — just because I want to try and get as much in here so that people will say, *Man, there's such interesting stuff in this book. I've got to go out and get it*, let's talk about Lysander Spooner. Of all these people, probably if I were to ask my listeners which one of these people have you actually read, overwhelmingly the most likely one to have been read by listeners of this show would be Lysander Spooner. And in particular, a lot of times what people have read would be his critique of the constitution and of constitutions in general because they presume consent that has not been given and they proceed on that basis and he's got quite a significant critique of it.

But we're stepping back from that a bit. We're looking at Spooner's view of justice, which if you read some of his other writings — like in his work on the unconstitutionality of slavery, he starts off with the discussion of questions like this, that when you're a child you very easily and readily absorb certain basic moral principles, which he thinks kind of goes to show that these principles really are natural to us, they exist before any legislation. They indeed make legislation superfluous.

**CASEY:** Yeah, indeed. I mean, I don't think it's any secret that Lysander Spooner is one of my heroes, and I think he's right on this. Anyone who's had children themselves or been a teacher, for example, who have been around children will realize that almost at the same time as they learn to speak and to interact with one another, they have

absorbed — unreflectively, of course, because they're not in a position to think about it theoretically — they have absorbed sort of principles in common.

They will say things like, "That's not fair," where, say for example, two children are arguing over the use of a toy, and say it belongs to child A and not child B. And a parent says to child A, "You must give your brother your toy," and child A says, "No, it's mine." And the parent takes it from child A and gives it to B — child A would very often say, "That's not fair. It's my toy."

Actually, I know this to be true because this is exactly what I did when I was a child. I can remember on one occasion, I don't know quite what it was, but somebody gave me not just a piece of candy but a whole back of candy — this was really unusual — and my parents suggested that it might be really nice for me to share this with my little sister. And because I was a precocious brat, I said, "Who's candy is this? Is it mine?" And they said yes. And I said, "In which case, I decline to share it." And you know, to my parents' eternal credit, they didn't force me to do it.

So children have this innate sense of injustice and they will explain when they feel, rightly or wrongly, that being transgressed. So really, it's very hard for anybody to take seriously the idea that you don't really understand what justice and injustice consist in.

**WOODS:** So therefore, what can Spooner contribute to our understanding of society? On the basis of these simple insights that we gain when we're young, how is he able to draw out major principles for the organization of society?

**CASEY:** All right, well, what he thinks is if you do have this understanding or a pre-reflective understanding and so on, it's not hard to make it reflective. You simply point it out to people, and they go, *Oh, right, of course. That's what we've understood all along*. And so if natural justice is, as he thinks, if you know it very easily and if it's universal and if the rights associated with it are inalienable and prescriptable — in other words, they can't be taken away from you and they can't be given to others without your consent — why do you need legislation? In other words, why do we need a group of people sitting in a room somewhere in Washington or London or Dublin making complicated rules for the use of your property or how you relate to other people? We don't need these. The short answer is we don't need legislation.

But then of course the point comes up: well, we've got it, whether we like it or not, and in abundance. And the question then is why. And his answer is, look, whenever a society advances so that you get more than the means of subsistence — in other words, whenever you get the accumulation of goods beyond a subsistence level — someone, there is always somebody there who wants to take it and say to the others — in other words, whoever has accumulated the property, there is always somebody there willing to relieve them of the burden of that property. And in fact, he thinks this kind of theft in this way has been institutionalized in the form of governments and enforced by the making of laws.

The paper I gave actually at the weekend was all about sort of welfare, and I was making I think a kind of Spoonerian point, which is this: in other words, if at any stage you can distinguish two groups of people, and property is taken from A by force or by

the threat of force and given to B, then A are underprivileged and B are privileged — which is kind of ironic, because typically in our welfare societies, some of the people who receive the ill-gotten gains of government force are often described as being the underprivileged. Of course when you think about it, anybody who gets somebody else's property free, gratis, and for nothing is actually privileged. And this is I think a kind of Spoonerian point.

**WOODS:** Indeed, it is. Now, he's not of course saying that you might not feel morally compelled to do good things for other people. The question really is a matter of is physical force being used or not? So there's a lot in Spooner that we encounter and say he sounds like one of our own people writing. Is there anything in Spooner that you encountered where you say, well, he's really good but he's not perfect?

**CASEY:** That's a very good question. I've never really thought about it that way. I can't — reserving judgment for the moment, I can't think of anything that I have found fundamentally objectionable in Spooner in the way that I would have found it, for example, in others, thinkers like Godwin, for example, or indeed even in Warren.

**WOODS:** Well, what about Benjamin Tucker then? Because he's often mentioned in the same breath almost as if they're the same person, but I think he's not quite as good and I'm not entirely sure why.

**CASEY:** Well, Tucker's really interesting, and of course I mean like he's famous and he had his magazine, *Liberty*, which, by the way, if any of your readers have never had the opportunity to look through it, they really should, because one of the things that will strike you immediately when you look through this material is just how contemporary the discussions are in that journal. These conversations are still continuing. So these are not sort of merely historical documents of mere historic interest. These are contemporary documents.

So yeah, see, Tucker began effectively as a Spoonerian and as a natural rights exponent. But what he did by the time he got to the late 1880s, he'd actually become a kind of Stirnerite, which is really amazing. He went through this kind of conversion from natural rights, from Spooner, to something like Stirner. And then he — oh my goodness, you should then read the discussions in his journal after he did this. It's hot stuff. It's great stuff. So he is very strange. And of course, as we've discussed earlier, he suffered all the sort of problems of trying to explain and defend himself on Stirnerite grounds and it's very, very difficult for him to do that.

So I think many people, if they know anything about Tucker, they all tend to think of him as something along the lines of Josiah Warren and maybe even a kind of Spoonerian, which he was in his younger days, but they probably don't realize the extent to which he underwent this Stirnerite conversion and just how radical that was. He actually published Stirner's work in English. He was the first one to do it.

**WOODS:** I like your point about the occupy versus use criterion of land ownership, because again, with Tucker we see that. Land that's occupied and used can be owned, but only for so long as it is occupied and used, and that was not Spooner's view, and therefore, Tucker went after him for that.

But you say, "The Tucker/Warren doctrine on property rights won't do. The occupy/use criterion of land ownership rules out any just practice of land rental, even if I the landowner want to rent it to you and you the would-be tenant want to rent it from me. The individual anarchists' problem with land ownership stems ultimately from the economic doctrine of the labor theory of value. This doctrine, which also undermines Marx's critique of capitalism, lies at the root of the individual anarchists' dismissal of the legitimacy of rent, interest, and profit, and from this follows their rejection of a full-blooded account of land ownership."

So I know Rothbard had a great deal of respect for the individualist anarchists. What was he seeing in them?

**CASEY:** Well, again, see, like many people, they had a grasp on part of the truth but not necessarily on all of it. And I think I make a large point here, which I think is defensible but maybe people would want to take me up on, which is that they are all suffering from the labor theory of value, which was part of the classical doctrine in economics, and they didn't really understand the whole notion of marginal utility. And therefore, because they were if you like prey to this doctrine, they found it difficult to recognize a full-blooded notion of property which wasn't simply tied into the actual use and so on, and we saw how Proudhon, for example, tried to distinguish between property and possession. And we see the same intellectual wrangling and going on with both Tucker and Warren.

Maybe this point would sort of make something clear. Maybe I could give you an example. Look, in the common law system — I don't know quite how it works in the various states in the U.S., but here in Ireland, for example, if you own property and if somebody comes onto your land — say you had a large estate, 50,000 acres. And somebody comes along on the outside and begins to act as an owner, in other words, by doing something like fencing off a piece of it or building a house or a shed or whatever it might be. And if you, the actual owner, the legal owner, don't do something to indicate your right for a period of time — now, not five minutes. Not even five months, but something like, I don't know, 10 to 14 years, the law will consider that you have effectively abandoned that piece of land and they will deem that the person who is now on your land or who has been there for 14 years is now the effective owner.

And you can see this isn't completely crazy, because if you were to have a notion of ownership that said I own this property and if I go off for 500 years and I make no arrangements for its use and I don't rent it and I don't do anything else, just leave it there, it's not unreasonable to think that you've abandoned it, right? So something like that — I'm trying to make the case here for Warren and Tucker as best I can. Something like that I think is at the root of their thinking. But what they've done is they've moved what I think is a reasonable period for considering something to be abandoned like 14 years down effectively almost to a point, so that if you rent it, you're considered effectively to have abandoned it. And that seems to me to be crazy.

**WOODS:** All right, so we've now looked at I don't know how many people, but these are names that get thrown around. And we encounter some of these people online, because any time you use the word anarchism you're going to have these sorts of folks pop up and generally make criticisms of you, and I'm not sure how many of our own

people, myself included, have really taken the time to delve into what these other folks are saying. And you devote quite a significant amount of space — I mean, it's a huge book, but still, three solid chapters to this topic, to anarchists before, let's say, Rothbard, whom you also devote some time to. So some of them obviously are better than others and some see some things that others don't. What would be — would you say that, if you were to look at most histories of political thought, would you say that in general they devote the same proportion of space to these folks that you did?

**CASEY:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** And if not, how would you justify your decision?

**CASEY:** The answer is no, I don't. When I was pitching this book around to various publishers at various stages, some of the readers were coming back and saying, "Why is he talking about these people?"

**WOODS:** That's funny. Okay, so they saw exactly what I'm seeing. But I have no problem with it because I think it does help clarify what anarchism is all about.

**CASEY:** Yeah, because again, I think the larger picture is when people are interested in political philosophy, they take it as a given that really the question is what kind of government is best, whereas the more basic question is why do we have government at all. So the anarchists are the ones who really put the prior question, but because they're like the unwanted guests of a party, the guy who comes in and hasn't showered for three weeks and is sort of splashing drink all over everybody, nobody really wants to talk to him. So the anarchists raised the kind of questions that people who are typically involved in political philosophy would prefer weren't raised. They want to get on to say I prefer A to B or B to C or C to D, whereas the anarchists are saying why do we need either A, B, C, or D.

And so really, one of my reasons for writing this book, because it really is an account of the development of freedom, is it's not until we — although there are obviously indications of anarchist thought before the 18th and 19th centuries, it's not until we come to the 18th and 19th centuries that anarchism becomes reflectively self-aware. And these people, whatever their defects might be and limitations might be, are nonetheless the people who raise these kinds of questions that for people like us are still relevant. These are live questions for us, and the people I'm dealing with are a representative sample of the kinds of people who began that conversation. And the issues they raise and the arguments they present are still very much the kinds of things that we deal with today.

So for the people I hope will be the kind of people who read my book, these three chapters should be — I don't want to say that the others aren't important, but these should really be the heart of what they're reading, and they should make an effort I think to come to terms with these thinkers, not least by going back, as I said for example in relation to Tucker, by looking at the material in his journal, which is still fascinating today.

**WOODS:** Well, I couldn't agree more about what you just said, because whatever their faults are, at least they're not begging the question, which is what almost everybody else in political thought is doing. They're, as you say, beginning with, *All right, what would be the best kind of state?* But okay, maybe you think it's obvious that that's the ultimate form of human organization, but you can't just start there. Just for the sake of intellectual completeness, you've got to give me some justification. Even if it's a dumb one like about roads and police, like no one's ever thought of that objection before, and you don't feel like you need to answer any of our arguments, at least acknowledge that you're making a value judgment when you say, *Let's figure out what the best kind of state is*. Instead of making it seem like you're just an impartial scientist who's assessing all of the evidence, you're completely overlooking a whole bunch of people who disagree with the premise.

**CASEY:** Indeed. I don't want to exaggerate, because when you're reading some political philosophers or accounts of political philosophy, you will find from time to time a discussion of anarchism, but it tends to be very brief, very often cursory. It tends to be global rather than focused on particular anarchists and their points. And it tends to be set up only to be dismissed rapidly.

**WOODS:** That's true.

**CASEY:** Yeah, and so you do find it in bits and pieces. So what I'm hoping is that — You know, the modest effort here of my three chapters clearly can't cover everything here, and so it's really an invitation to people to go find out more for themselves. But at least anybody who makes an effort to go through the chapters here — and I apologize that they're not a big longer. They probably should have been — but would be in a better position to understand really the roots of anarchism as a theory and in a position to understand it for themselves and indeed to apply it to current debates. And if it did that, then I would be very happy.

**WOODS:** Of course the book is *Freedom's Progress: A History of Political Thought*, linked at TomWoods.com/1047. It is the book that all the cool kids are getting in 2017 and '18 and so on and on into the future. You have to have it. You need to know this stuff about all these different people, and you need to have a reliable guide, and I cannot think of any more reliable guy than Professor Gerard Casey, whom I thank very much for his time today. Thank you.

**CASEY:** Thank you, Tom.