

I entered graduate school having spent much of my adult life working in social movement organizations of various types, but I had become frustrated by the limitations of protest politics and doubtful about the prospects, or the value, of revolution. During this period I was also involved in work in the San Francisco Bay Area that sought to develop alternative institutions based around cooperative ideals, and came to believe that this could represent a more productive—if longer-term—path to social change. However, much of my experience with the cooperative movement suggested that it had little sense of its politics, and, outside of fairly small-scale, isolated groups, it did not seem to see itself as anything more than a friendlier sort of capitalism. Thus, my objective in graduate school was to work toward a political theory of cooperatives that could help one of the world's largest social movements gain a sense of itself as a *movement*.

My research into the history of cooperatives led me to the realization that rather than developing an ideological framework from scratch, my project involved a kind of restoration, as in its earliest days cooperatives had been envisioned as precisely the kind of transformative social movement I envisioned. Drawn by a footnote in a paper by Carole Pateman to the work of William Thompson, I discovered ideas that I had associated with Marx, expressed when Marx was but a young boy. Further research into Thompson unveiled an important and influential thinker whose work has been largely ignored or underappreciated in work on the history of political thought. It also led me to the work of Thompson's mentor, someone whose work has been anything but ignored: Jeremy Bentham. However, I quickly found that, because I was coming to Bentham through Thompson, I had a very different perspective on a number of elements of Bentham's thought, some of which directly challenge the orthodoxy of Bentham interpretation, including among scholars in the contemporary revisionist literature. Close examination of the parallels and tensions between Bentham and Thompson led to my recognition that the differences between them

arise because they employ different conceptions of happiness. This became the basis for my dissertation, *The Politics of Happiness and the Practice of Democracy*, which closely examines the way Bentham and Thompson conceptualize happiness and the implications of this for their theories of utility and democracy. The dissertation concludes with a chapter on Thompson's role in the historical development of cooperatives, showing how the principles that guide the cooperative movement today can be seen as having derived from Thompson's work.

In developing and doing the research for my dissertation I traversed a rich field of intersecting theoretical paths: democratic theory including economic democracy; utilitarianism; political economics and the historical and theoretical foundations of property; community and associated questions of identity; and the nature of politics and the political. In the course of this I found that a number of the topics involved in my research had received little attention in political theory. This is generally true of Thompson, but also certain aspects of Bentham's work, as well as cooperatives generally and the concept of happiness.

As a result of my dissertation work, I was invited to contribute articles on William Thompson, Pain, and Pleasure for the upcoming *Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism*. Parts of some chapters are currently under review by journals, with still others being prepared for submission. The dissertation itself has been turned into a book manuscript, and major university publishers are currently in the process of reviewing the prospectus.

My research agenda extends well beyond the dissertation, and includes both articles and book-length works. I am interested in continuing the work of developing a political theory of cooperatives, for which I see the dissertation as a starting point, not an end. Part of this involves further work in democratic theory, in particular showing how cooperatives can be understood as an institutional framework in which contemporary theories of radical democracy can be put into

practice. Another element requiring further development involves engaging with community theory, to understand the functioning of cooperatives as a particular sort of community, in part to recognize the political nature of that community and to consider the dynamics not only within the community but between the community of the cooperative with the larger social context in which it is situated. A third project involves both organizational theory as well as empirical research, as it would be concerned with the existing practices of cooperatives, to consider the challenges they face, both practically and structurally, in implementing democratic practices. A related project would bring together the work of a number of scholars doing historical, theoretical and empirical research on the politics of cooperatives into a single volume that would help to elevate the profile of cooperatives as a valuable research subject in the social sciences.

I also have research interests that are not directly related to cooperatives. One area of interest involves expanding the work on William Thompson, to better understand his place in the history of political thought, and of political economics in particular. This involves reaching backward into the development of republicanism and early anti-capitalist movements such as the Diggers, as well as a consideration of the classical political economists around Thompson's own time (Smith, Ricardo, and James Mill), and into the future (JS Mill, Marx, Jevons and Menger). Work on Thompson's influence on Marx and JS Mill would constitute a full-length project in its own right. Another, related project would be to produce an edited and annotated edition of Thompson's primary work, *An Inquiry into the Principles for the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness*, prior to the work's bicentennial in 2024.

Another interest connects the dissertation with environmental political theory. Thompson is a strong critic of the institution of private property, and in the course of my graduate studies I spent a year focused on theories of private property and its historical development. Inspired by

the ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood's call for a "new conception of property" that comes "from the perspective of the land," this project is conceived of as a genealogical study of the ideological foundations and the ontological function of property, with the intention of opening up space for a new way of conceptualizing property. As I envision it, in place of the tendency of private property to establish separation between people and between people and nature, and promote an instrumentalist ethic, a new concept of property would promote a more holistic perspective that emphasizes interaction and interdependence, and promotes an ethic of mutuality.