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Toward a Conceptual History of Radical Philanthropy:

Spenceanism and the Ragged-Trousered Lovers of Mankind (Imperial Britain, ca. 1790–1820)

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I. CLAIMING PHILANTHROPY FROM BELOW

In his masterpiece of working-class literature, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), “Robert Tressell” (the pen name of Robert Noonan) recounted the everyday drudgeries of a group of impoverished masons trapped in the capitalist cycle of looking for, performing, and losing precarious jobs in Edwardian England. A key feature of the novel’s humorously moving style is the use of the term “philanthropists” to describe the poverty-stricken carpenters who, despite creating “the abundance of things that are made by work,” enjoyed none of them. Instead, they “lived in want and died of hunger” so “the people who did nothing” could revel in the “benefits of civilisation”—truly charitable of them, Tressell sarcastically remarked.¹ Whereas the “philanthropic workers” were committed to toiling “at their . . . unselfish task of making money” for their masters (mockingly branded “most deserving cases”), the latter engaged in benevolent activities aimed at inducing the former to “beg as a favour for what one is entitled to demand as a right.”² Whereas capitalism required the exhausting exertions of the poor only seemingly mitigated by the humiliating charity of the rich, the socialist system Tressell longed for would abolish “such principle of philanthropy” forever.³

The novel satirically twists the conventional meaning of “philanthropy” to parody the hypocrisy of upper-class charity. However, there is a thin, almost obscured thread linking Tressell’s trick to the appropriation of the language of philanthropy by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British radical movement, especially in its Spencean current, which was not merely rhetorical but attempted to put forward a conceptual alternative “from below.” As demonstrated by Hugh Cunningham in his recent ground-breaking study, it was in the mid-eighteenth century that “philanthropy” entered the British public debate as a socially engaged and secularized activity, overtaking previously prevailing terms such as the privately devolved and religiously inspired “charity” and the more generically well-wishing “benevolence.” Subsequently, in the wake of the French Revolution, a semantic controversy arose as revolutionaries across the Channel presented themselves as *philanthropes*, establishing a connection between philanthropy and a universalist (and dangerously expansionist) love for mankind.⁴ However, the Revolution was only the first of a series of historical transitions during which British observers interrogated the merits and faults of professing philanthropy; the campaigns for the abolition of the slave trade and enslavement and the reform of the Poor Laws, among others, also contributed to this debate.⁵

If, therefore, during the last two centuries, philanthropy repeatedly became an intellectual “battlefield”—or, as recently shown by Arthur Gautier concerning the French context, a heatedly “contested concept”—this article aims to further investigate the semantic struggle that unfolded around that notion.⁶ It does so by examining a thus far

underexplored aspect: the ways in which, at the turn of the nineteenth century, certain British appeals to philanthropy were associated with a revolutionary overthrow of property relations and a transformation of the established order of society in the interest of the poor and laborers.⁷ Inspired by Cunningham's classic work on patriotism and Mark Philp's investigation of the interplay between radical "politics and language," this article shows how the French revolutionary appeals to "philanthropy" transformed the term into a "tool of opposition" in the British context,⁸ igniting the attempts of some Jacobin-inspired theorists and militants to radicalize the notion beyond the French Jacobins' hostility to redistributive aspirations and their defense of private property rights.⁹ Therefore, while Cunningham has reconstructed the intellectual controversy between the promoters and the critics of philanthropy, this research expands on his analysis by complicating the composition of the philanthropic front and shedding light on its internal fragmentation.

As it adopts the conceptual perspective recently employed by Gautier,¹⁰ this analysis is cognizant of the important remark made by Reinhart Koselleck on the difference between "words" and "concepts."¹¹ On the one hand, in the investigated context, "philanthropy" continued on occasion to be used interchangeably or in conjunction with its cognates, "charity" and "benevolence";¹² on the other, some of its uses descended from its conventional meaning (as exemplified by Tressell), while others suggest a strategic and tactical employment (as a way to evade repression by presenting one's activities as harmless). Moreover, one should be mindful of Philp's caveat, that radical forms of expression are rarely doctrinal but are rather exploratory and "protean," developing within a process of polemical confrontation and involving a massive deployment of propaganda.¹³ Nonetheless, some occurrences can be identified that, once disentangled from rhetoric, reveal an ideological, oppositional stance regarding what genuine "philanthropy" consisted of and who could legitimately boast it. Therefore, this article does not limit itself to arguing that different actors claimed to be promoting the well-being of mankind by using the same word but shows that their appropriations of "philanthropy" corresponded to fundamentally contrasting views about the essence of this well-being and the ways it should be promoted. It is by examining the constellation of meanings of "philanthropy" and the disagreement over them that this research reconstructs the conceptual depth of an etymologically evocative word.

This research further shows that this notion appears to have undergone the same process of politicization, ideologization, and (attempted) democratization that, according to Koselleck, altered the semantics of other concepts during the Age of Revolution.¹⁴ It was during this "saddle period," when philanthropy had yet to permanently acquire its middle-class and paternalist overtones and current meaning as an act of giving by the rich to the poor, that some British "ultra-radicals" (including Thomas Spence and the Spenceans) presented as philanthropic acts of taking by the poor from, and against, the rich.¹⁵ By showing the contribution of radicalism in general, and Spenceanism in particular, to the conceptual contest around a specific notion, the next sections investigate that brand of philanthropy which did not operate top-down but instead at the grassroots level.¹⁶ Not the disciplining, condescending philanthropy of the rich for the poor, but the uncompliant and unfilial philanthropy of the poor for themselves.¹⁷

This article does not argue that these competing notions of "philanthropy" neatly correspond to opposite classes, starkly overlapping with internally homogeneous social groups. The bipolarity between "the rich" and "the poor" oversimplifies the stratification of the late eighteenth-century British social structure by overshadowing the emergence

of the middle classes as alternately the allies of the aristocracy and the “protectors” of the lower orders and concealing the expanding gulf between the laboring and the indigent poor.¹⁸ Moreover, the realm of philanthropy was internally differentiated by conservative and progressive stances, religious and secular motivations, and parochial and transnational purposes.¹⁹ At the same time, however, there was an underlying, fundamental divergence: a difference in attitude toward the order of society and the very existence of inequality. Whereas the “haves”—whether aristocrats or bourgeois, Whigs or Tories, Anglicans or dissenters—aimed to maintain existing property and labor relations, some of the “have-nots” fought to overthrow them. While several charitable associations and individuals promoted philanthropy as an aimed at validating social hierarchies, there were differently phil-anthropic societies and militants for whom the highest demonstration of “love for mankind” involved not the preservation of social order but rather its revolutionary overhaul. So understood, these two interpretations appear as rival meanings of the concept of philanthropy, set against one another.

In late eighteenth-century Britain, in the wake of the establishment of a “free” labor market and the progressive erosion of the gentry’s paternalism, charitable activities—and their expected counterpart, the cheerful submissiveness of recipients—were still considered a justification for the privileged social position of donors and were becoming a defining feature of the emerging middle-class consciousness.²⁰ Concurrently, the solidarity among the lower orders, which had always characterized laboring-class relations, was adopting an increasingly organized form and antagonistic propensity; this article goes on to show how it began to claim the label of philanthropy.²¹ As Cunningham remarked, the history of British philanthropy is “multi-layered” and has witnessed several “battles fought out over [its] ownership and meaning,” during which “some of [its] potentialities were closed off.”²² This article explores one of these losing battles and lost causes by bringing a now marginalized stratum of philanthropy back into the light: the transient potential of the enemies of social order to be the truest friends to mankind.

II. THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS

In 1788, one year after the king’s Royal Proclamation against vice and immorality, social reformer Robert Young founded the Philanthropic Society for the Prevention of Crimes, the first London reformatory for juvenile delinquents.²³ By “unit[ing] the spirit of charity” with the principles of both “trade” (i.e., political economy) and “the police,” Young’s establishment would concur in “promot[ing] subordination” and defending “property and distinctions of rank.” By counteracting “those false notions which, under the sacred name of liberty, give birth to anarchy . . . and civil war,” philanthropists set out to help “maintain the beauty of order,” and thereby deserved to be considered the best “friend[s] to order and public good.”²⁴ The “false notions” censured by Young belonged to the French revolutionary ideology, which, by equating the Revolution with the philanthropic emancipation of mankind from the fetters of absolutism, was igniting a widespread reconsideration of the meaning of philanthropy in Britain that also involved the participation of the lower orders. Pro-French organizations sprouted up across the country, beginning with the London Corresponding Society (LCS) in 1792, a predominantly working-class and republican association that became a major propagator of the revolutionary ideas among the radicalized laborers of the capital. The main purpose of the LCS was to promote, via mass meetings and petitions, a political agenda inspired by Thomas Paine that included parliamentary reform, universal male suffrage, and the secret ballot.²⁵ The LCS appears to have embraced the new French

philanthropic vocabulary: Having been invited by Yorkshire radicals to “send [them] the word of enlightenment and philanthropy,” “sentiments of philanthropy” were praised at a 1795 general committee meeting.²⁶ As self-proclaimed “friend[s] of humanity,” LCS associates harshly condemned the continuation of the war with France.²⁷

Similar to their French counterparts, the majority of the LCS “English Jacobins” harbored no designs for a social revolution aimed at redistributing or abolishing private property.²⁸ Quite the contrary, in a 1792 official *Address*, secretary Thomas Hardy stated that “distinctions of property” were “sacred and inviolable.” The following year, the Society issued a resolution “recommending the expulsion of persons who shall be found guilty of propagating levelling principles.”²⁹ Likewise, one anonymous reformer rejected insinuations that the members of the corresponding societies, aka “the best friends to mankind,” wanted to “level all property,” and asked: “Where is the book or pamphlet which holds out this principle of division? Name its author, that he may be execrated.”³⁰

One such author was the Newcastle-born former schoolteacher Thomas Spence (1750–1814), a “true and genuine Leveller” as he proudly considered himself, drawing on the example of opposition to land enclosures offered by the Diggers, or True Levellers, in the seventeenth century.³¹ Upon moving to London in the early 1790s, Spence joined the LCS, which was also enlisting militants who entertained views more socially radical than those espoused by the majority of members.³² In London, Spence opened a bookshop where he sold banned works by other authors, published his own seditious pamphlets, and coined tokens publicizing his ultra-radical “Plan.” This was a proposal for the abolition of private land-ownership, the restoration of the land to the people in common, and the general quarterly redistribution of the profits of the soil within a decentralized parish organization. From at least 1795, Spence began to present the implementation of his Plan as the outcome of the violent revolution of the “swinish multitude,” the poor laboring class despised by Edmund Burke and adopted by Spence as his preferred collective political interlocutor.³³ Concurrently, he started, on the one hand, to distance himself from the reformist approach of the LCS by advocating the “*real* rights of man” (a polemic hint at the proprietary limitations of Paine’s “rights of man”)³⁴ and, on the other, to openly criticize the French Revolution, of which he had previously been an enthusiastic admirer. Insofar as they merely wanted to assume the political control of the French state against the aristocracy, with no real aim for any transformation of the social establishment, the Jacobins appeared to him as “democrat[s], but no leveller[s]”; thus, Spence regrettably concluded, despite “all that . . . the French Republic has taught us, we do not yet know the Rights of Man.”³⁵

Spence’s view of the incompleteness of the French Revolution was accompanied by a distinctive use of the notion of philanthropy, which he appears to have radicalized beyond the republican *philanthropie* embraced by the French. He was outraged by the acts of charity dispensed by the rich: “Public collections, subscriptions, and charities” were nothing but “appendages of . . . extortion and oppression,” only “serv[ing] to make [the multitude’s] slavery more servile.” It was “monstrously provoking” of the upper orders to first “rob [the poor] by wholesale” and then “relieve [them] by retail.”³⁶ Far from considering inequality as the foundation of the division of labor and societal affluence, as argued by the advocates of commercial society, Spence saw it as the illegitimate outcome of the violent dispossession of the many by the few. Unlike upper-class reformers, he conceived of poverty as neither the inevitable by-product of social dynamics nor the necessary spur to industry, but as a flagrant injustice and heinous distortion of natural principles. While modern thinkers saw civil society as emerging

from a rupture with the state of nature, its community of property, and resulting primitiveness and scarcity, and legislators were predicating enclosures of land on the notion of “improvement,” Spence believed that his revolutionary Plan would reestablish society and promote civility in line with, and no longer in opposition to, natural rights and equality.³⁷ To this end, he advocated “the extirpation” of landed proprietors—“the monsters, or giants, that the world want [*sic*] to be rid of”—by the “philanthropic giant-killers, the deliverers of mankind.”³⁸ He nurtured a popular idea of “mankind” as coinciding with the great majority of the exploited and oppressed.³⁹ While the charity of the rich was premised upon inequality, which enabled some individuals to assist others, only a revolution aimed at subverting the propertied order was, to Spence, truly philanthropic.

In 1795, following his dissatisfaction with the French Revolution, Spence described himself as a “disappointed philanthropist.”⁴⁰ That same year, during months of calamitous food shortage, an anonymous “philanthropic butcher,” angrily appealing to the legislature about the high price of meat, criticized the charitable subscriptions organized by the upper classes for the benefit of famished paupers; these were collected not out of benevolence but rather “fear” of the “tumultuous poor.” Charity was not only useless in eradicating the real cause of distress but also degrading, aimed at making the “insulted and inflamed” multitude submissive and preventing their rioting in defense of their moral economy of provision.⁴¹ As Spence’s token, which displayed a tail-wagging dog, warned, “much gratitude brings servitude.”⁴² In the mid-1790s, the government’s alarm at the starving and politically radicalized “tumultuous poor” led to the enactment of stringent measures, from the suspension of habeas corpus to the Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices Acts. Under the Acts’ terms, Spence was hindered in his activity as a bookseller, arrested without trial, and imprisoned several times.⁴³ State repression did not even spare radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton, who was repeatedly tried for sedition even though his views were far less radical than Spence’s.⁴⁴ From 1795 to 1796, Eaton published *The Philanthropist*, in which “philanthropy” was ascribed, in French revolutionary fashion, to the “lover of the whole world” and the promoter of the “weal of the community”; the periodical, however, also included contributions condemning “flagitious designs of overturning all government, [and] confounding all property.”⁴⁵

Despite the different views and internal divisions of the democratic and republican front, the advocates of the established order were under the impression that the exponents of the radical movement were “all”—at least self-proclaimed—“philanthropists.”⁴⁶ The founder of the reformatory, Robert Young, received competing appropriations of the term with apprehension. In 1795, after discussing the raging social problems of pauperism and prostitution, he pondered dismally, “are not we the *philanthropists* of the day? And what will be said, should another, and not we, remedy these evils?”⁴⁷ Before Malthus started writing against the right of the poor to charity, and during years of escalating poor rates, Young’s appeals to “philanthropy” were instrumental in stigmatizing both the generosity of private donors and the excesses in statutory relief, which supposedly encouraged the poor to live in idleness.⁴⁸ He stressed, in fact, that “true philanthropy” consisted not in providing assistance but rather in turning the “many internal enemies to the peace” of society into “its members and supports.”⁴⁹ The very preservation of social order was at stake in conflicting uses of the philanthropic lexicon. Meanwhile, censorship and state repression were failing to silence the ultra-radicals. In 1797, Spence pleaded with the swinish multitude not to be deceived by the “pretended philanthropy of the great” and urged them to rise to “recover our rights” to the common property of the soil, bestowed

by nature. “Take care,” he warned them, that “you leave not any roots of those lordly plants in the earth” as “thus do philosophy and the purest philanthropy compel us to eradicate this baneful order from human society.”⁵⁰

These appeals to philanthropy must have sounded alarming to the anti-revolutionary coalition. The short-lived periodical *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* (1797–98) was particularly vociferous, noting how “attack[s] [against] the very foundations of society” were being justified by means of “the imposing name of . . . philanthropy,” which had thus become “justly suspicious to every honest man.”⁵¹ In 1798, as Spence envisaged a “philanthropic dance of human happiness” occurring after his proposed revolution, caricaturist James Gillray provided a vivid iconographical representation of radical “Philanthropy”: an angry, hungry woman, wearing a Phrygian cap and presiding over a bag of “philanthropic requisition”; not far from her feet, a plethora of English radical writings—including Spence’s periodical *Pigs’ Meat*—overflowed from the “cornucopia of ignorance.”⁵² That same year, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* lamented that “the philanthropy of some folks” comprised the summoning of a “misanthropic horde” to “plunder property” and “destroy social order . . . under the veil of philanthropy.” This “disorganizing philanthropy” had recently inspired the founding of “philanthropic societ[ies] of highwaymen, housebreakers, assassins, footpads, and pickpockets petitioning for equality” and “demand[ing] a radical reform”—the democrats of the corresponding societies.⁵³

Arguably aiming to justify even harsher repressive measures, state authorities contended that these societies were part of a transnational radical network that comprised the United Irishmen (the revolutionary organization that sought to establish an independent Irish republic and instigated the great Irish Rebellion of 1798) and the United Englishmen (who attempted to coordinate a republican uprising in Britain with a French invasion).⁵⁴ In 1798, Spence was arrested for his alleged connections with these clandestine organizations, together with the then secretary of the LCS and future librarian of the Society of Spencean Philanthropists, Thomas Evans.⁵⁵ In 1799, the Unlawful Societies Act outlawed the LCS alongside the United Irishmen and United Englishmen, while exempting charitable associations from suppression.⁵⁶ That same year, the *Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons* provided intelligence about Jacobin-inspired “societies at Hamburgh [*sic*],” which had of late become “the receptacle” of “the disaffected of every other country.” Specifically, “a society called ‘The Philanthropic Society’” had been established there “for the purpose of correspondence with the Republicans of all countries. . . . The leading members . . . compose a committee of about twenty persons, British, French, Dutch, and Germans.” Radicals across Europe were reported to be plotting “the general confiscation of property and the erection of a democratic Republic, founded on the ruins of . . . all political and civil society”; apparently, they were doing so in the name of philanthropy.⁵⁷

In 1801, Thomas Spence published *The Restorer of Society to Its Natural State*, his lengthiest work, in which he emphasized the revolutionary methods of his Plan. After scoffing at the “humiliating charity” of the rich, who were “always preaching up temperance, labour, patience, and submission,” he made early use of the sarcastic vocabulary later employed by Robert Tressell as he urged the British poor to stop treating the parasitical upper orders, those “undeserving objects,” as “objects of charity” by “generously suffer[ing] them still to remain the richest members of the community.” The abolition of private landownership Spence advocated would, he maintained, be cherished not by the “lovers of anarchy” but rather by the “real lovers of . . . order and solidity.”⁵⁸ For him, in fact, an improved set of social relations and true “civilization”

would flourish, and not perish, in the absence of private landownership and social hierarchies.⁵⁹ State authorities took a different view: In the spring of 1801, with another harvest crisis raging throughout Britain, Spence was arrested for publishing *The Restorer of Society* and tried at the Court of King's Bench. Too poor to afford an attorney, he pleaded his own defense in court, at which he presented his writing—the purpose of which was admittedly to “modify property”—as the “undeniable evidence of [his] disinterestedness and philanthropy.”⁶⁰ Having advocated his Plan for the benefit of “all those who have no helpers,” Spence attempted to persuade the jury that he had been moved by the sincerest “philanthropic intentions,” and that “what I have written and published has been done with . . . as much philanthropy as ever possessed the heart of any Prophet, Apostle, or Philosopher that ever existed.”⁶¹ Spence's self-defense was ineffective: In June 1801, he was convicted of seditious libel and imprisoned for one year at Shrewsbury Prison. Shortly before his arrest, in March 1801, a meeting of his admirers took place in London; they would later rename themselves “Spencean Philanthropists.”⁶²

Meanwhile, the upper orders continued devising their own, law-abiding relief plans. In 1800, Thomas Bernard, the founder in 1796 of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (SBCP), contended that social hierarchies were, properly understood, foundational to philanthropy: “The welfare of the poor [is], in truth, more promoted . . . by the gradations of wealth and rank, than it ever could have been by a perfect equality of condition.” In fact, as “the labourer has no leisure,” “while he labours for others, . . . philanthropists must plan for him.”⁶³ Bernard was attempting to deter the initiatives of the poorer classes for themselves, stressing that real philanthropy could only be dispensed from above. In 1811, William Allen, the Quaker who founded the Soup Society in 1797, started publishing *The Philanthropist*, a periodical advertising benevolent experiments for the “improvement” and discipline of both the metropolitan poor and the enslaved of the colonies.⁶⁴ One of the first issues reassured its intended middle-class readership that “the term Philanthropist is admirably suited to unite the good of all classes” in defense of established hierarchies and should not, therefore, “alarm the politician.” In a later issue, one contributor clarified, “I am no disciple of Spence.”⁶⁵ Radicals, however, kept fighting back. In 1812, Norwich preacher George Beaumont maintained that real “philanthropists” were those who would “espouse the cause of the poor” by “dar[ing] . . . to confront the oppressions of the rich.” As an adversary of “friends to things as they are,” the philanthropist should proudly vindicate the ascribed reputation of “a restless, disaffected fellow, an enemy to his country, a Jacobin.”⁶⁶ In 1814, Spence published his last periodical, *The Giant Killer, or Anti-Landlord*, which spanned two issues. The second ended with his “philanthropic wish” to pursue “whate'er is friendly to my race.”⁶⁷ This can be interpreted as Spence's intellectual will: A few weeks later, he suddenly died. His obituary remembered him as the author of writings “evinc[ing] a most disinterested desire to serve mankind.”⁶⁸

III. THE INSURRECTIONARY YEARS

Within his reams of political writings, Thomas Spence employed the notion of philanthropy comparatively rarely. Nonetheless, by offering a critique of the paternalist charity of the upper orders, and concurrently presenting the revolutionary and violent action of the multitude as “philanthropic,” he made the concept an appealing one for his followers, thereby contributing to the emergence of an ultra-radical politics of philanthropy. It was after Spence's death—when, following the demobilization of the Army and the Navy at the end of the Napoleonic wars, popular protests escalated

across Britain—that his disciples came to organize formally as the Society of Spencean Philanthropists, which soon became the leading group within London insurrectionary politics.⁶⁹ Committed “wellwishers to the human race,”⁷⁰ the Spenceans gathered followers from the lowest and most unrespectable social groups: poor artisans and laborers supporting Jacobinism, miscreant libertines, and immigrants of African descent from the Americas.⁷¹ As Terry Parssinen observed, although not always “orthodoxically Spencean” in doctrine, they remained so in spirit.⁷² This, in turn, entailed a distinctive understanding of philanthropy.

In their first *Address* of 1815, the Spenceans declared their intention to establish a “committee of correspondence . . . to extend [their] philanthropic views.”⁷³ Key to these views was the abolition of private landowner-ship. In his *Christian Policy, the Salvation of the Empire* (1816), librarian Thomas Evans waged an attack on traditional Christian charity as all the “convents and monasteries [that] maintained the poor [and] clothed the naked” were “allow[ing] [men] to have a claim upon [the] common property” of the land “as charity only,” rather than as their birthright. “Charity,” wrote Evans, should be “banished to introduce right and justice.” *Contra* traditional Christianity and its promise that grievances would be redressed at the “spiritual millennium” preceding the end of days, the Spenceans advocated a much closer and more secular “political millennium” under the banner of philanthropy.⁷⁴ In November and December 1816 and February 1817, they attempted to precipitate this revolution by convening mass meetings in Spa Fields, London. Their plan was to inflame the mob, lead protesters to assault the Tower of London and the Bank of England, and establish a provisional government that would abolish private landownership.⁷⁵ At one of the demonstrations, Spencean James Watson harangued the crowd, declaring that “it rests with ourselves to consider how we shall relieve ourselves.”⁷⁶ His son, James Watson Junior, vehemently criticized the allowance of “ox-cheek soup and ox-bone broth,” as charity was only meant to “rob you of all you possess, and then give you a penny to pay the turnpike”—the road tolls collected to maintain road segments, which Britons had freely used until the early eighteenth century.⁷⁷ Watson then called the mob to action: “If they will not give us what we want, then shall we not take it? Yes!”⁷⁸ At the December demonstration, the crowd was joined by a sword-brandishing chimney sweep, a typical target of middle-class charitable campaigning.⁷⁹ Scorning the self-serving benevolence dispensed by the rich, the protesters responded to upper-class paternalism with activity of their own aimed at retaking possession of their birthright to freedom, equality, and the commons.⁸⁰

Despite the Spenceans’ organizational efforts, the three demonstrations met with failure. Nonetheless, the debates regarding Spa Fields show that the ideological discord between the defenders and the disturbers of public order around the meaning of philanthropy continued. The *Northampton Mercury* lampooned “the philanthropy” associated with “the late riots,” which appeared totally “indifferent to individual security” and instead favorable to “a state of anarchy.”⁸¹ For another observer, the driving force of the “Spencean brigade”—comprising “poachers, sheep-stealers, gypsies, [and] incendiaries”—was, in fact, an irresistible “love of mischief” rather than for mankind.⁸² According to the *Dublin Evening Post*, the popular dissemination of the Spencean doctrine was evidence of the failure of traditional charitable attempts to moralize the lower orders: “If this system of theoretic politics . . . and practical robbery be now the favourite creed of the people of England, what have all the Bible societies . . . been able to accomplish?”⁸³ In March 1817, the official government reaction to Spa Fields followed an established path: Habeas corpus was suspended and the 1795 Seditious Meetings Act renewed, the difference being that the new law explicitly banned all political clubs that referred to Spencean principles.⁸⁴ During the

parliamentary debates leading to the passage of the bill in the House of Commons, Lord Castlereagh was dismayed, observing that “these men seem to think, when they call themselves *Philanthropists*, the very name must disarm suspicion”; however, there was a “singular perversity,” he thought, in “profess[ing] the most unbounded benevolence” and “loving-kindness to the human race” while advancing plans for “the destruction of private property . . . [and] the fabric of civil society.”⁸⁵

In that same year of 1817, in their *Address to All Mankind*, the Spenceans stressed that “the state of society, truly desirable by the enlightened philanthropist”—namely, a society where “the monopoly of the common benefits of nature would be unknown, and every man able to produce his subsistence with a healthy exertion of labour” and without “the degrading pittance of cheerless charity”—would be accomplished only through “a radical adjustment of the social system” to bring about an equally “radical remedy for . . . the wrongs of man.” This remedy coincided with the adoption of Spence’s Plan, whose contents represented the quintessence of Spencean philanthropy.⁸⁶ Understanding the Plan as a retrograde doctrine, aimed at winding time back to savagery through the annulment of enclosures and abolition of taxation, the pro-government *Sun* denounced Spenceanism as incompatible with both private and statutory relief: “What would become of . . . [the] several charities? What would become of the wounded and brave veterans . . . ? What is to become of the Poor Rates? Under the system of the Spenceans, how do they propose to protect the aged and infirm?”⁸⁷ Later that year, Thomas Preston, one of the Spa Fields agitators, published his autobiography. In it, he recounted how, in the 1790s, it was by becoming acquainted with the LCS that he had realized that his “sympathy and affection,” hitherto “confined to private circles,” were “due to the . . . great universal mass of society.” He had subsequently become a “political philanthropist” and joined the Spencean Society in the mid-1810s.⁸⁸ Preston noted that an ideological battle had been and was being fought around the vocabulary of social protest: In 1817, just as in the 1790s, several malicious individuals “though conversant with their dictionary, would have it, that Reform meant Deform, and that Revolution was a compound of Blood and Madness.”⁸⁹

Philanthropy was also a source of fierce intellectual disputation. In October 1816, in *The Quarterly Review*, Robert Southey referred ironically to the “philanthropical proposal” of the Spenceans, who proposed to “scalp” landlords with the guillotine and “destroy all private property in land.”⁹⁰ Those “philanthropic plunderers” were going as far as to “deride the efforts of benevolence and philanthropy towards ameliorating the transitory evils” of the poor.⁹¹ In a short piece published in *The Morning Post* in April 1817, another typical object of middle-class charity, “a sailor’s orphan daughter,” indignantly addressed the radical sympathies of reformist Member of Parliament Francis Burdett by reminding him that “Philanthropy wants not the overthrow of states” nor did it cherish “speculative plans for the overthrow of religion, government, [and] order. . . . She never graced a meeting in Spa-fields.” Quite the contrary, real “Philanthropy” was “a strenuous advocate for the reform of the immoral, the disloyal, [and] the seditious.”⁹² Philanthropy, the contributor argued, was a function of social order, not a tool for its subversion. Likewise, in his *Constitutional Politics: Or the British Constitution Vindicated, Against the Spenceans*, Calvinist preacher Thomas Williams acknowledged that lately “the name of *Philanthropy* has been unhappily abused in more instances than one.” He then wished that, as “massacres and murders” would inevitably accompany the adoption of Spence’s Plan, “no men who claim the peaceable name of ‘philanthropists,’ could think of it without horror.”⁹³ It was to reclaim the ownership of that notion for the anti-revolutionary front that, in January 1817, Williams began to publish *The Philanthropic Gazette*.⁹⁴ As an “antidote” against the circulation of

those “infidel and democratic” ideas aimed at “the dissolution of government and the disorganization of society,” there was nothing more effective, or so Williams thought, than the charitable activities of the middle classes: After listing benevolent subscriptions, Bible distributions, soup kitchens, Sabbath schools, and home inspections, he concluded, “A little reflection must convince the poor how much preferable is this conduct to that of factious and noisy demagogues, who do nothing for the public good.”⁹⁵

The rivalry between ultra-radical and middle-class philanthropy reflected an “age [that] abounds in philanthropists of every kind.”⁹⁶ One of the most prominent was social reformer Robert Owen, whose system of cooperative villages for the working poor was indebted to the parish organization devised by Spence.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Owen’s proposed methods and goals had little to do with those promoted by Spenceanism, as, while wishing to reorganize production, he also strived to encourage workers to abandon class struggle and follow the lead of an enlightened employer—something the Spenceans abhorred.⁹⁸ In August 1817, during a widely attended debate convened by Owen at the City of London Tavern to popularize his plan to relocate masses of unemployed workers to communitarian villages, his “distinguished philanthropy,” as reported by the conservative *Morning Post*, was confronted by “vehicles of Jacobinism and sedition,” who wished to “render the . . . meeting a scene of . . . tumult, like [that] at Spa Fields.”⁹⁹ Owen’s ongoing intellectual path toward embracing communal property and living did not persuade those who opposed him, who saw his planned villages as a crypto-oppressive form of pauper control.¹⁰⁰ The radical periodical *The Black Dwarf* (edited by Thomas Wooler, an admirer of Spence’s Plan) censured Owen for being the author of a scheme for “the low people, who are born . . . to labour and to starve, [to] learn to labour and to starve in . . . quiet . . . [so as not] to disturb their neighbours by their groans.” Wooler peremptorily asked of Owen—a “pretended philanthropist,” who did “not want to alter the system”—that he “LET THE POOR ALONE” as they loathed his “splendid erections for the cultivation of misery, and the subjugation of the mind.”¹⁰¹ In a later issue, an anonymous “Amicus” scornfully dismissed “Mr. Owen’s or any other philanthropist’s directions” and espoused the revolution as the only method able to “advance the career of humanity”—or, rather, of the oppressed majority of it.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, philanthropy continued to be claimed and weaponized by opposing sides. The founding of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity in 1818 was praised by the press as a response to social distress at a time when “some Jacobin, some Spa Fields insurrection was again meditated.”¹⁰³ The flourishing of middle-class charity exacerbated the indignation of radicals. A March 1819 issue of *The Medusa*, a working-class periodical voicing the views of Spenceanism, featured, on the one hand, an article denigrating the “hypocritical” Society for the Suppression of Vice and, on the other, the poem “The Wrongs of Man” by “a Spencean Philanthropist,” declaring war on “things as they are.”¹⁰⁴ The turning point in this war occurred in the following summer in the Peterloo Massacre, when laboring-class protesters were killed by yeomanry and hussars during a peaceful demonstration for the extension of the suffrage in Manchester.¹⁰⁵ The advocates of the established order ascribed several grievances to the demonstrators, some of which overlapped with the designs of the Spenceans. One week before the planned meeting in St. Peter’s Field, *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette* envisaged the “disagreeable consequences which might overwhelm . . . our Radical Philanthropists . . . by a neck-and-nothing pertinacity” in pursuing their schemes.¹⁰⁶ However, what occurred on 16 August 1819 went beyond the gloomiest expectations of “disagreeable consequences.” The military attack on the defenseless

was widely interpreted as evidence of the inefficacy of non-violent action, convincing the Spenceans that “the revolution had begun in blood” in Manchester and “had also to end in blood”—in London this time.¹⁰⁷

IV. PHILANTHROPISTS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

At the turn of the nineteenth century, before the Spenceans made their final attempt to precipitate their intended revolution, other movements were contributing to philanthropism from below: the working-class traditions of mutualism and trade unionism on the one hand, and the abolitionist struggles for the self-emancipation of the enslaved on the other. Despite the diverse strategies they adopted, not all of which were revolutionary, these movements shared a fundamental approach to political action: a propensity to “combine,” namely, to form unions and associations “for some certain purpose”—that is, to help each other, promote their interests, and defend their rights. As early as 1755, Samuel Johnson, a staunch conservative scared of unruly mobs, noted that “combination . . . was formerly indifferent” but “is now generally used in an ill sense.”¹⁰⁸ The proliferation of popular associations in Britain in the wake of the French Revolution provided factual evidence that the laboring poor were embracing union among themselves as a key tactic against exploitation and repression.¹⁰⁹ In one of its widely circulated handbills of 1792, the loyalist Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers lamented the detrimental effects that the dissemination of French principles, including “Organization,” was having on the British lower orders.¹¹⁰ A radical flier responding to the Association’s handbill warned loyalists that “whether you like the word organization or not, we are too well organized . . . to mob as you would make people believe we intend. . . . Our firmness and union will procure us rights without mobbing,” but rather by systematically “associat[ing], subscrib[ing], petition[ing], remonstrat[ing], [and] demand[ing].”¹¹¹ In 1795, Charles Pigott’s *Political Dictionary* acknowledged that “the meaning of th[e] word ‘Association’ has lately undergone a revolution.” Whereas “in former times it was deemed legal for Englishmen to associate, . . . now government deems [it] . . . seditious, and the associators stand a good chance of being confined . . . in Newgate . . . and transported to Botany Bay.”¹¹² Pigott was not exaggerating: During the 1790s, stringent measures were passed that aimed to repress popular organizations.

An exception is the friendly societies of laborers that sought to provide mutual aid in the case of old age and sickness. Seen by the government as a way for the poor to raise the costs of their support among themselves without claiming the parochial relief of the Poor Laws, they were legalized by the 1793 Act for the Encouragement and Relief of Friendly Societies, thereby becoming the only associations in which working men could freely meet in those years.¹¹³ On the one hand, friendly societies were cherished by middle-class reformers, who equated membership with industriousness; on the other, associates courted the patronage of the upper orders while also striving to maintain control over their activities, among which ritualized drinking featured prominently. In this way, these associations, although professedly non-revolutionary, became sites of struggle between a middle-class rhetoric of working-class respectability and the actual sociability of laborers, imbued with a highly gendered ideal of masculine, drunken conviviality.¹¹⁴ To describe their cooperative principles, these associations also occasionally adopted the language of philanthropy.¹¹⁵ In 1796, a group of laborers from London’s East End organized themselves into a “Fraternal and Philanthropic Community, . . . united for reciprocal advantages . . . to ease the cares, and to alleviate all the burdens of human life.” Its first report acknowledged with regret

that “the word *fraternal*, because it being used by the French since their late Revolution,” was widely considered “seditious.”¹¹⁶ It subsequently addressed all “brother philanthropists” and “partners in oppression,” encouraging them to collect a “philanthropic fund” for the relief of orphans, widows, and fellow workers affected by senility and infirmities. The accomplishment of their “plan of pure philanthropy,” the founders wrote, depended on their maintaining “firm unity,” for “if once you revolt against your philanthropic principles, and disunite your divisions, you will immediately become weak as one oppressed man.”¹¹⁷

In 1812, the Philanthropic Society of House Carpenters and Joiners was established in Newcastle for the purpose of “assist[ing] and support[ing] each other” in old age and debility. To avoid falling within the purview of acts against seditious meetings, the rules of the Society prescribed that “no political debates are to be suggested by any member . . . , nor any disloyal sentiments used, nor political songs sung.”¹¹⁸ Despite the skepticism of some upper-class reformers, who believed that mutual “pecuniary charity” was as a matter of principle “out of the province” of laboring-class activity, others like the SBCP founder, Thomas Bernard, believed that friendly societies, when “properly established,” would invariably “promot[e] industry, economy, [and] philanthropy . . . among the poor.”¹¹⁹ To be “properly established” meant to remain socially non-explosive, aiming not to subvert social order but rather to improve the conditions of laborers within it. This is arguably why these activities were not embraced enthusiastically by ultra-radicals. The Spenceans—whose Society was initially founded as a “free and easy,” namely, a convivial club¹²⁰—appear to have engaged in practices of mutual aid only when some of their members were suffering under repressive legislation.¹²¹

In 1799, in contrast to friendly societies, early trade unions promoting collective bargaining were repressed as “seditious” by the Act to Prevent Unlawful Combinations of Workmen.¹²² Trade unionism—which, unlike mutualism, was not interpreted as a defanging of revolutionary philanthropy but rather as a path to it—also began to employ a philanthropic lexicon. In 1812, radical “philanthropic” minister George Beaumont defended the Manchester cotton weavers who had recently attempted to have their wages raised by “unanimously strik[ing]” and “spoil[ing] work”: “Seeing no prospect of any help from *others*, [they] began now to think of helping *themselves*.”¹²³ The same attempt to do good to one’s fellow workers led to the establishment of the Philanthropic Society in Manchester in 1818. This union aimed to provide workers employed in all trades in the textile industry with a shared platform from which to “resist [the] oppression” of “their avaricious employers reducing wages.”¹²⁴ Later that year, London trade unionists followed in the footsteps of the Manchester laborers by founding the first attempt at a general union, the Philanthropic Hercules.¹²⁵ The working-class periodical *The Gorgon* rejoiced at this establishment, maintaining that “the People have nothing to expect from any exertions but *their own*.”¹²⁶ In July 1819, an address published in *The Medusa* by one “J. G.” warned the working classes, “nor will you ever recover your rights . . . whilst you are divided among yourselves.” The contributor invited readers to take inspiration from “the social compact between [your employers] in uniting their strength to crush you”; in fact, once “united in the bonds of a Philanthropic Hercules,” workers would realize that they were “powerful beyond [their] calculation.”¹²⁷ It is most likely that “J. G.” was the trade union leader and Spencean sympathizer John Gast. As noted by Malcolm Chase, the name “Philanthropic Hercules” might have had a Spencean origin, being inspired by Spence’s “giant killer”: In Greek mythology, Hercules was an unrivaled killer of giants.¹²⁸

In the early nineteenth century, the language of philanthropy also became associated with emancipation from enslavement. Cunningham has meticulously surveyed the ways in which “philanthropy” was applied, as a term of either praise or censure, to middle-class supporters of the abolition of the slave trade and enslavement including the Evangelical “Saints” of the Clapham Sect, whose supposedly “mistaken philanthropy” soon became the polemical target of pro-slavery observers, who speciously equated advocacy for the colonized with neglect of domestic poverty.¹²⁹ However, what this section addresses is not the philanthropy of those Members of Parliament and government bureaucrats who lobbied the legislature to pass measures against enslaving trade and practices, but rather the philanthropy from below that supported the revolutionary struggles of the enslaved. Parliamentary abolitionists such as William Wilberforce, who engaged in anti-slavery campaigning alongside charitable activities aimed at moralizing the metropolitan poor, were animated by an order-loving commitment to turning the enslaved into compliant and disciplined “free” laborers akin to British workers.¹³⁰ As a contributor to *The Colonist and Commercial Weekly Advertiser* polemically remarked, “We have no doubt but Mr. Wilberforce, notwithstanding all his philanthropy, would be the first to take alarm were the Spencean system to be proposed as a general measure.”¹³¹ The philanthropy of middle-class campaigners was as far from ultra-radical philanthropy as, from the perspective of the enslaved, being manumitted by act of Parliament was from emancipating themselves through violent action.¹³²

The most widespread and influential of these emancipatory struggles, able to strike terror into the planter elites while simultaneously representing a bright example for other enslaved communities across the Caribbean, was the Haitian Revolution. At the end of the eighteenth century, historian and slave-owner Bryan Edwards blamed the insurrection in Saint-Domingue on the “enormous misinterpretation and misapplication of [the] philanthropic principles” of the French Revolution, which had inspired the enslaved to foster mischievous designs against the “ties which hold society together.”¹³³ In 1803, future Lord Chancellor Henry Brougham dreaded the idea that “the African revolutionaries” could succeed against the Napoleonic troops sent to Saint-Domingue to quell the insurrection. While expressing his “greatest sympathy for the unmerited sufferings” of the enslaved, Brougham also “deprecate[d] that inconsistent spirit of canting philanthropy, which in Europe is only excited by the injuries or miseries of the poor and the profligate, and, on the other side of the Atlantic, is never warmed but towards the savage, the mulatto, and the slave.” Considering himself a “consistent friend of humanity,” he disapproved of the Revolution and rather wished that “the Africans . . . be enlightened with the idea . . . of love of order.”¹³⁴ Brougham was here distinguishing between two forms of philanthropism: the order-loving benevolence of upper- and middle-class abolitionists, which he would soon openly espouse, and the revolutionary philanthropy of the rebellious enslaved and those who cheered their insurgencies.¹³⁵ This latter “spirit” was aimed at overthrowing the social order of plantation societies and the racialized order upon which European empires were founded—the mighty achievement accomplished by the Haitian revolutionaries and sanctioned by their 1805 *Constitution of Imperial Haiti*, significantly addressing the “philanthropists of all countries [*philanthropes de tous les pays*].”¹³⁶

Among the advocates for the self-emancipation of the enslaved was Thomas Spence. Some recent studies have shown how his Plan featured a strong critique of enslavement and empire as well as a project of colonial emancipation.¹³⁷ In 1793, referring to the recurring slave revolts unsettling Caribbean plantation societies, Spence wrote that “as often as such periodical revolutions happened in favour of the

Rights of Man, they . . . were procured by the irresistible importunities of the slaves and the landless men.”¹³⁸ Sarcastically contrasting the supposed “savagery” of the enslaved with Britain’s pretended “civilization,” he admired the “free-born, unshackled minds of the . . . African savages, who have not yet learned to look upon blood-sucking landlords with that timorous . . . reverence, paid to such miscreants, in a country so well bred as this.”¹³⁹ In 1803, Spence even proposed to send his Plan to “St. Domingo,” soon to be renamed Haiti, “for an example how to frame laws.”¹⁴⁰ Faithful to their mentor’s lesson, the Spenceans believed the abolition of private landownership at home and the emancipation from enslavement abroad to be two faces of the same solution to poverty and exploitation on a global scale. Thomas Evans censured slavery as an aberration to “Christian policy”; after all, Christ himself had been “crucified as a slave . . . for preaching the seditious doctrine that . . . all men were equal in his sight, and consequently ought not to be slaves to one another.”¹⁴¹ According to the Spenceans, it was the duty of the “enlightened philanthropist” to disseminate Spence’s Plan “throughout the world, extirpating in its progress the slavery . . . of mankind.”¹⁴²

It was therefore no accident that the Society also enlisted two Jamaicans. One of them, Robert Wedderburn, the son of an enslaved woman and a planter, was acutely attuned to the interrelation of racial oppression and class exploitation on the imperial scale, knowing that “the rich hates the poor, no matter what colour.”¹⁴³ After scoffing at middle-class philanthropists—including Owen, whose planned cooperative villages were for him nothing but “an improved system of that slavery which [is] suffered in the West Indies”¹⁴⁴—Wedderburn presented the Caribbean enslaved as the vanguard of radical mutualism: “If [the Spencean Philanthropists] had expected equality of distribution [of the relief fund], they should have appointed a committee of West Indian Negroes, who, being equally fed and equally worked, would have known what it was to divide equally.”¹⁴⁵ Having assured the enslaved that “the equality of your present station in slavery, is your strength,” he envisaged that “union” among them would “strike tremendous terror” into slave owners, and invoked “the fate of St. Domingo” for his native Jamaica.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, in the early nineteenth century, two different sets of philanthropists promoted the end of slavery—via diametrically opposite means. In 1816, plantation owner Joseph Marryat described “modern philanthropy” as the product of two “spirits,” distinct from each other yet “equally dangerous”: the love for mankind that permeated the campaigns of middle-class abolitionists and the “spirit of wild fanaticism” that fueled popular insurgencies.¹⁴⁷ The combination of the two was deemed responsible for Bussa’s Rebellion in April that year, the largest slave revolt in the history of Barbados. Quoting from Brougham, the *Report* of the Barbadian select committee appointed to enquire into the causes of the revolt blamed the uprising on the “inconsistent spirit of canting philanthropy” promulgated by the “Spencean and African Philanthropists,” which had arrived in Barbados via journals sold in Bridgetown.¹⁴⁸ The *Report* suggested that, alongside the anti-slavery campaigns of British parliamentary abolitionists (the “African Philanthropists”), a popular and much more radical philanthropy—Spenceanism—was intellectually implicated in the rebellion. In fact, it seems British radicals associated with Spenceanism celebrated the Barbadian revolt. A June 1817 issue of *The Black Dwarf* praised the West Indian enslaved as “the mo[st] untutored asserters of freedom” of the Americas. The contributor also mentioned musical instruments being played by the Barbadian Blacks during their “battle dance”—probably an allusion to Bussa’s and his companions’ life-and-death struggle for emancipation.¹⁴⁹ On the opposite end of the political spectrum, commenting on “the

recent events at Barbadoes [*sic*],” *The Anti-Jacobin Review* bitterly concluded that “the rapacity of philanthropy exceeds every other species of rapacity.”¹⁵⁰

Despite the increasingly racist views of the British working classes, which elevated the cause of white metropolitan laborers as opposed to the enslaved of the West Indies, revolutionary positions survived within abolitionist philanthropy in the following years.¹⁵¹ In 1822, after wondering “what an outcry would be raised in England if the Blacks of Jamaica were to rebel,” *The Black Dwarf* stressed that “the philanthropist must rejoice at the success of such enterprises.” In fact, “if the whole of the [West] Indian islands were to succeed in proclaiming the . . . sovereign authority of the native blacks, it would be called a GLORIOUS REVOLUTION.”¹⁵² In the aftermath of the Demerara Rebellion of 1823, which involved more than ten thousand enslaved people, a white “inhabitant of Demerara” condemned “modern philanthropy, whose course is everywhere marked with . . . disorder.”¹⁵³ In July 1824, in the wake of an attempted insurrection of the enslaved of the Jamaican parish of Hanover “for the purpose of obtaining [their] freedom by force,” local planters blamed once again “those incendiaries” in Britain—first and foremost Wilberforce—who, by disseminating abolitionist principles, had almost caused a “servile war” in the colony. While “those hell-hounds . . . denominate themselves ‘Philanthropists’ . . . (were ever terms so perverted?),” the slave owners were bold enough to claim the definition of “real friends of humanity” for themselves, having promoted the “amelioration” of enslavement consistently with the racial hierarchies of plantation societies.¹⁵⁴ Even if pro-slavery critics tended to paint all participants in the abolitionist movement with the same brush, that movement featured at least two different currents, both of which identified themselves as philanthropic but only one of which was a friend to the self-emancipation of the enslaved.

V. MAY DAY MISANTHROPY

In the aftermath of the first two failed Spa Fields demonstrations, *The Morning Post* warned the agitators that their desperate attempt to instigate a “servile war” in Britain would never alter the order of things, for which “those who think must govern those who toil.”¹⁵⁵ After 1819, frustrated by Spa Fields and outraged by Peterloo, the Spenceans lost patience with the oppression of “those who toil” by “those who govern” and switched from the organization of mass meetings to political terrorism.¹⁵⁶ On 16 February 1820, an article in *The Black Dwarf* scoffed at the subscriptions raised to provide the homeless poor with “temporary relief,” contending that “the true philanthropist” dismissed charitable panaceas and instead blamed social distress on “some aberration to the laws of nature,”¹⁵⁷ namely, the exclusion of the many from landed property. On that day, wishing to purge the body social from such aberration by abolishing private landownership, the Spencean Philanthropists were plotting the disastrous Cato Street Conspiracy, the attempted assassination of the entire British Cabinet at a ministerial dinner in London. On 23 February, as they were about to take action, the leaders were discovered and arrested.¹⁵⁸

At their subsequent trials for high treason, principal plotter Arthur Thistlewood asserted that “my every feeling . . . was the welfare of my starving countrymen.” John Thomas Brunt went further: After declaring himself “a friend to the lower orders,” he maintained that it was “the Ministers” who harbored “an antipathy against the people”; therefore, he asked the jury, “if he did conspire to murder them, was that high treason?”¹⁵⁹ State authorities deemed 1 May 1820, a day of advocacy of workers’ rights

and resistance against labor discipline, a good one for publicly hanging some of the conspirators.¹⁶⁰ This was the fate of Thistlewood and Brunt, together with James Ings, Richard Tidd, and William Davidson. The other conspirators, Charles Cooper, Richard Bradburn, John Harrison, James Wilson, and John Shaw Strange, were transported to New South Wales.¹⁶¹ In his last letter to his wife before execution, Ings begged her to remember that “the cause of my being consigned to the scaffold was a pure motive: I thought I should have rendered my starving fellow-men, women, and children a service.”¹⁶² In early March 1820, a newspaper noted that Jamaican conspirator William Davidson, before engaging in plotting, had been relieved by the Mendicity Society, his “distress” having “excited [their] commiseration.” The Society had even provided him with a sum of money to redeem his working tools—money that Davidson, the article suggested, had employed to fund the plot.¹⁶³ Once again, two competing notions of philanthropy were set against each other: One showed a loving, patronizing care for the poor as long as they were submissive and dependent; the other struck a blow against submissiveness and dependency by preaching the need for the laboring classes to act for themselves.

This article has shown how, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the experimentation with social and political lexicons, which was part of the process of ideological formation and self-definition of the British radical movement,¹⁶⁴ also involved a semantic struggle fought over “philanthropy,” which was claimed by rival fronts, assigned conflicting social connotations, and moved from one “political location” to the other.¹⁶⁵ Clear evidence of how contentious this concept had become in the wake of its late eighteenth-century politicization is provided by the fierce controversy over its features. Using their charitable pursuits to prove their class respectability, and putting their private initiatives at the service of the state and its need to relieve distress and curb discontent, the upper and middling orders presented themselves as “true,” “peaceable,” and “distinguished” philanthropists; conversely, they blamed the poor and laborers for their “Jacobin,” “disorganizing,” “radical,” “plundering,” “canting,” and “inconsistent” philanthropy. On the opposite side of the controversy, espousing an anti-institutional and extra-parliamentary variant of philanthropism, the laboring classes censured the rich as dispensers of a “humiliating” and “degrading” benevolence; as they belonged to a part of society which oppressed another, they were nothing but “pretended philanthropists.” In contrast, the lower orders vindicated their own philanthropy—which aimed at establishing communal landed property; the laborers’ control over the fruits of their own work; the self-emancipation of the enslaved; and an egalitarian, non-coercive, and convivial social intercourse¹⁶⁶—as “pure,” “disinterested,” “enlightened,” “political,” “fraternal,” and, of course, “true.” This bustle of adjectives marks a period in history when the definition of philanthropy was still open to shifts in meaning, and a version of it “from below” became a weapon in the intellectual armory of radicals and a defining feature of their oppositional identity.

Spencean philanthropy represents a remarkable example of this ultra-radical current. The politics associated with Spence’s ideas played a key role in both the revolutionary generation of the 1790s and the insurrectionary generation of the 1810s. For about twenty-five years, Spenceanism provided a theoretical and practical field within which a distinctive notion of philanthropy was conceived and implemented in a series of unsuccessful attempts to precipitate the revolution of the people against their masters and rulers. Along with the disciples of Spenceanism, trade unionists and revolutionary

abolitionists also employed the vocabulary of philanthropy, which they envisaged as the concerted action of the poor, the laborers, and the enslaved for the seizure of their rights and freedom. Thus understood, philanthropy was not an order-restoring activity validating social hierarchies but rather a movement aimed at challenging those hierarchies by subverting that order. Its proponents were not propertied individuals concerned with appeasing the class hatred of their poorer countrymen but rather ragged-trousered philanthropists, hostile to “things as they are” and willing to overturn them for the sake of the oppressed majority of mankind.

One can hypothesize that the mass hanging on May Day 1820 represented a setback for the current of “philanthropism from below” that the Spenceans had helped keep alive. In 1823, when the public threat they had represented was long past, Quaker benefactor William Allen could confidently maintain that, although Britain had recently been agitated by a clique of “infidels and friends to revolution,” the country was also blessed by cohorts of individuals “of education, of talent, and of property”—Allen’s fellow philanthropists, who were the “firmest support of the government” and best “friends to . . . social order.”¹⁶⁷ However, there might be another reason why the lexicon of philanthropy ultimately passed from “the left” to the middle-class “logic” of the defenders of the status quo:¹⁶⁸ the emergence of the language of “class.” While “philanthropy” is indissolubly attached to a capacious, all-encompassing ideal of love for mankind, the notion of “class” implies the defense of one’s interests as different from, and opposed to, those of others.¹⁶⁹ In turn-of-the-century Britain, when the transition from a “plebeian movement” to a self-conscious working class was still underway, the making of an oppositional laboring-class consciousness experimented with political language and, in the words of Eileen Yeo, “drew promiscuously from a range of vocabularies,” coining competing versions of concepts already employed by rival groups.¹⁷⁰ In this process, the philanthropic lexicon became an arena of social struggle between the haves and have-nots, until the poor and laborers decided that their identity would be better defined by abandoning the universalism of “philanthropy” and embracing the antagonism of “class.”

Nonetheless, remembrance of the subversive philanthropy of the poor for themselves survived, almost clandestinely, within working-class culture throughout the nineteenth century. In 1843, the Chartist leader Fe-argus O’Connor—one of the promoters of the “Land Plan” which advocated the redistribution of small landholdings to laborers (for which, as shown by Chase, the Chartist movement restored Spence as an intellectual inspiration)—maintained that it was “the duty of every philanthropist” to concur in the “destruction” of those exploitative practices operating “to the disadvantage of thousands for the advantage of individuals.”¹⁷¹ One year later, arguably as a result of his and Engels’s closer links with the Chartists, Marx stated that “the philanthropy . . . of communism is at once *real* and directly bent on *action*.”¹⁷² For his part, the author of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Noonan, was an active member of a local branch of the Social Democratic Federation, whose leader, British socialist Henry Hyndman, crucially contributed to the rediscovery of Spence’s thought in 1882 by reprinting the earliest posthumous edition of his first lecture.¹⁷³

Today’s dominant understanding of philanthropy conceals a conceptual history that scholars have begun to investigate only recently. This history, in turn, features an alternative, once militant and subsequently defeated and abandoned, philanthropic current, the analysis of which contributes to the intellectual history of the British working class in the years of its making.

NOTES

1. Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Oxford University Press, 2005 [1914]), 10–11, 22–23.
2. Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 40, 281, 297, 344–53, 402, 422, 473, 596. On Tressell's socialist thought, see James D. Young, "Militancy, English Socialism and the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 2 (1985): 283–303.
3. Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 493, 605.
4. Hugh Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy Since 1750: Britain and Beyond* (Manchester University Press, 2020), 2, 9–14, 86–102. See also: Arthur Gautier, "Historically Contested Concepts: A Conceptual History of Philanthropy in France, 1712–1914," *Theory and Society* 48 (2019): 95–129 (110–12); Kenneth R. Johnston, "Philanthropy or Treason? Wordsworth as 'Active Partisan,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 25, no. 3 (1986): 371–409; Evan Radcliffe, "Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 2 (1993): 221–40; Catherine Duprat, *Pour l'amour de l'Humanité. Le temps des philanthropes: La philanthropie parisienne des Lumières à la Monarchie de Juillet* (Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1993); Marc Belissa, *Fraternité universelle et intérêt national (1713–1795)* (Éditions Kimé, 1998), 50–57.
5. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 107.
6. Gautier, "Historically Contested Concepts," 124.
7. A similar investigation of liberalism can be found in Richard Ashcraft, "Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 249–72.
8. Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1790–1914," *History Workshop Journal* 12, no. 1 (1981): 8–33; Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789–1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
9. Robert B. Rose, "The 'Red Scare' of the 1790s: The French Revolution and the 'Agrarian Law,'" *Past & Present* 103, no. 1 (1984): 113–30; Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 363.
10. Gautier, "Historically Contested Concepts."
11. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (MIT Press, 1985 [1979]), 80–88; see also Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, and Frank van Vree, eds., *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives* (Amsterdam University Press, 1998).
12. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 25.
13. Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, 10–17, 26–27.
14. Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*" [1972], trans. Michaela Richter, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 1–37.
15. On "radicalism" and "ultra-radicals," see: Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 181–203; Gregory Claeys and Christine Lattek, "Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism: From the Principles of '89 to the Origins of Modern Terrorism," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 200–253; Joseph Albernaz, "Abolition, Black Ultraradicalism, and the Generation of the General Strike," *Critical Times* 5, no. 3 (2022): 538–69. On the Spencean thought and militancy, see: Robert Franklin, "The Political Ideas of Thomas Spence," *Journal of Local Studies* 2, no. 1 (1982): 21–40; Mary Kemp-Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence* (Frank

Graham, 1983); Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775–1840* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2010 [1988]); Keith Armstrong and Alastair Bonnett, eds., *Thomas Spence: The Poor Man's Revolutionary* (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2014); Rachel Rogers and Alexandra Sippel, eds., *Thomas Spence and His Legacy: Bicentennial Perspectives*, special issue of *Miranda: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone* 13 (2016); Matilde Cazzola, *The Political Thought of Thomas Spence: Beyond Poverty and Empire* (Routledge, 2022).

16. For insights into the connections between philanthropy and ultra-radicalism, see: Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Routledge, 2017), 105; Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 94–95; Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (Rivers Oram, 1996), 32–57.

17. Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (University of California Press, 1995), 149.

18. Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 217–18. Mark Philp has also recently shown how several exponents of the “middling orders” sympathized with the radical cause: Mark Philp, *Radical Conduct: Politics, Sociability and Equality in London, 1789–1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

19. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 107.

20. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]); Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792–1850: The “Heathen” at Home and Overseas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

21. E. P. Thompson, “Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (1974): 382–405.

22. Hugh Cunningham, “The Multi-Layered History of Western Philanthropy,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philanthropy*, ed. Tobias Jung, Susan D. Phillips, and Jenny Harrow (Routledge, 2015), 42–55; Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 107.

23. Donna Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 182–86; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Clarendon Press, 2006), 178.

24. [Robert Young], *First Report of the Philanthropic Society* (London: T. Becket, 1789), 2, 23; Robert Young, *Essays and Reflections on Various Subjects of Politics and Science* (London: T. Becket, 1790), 3; Robert Young, *Transactions of the Social Union: Formed for the Improvement of Civil Society* (London: T. Becket, 1790), 6, 12; [Robert Young], *The Philanthropic Society, Instituted September 1788* (London: 1790), 2; Robert Young, *Gnomia: Or the Science of Society* (London: J. Long, 1801), 2. On Young and the Philanthropic Society, see: Guglielmo Sanna, *La Philanthropic Society: Lumi, beneficenza, riformatorio (1788–99)* (Franco Angeli, 2020); Matilde Cazzola, “Robert Young and the Philanthropic Science of Social Happiness (c. 1788–1801),” *History of Political Thought* 44, no. 1 (2023): 116–52.

25. Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late 18th-Century England* (Scribner, 1968); E. P. Thompson, “Hunting the Jacobin Fox,” *Past & Present* 142 (1994): 94–140; Marc Belissa, “Révoltes et révolution en Angleterre et en Irlande, 1773–1802,” in *Révoltes et révolutions de 1773 à 1802*, ed. Serge Bianchi and Philippe Bourdin (Éditions du temps, 2004), 107–25 (117–18).

26. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 93; “Minutes: LCS General Committee, 10 September 1795” [1795], in *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792–1799*, ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 301–4 (303).

27. “Proceedings of a General Meeting of the London Corresponding Society, Held on Monday, October the 26th, 1795, in a Field Adjacent to Copenhagen-House,” in *London Corresponding*

Society, 1792–1799, ed. Michael T. Davis (Routledge, 2002), 2:85–104 (97). On the anti-French “patriotism” of part of the British lower orders, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (Yale University Press, 2008 [1992]), 283–319.

28. Rafe Blaufarb, *The Great Demarcation: The French Revolution and the Invention of Modern Property* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

29. “Address of the London Corresponding Society, to the Other Societies of Great-Britain, United for Obtaining a Reform in Parliament” [1792] and “Journal: LCS General Committee” [1793], in *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society*, 32–33, 85. Whereas “levelling” literally referred to the political claims—including the extension of the franchise—of the Levellers of the English Civil War, in the eighteenth century the notion was used to describe social proposals for the redistribution and equalization of landed property; see Myriam-Isabelle Ducrocq, “The Debate on Property During the First English Revolution, 1647–1659: A Historical Perspective,” *Miranda* 13 (2016): 1–13.

30. “To the Inhabitants of Nottingham” (London: [1793?]), The British Library, 74 648.c.26(77).

31. Thomas Spence, “Remarks. Societies of Levellers: Rebellions in China,” in *The Giant Killer, or, Anti-Landlord* (13 August 1814), 2:14.

32. Kemp-Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, 51; Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, 294.

33. Kemp-Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, 43–45, 58; Marcus Wood, “Thomas Spence and Modes of Subversion,” *Enlightenment and Dissent* 10 (1991): 51–77; Cazzola, *The Political Thought of Thomas Spence*, 17–20.

34. Thomas Spence, “The End of Oppression” [1795], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings of Thomas Spence, Radical and Pioneer Land Reformer*, ed. Geoff I. Gallop (Spokesman, 1982), 91–97 (93); Thomas Spence, “The Real Rights of Man,” in *Pigs’ Meat; Or, Lessons for the People*, ed. Thomas Spence (London: T. Spence, 1795), 3:220–29. On the radical “rights,” including those “of man,” see: Harry T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Methuen, 1977), 240–42; Gregory Claeys, “The Origins of the Rights of Labour: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796–1805,” *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 2 (1994): 249–90; Malcolm Chase, “‘The Real Rights of Man’: Thomas Spence, Paine and Chartism,” *Miranda* 13 (2016): 1–13.

35. Thomas Spence, “Spence’s Recantation of the End of Oppression” [1795], in *The Political Works of Thomas Spence*, ed. Harry T. Dickinson (Avero, 1982), 39–41; Thomas Spence, “The Meridian Sun of Liberty” [1796], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 107–10 (107). See also George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (Verso, 1987).

36. Thomas Spence, “The Rights of Swine: An Address to the Poor,” in *Pigs’ Meat; Or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, ed. Thomas Spence (London: T. Spence, 1794), 2:97–102 (101–2).

37. On Spence’s concepts of property, society, nature, and civilization, see: Harry T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Macmillan, 1994), 165–90; Cazzola, *The Political Thought of Thomas Spence*, 57–70, 90–97, 192–200. On prevailing and competing eighteenth-century social notions, see: Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815–1860* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 20–25; Sarah Lloyd, “Poverty,” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776–1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford University Press, 1999), 114–25.

38. Thomas Spence, “A Further Account of Spensonia” [1794], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 80–90 (83).

39. See Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, 86–92. On “humankind” and “humanity,” see Fabian Klose and Mirjam Thulin, eds., *Humanity: A History of European Concepts in Practice from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).
40. Thomas Spence, “The Disappointed Philanthropist: An Ode,” in *Pigs’ Meat; Or, Lessons for the People*, ed. Spence, 3:171–72.
41. Philanthropic Butcher, *Monopoly: The Cutting Butchers’ Appeal to the Legislature, Upon the High Price of Meat* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1795), 13–14, 16; see also E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 76–136.
42. Robert H. Thompson, “The Dies of Thomas Spence (1750–1814),” *British Numismatic Journal* 38 (1969): 126–62 (138).
43. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Vintage Books, 1966 [1963]), 60, 144–45; Kemp-Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, 43–47, 57–61, 78–82; David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance, and Surveillance, 1790–1820* (Wayne State University Press, 1992).
44. Edmund Downey, “Thomas Spence, Literary Networks and Connections: Daniel Isaac Eaton, Hannah More, and Ralph Beilby,” *Miranda* 13 (2016): 1–16.
45. [Untitled], in *The Philanthropist; Or Philosophical Essays on Politics, Government, Morals, and Manners*, ed. Daniel Isaac Eaton (16 March 1795), 1:1–8 (4); [Untitled], in *The Philanthropist; Or Philosophical Essays*, ed. Eaton (6 April 1795), 4:1–7 (4); W. H. Green, “For the Editor of The Philanthropist,” in *The Philanthropist; Or Philosophical Essays*, ed. Eaton (16 November 1795), 33:6–8 (8). See also Michael T. Davis, “‘That Odious Class of Men Called Democrats’: Daniel Isaac Eaton and the Romantics, 1794–1795,” *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 84, no. 273 (1999): 74–92.
46. “Constitutional Toasts” ([London?]: 1795), The British Library, 74 648.c.26(86).
47. Robert Young, *Mr. Young’s Report on the Attempts Made by the Usurpers of the Phil-anthropic Society, to Destroy the British Settlement* (London: Office of the British Settlement, 1795), 6. Emphasis in original.
48. Lloyd, “Poverty,” 117; Cazzola, “Robert Young and the Philanthropic Science.”
49. Robert Young, *Mr. Young’s Address to the General Body of Subscribers of the Philanthropic Society, and to the Nation* (London: 1796), 8.
50. Thomas Spence, “The Rights of Infants” [1797], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 111–26 (112–13, 122).
51. “Paris,” in *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* (5 February 1798), 1/13:458–64 (460); Cato, “Manners and Characters of the Age,” in *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* (2 July 1798), 2/34:564–72 (570); *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* (London: J. Wright, 1801), 237. See also: Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 91–92; Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789–99* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 69–82.
52. James Gillray, “New Morality; Or the Promis’d Installment of the High Priest of the Theophilanthropes, with the Homage of Leviathan and His Suite” [1798], in Tim Clayton, *James Gillray: A Revolution in Satire* (Yale University Press, 2022), 236–37.
53. Thomas Spence, “The Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth” [1798], in *The Political Works*, ed. Dickinson, 54–69 (55); Lawrence Lashknavé, “The Political Fantoccini; Or, Modern Curiosities!,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; Or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor* (September 1798), 1:364; Mark Noble, “The Lives of the English Regicides,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and*

Magazine (October 1798), 1:445–52 (450); “Appendix: The Emigrant, a Novel,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (December 1798), 1:741–54 (746–48); “History: Summary of Politics, Foreign and Domestic,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (August 1799), 3:489–96 (492).

54. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*, 249–50.

55. Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (Yale University Press, 1982); McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 15–16; Peter Linebaugh, *Red Round Globe Hot Burning: A Tale at the Crossroads of Commons & Closure, of Love & Terror, of Race & Class, and of Kate & Ned Despard* (University of California Press, 2019), 55–65, 127–34, 357.

56. Robert Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 173.

57. *Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons* (Cork: Advertiser-Office, 1799), 30–31.

58. Thomas Spence, “The Restorer of Society to Its Natural State” [1801], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 127–65 (133, 150, 154, 156–57, 164).

59. Cazzola, *The Political Thought of Thomas Spence*, 69–70.

60. Thomas Spence, “The Important Trial of Thomas Spence” [1803], in *The Political Works*, ed. Dickinson, 92–103 (93–94).

61. Spence, “The Important Trial,” 94, 97.

62. Kemp-Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, 78–82.

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64. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 93; Matilde Cazzola, “In Love with Social Order: William Allen and the ‘Science’ and ‘Art’ of Early Nineteenth-Century British Philanthropy,” *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 107, no. 377 (2022): 672–96.

65. S. S. H. S., “Invention for Saving Lives in Shipwreck,” in *The Philanthropist: Or Repository for Hints and Suggestions Calculated to Promote the Comfort and Happiness of Man*, ed. William Allen (London: Longman and Co., 1811), 1:218–22 (219); Geo. Harrison, “Additional Remarks Intended to Effect the Purpose of Civilization in Africa,” in *The Philanthropist: Or Repository for Hints and Suggestions*, ed. Allen, 1:291–302 (299).

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67. Thomas Spence, “Philanthropic Wish,” in *The Giant Killer, or, Anti-Landlord* (13 September 1814), 2:16.

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69. Terry M. Parssinen, “The Revolutionary Party in London, 1816–1820,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 14 (1972): 266–82; Chase, *The People’s Farm*.

70. Thomas Spence et al., *Spence's Songs* (London: Seale and Bates, [1810?]), 1.
71. J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796–1821* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 234–37; Iain McCalman, “Unrespectable Radicalism: Infidels and Pornography in Early Nineteenth-Century London,” *Past & Present* 104 (1984): 74–110.
72. Terry M. Parssinen, “Thomas Spence and the Spenceans: A Study of Revolutionary Utopianism in the England of George III” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1968), 182.
73. Society of Spencean Philanthropists, *The Address and Regulations, of the Society of Spencean Philanthropists* (London: Seale and Bates, 1815), 10.
74. Thomas Evans, *Christian Policy the Salvation of the Empire* (London: Seale and Bates, 1816), 11, 40, 42. On the radical “millennium,” see: Malcolm Chase, “From Millennium to Anniversary: The Concept of Jubilee in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England,” *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 132–47; Peter Linebaugh, “Jubilating: Or How the Atlantic Working Class Used the Biblical Jubilee Against Capitalism, with Some Success,” *Radical History Review* 50 (1991): 84–98.
75. These demonstrations reflected the heterogeneity of the radical front in a manner reminiscent of the 1790s. While some of the participants were members of Union Societies, agitating for the extension of the suffrage, according to the famous popular demagogue, Henry Hunt, “the whole affair was made up of Spencean principles, relating to the holding of all the land . . . as one great farm belonging to the people”: Henry Hunt, *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq.* (London: A. M. Kelley, 1822), 3:333. See also: Iorwerth Protheroe, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Methuen, 1979), 63–90; Chase, *The People's Farm*, 83; Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising*, 98–105.
76. William Hone, *The Riots in London* (London: W. Hone, 1816), 1, The British Library, G.18983(8).
77. See William Albert, “Popular Opposition to Turnpike Trusts in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *The Journal of Transport History* 5, no. 1 (1979): 1–17.
78. “Trials for High Treason!! Fairburn's Edition, No. 5” (London: Marchant Printer, 1817), The National Archives of the United Kingdom, TS/11/199 (71–72).
79. Hone, *The Riots in London*, 2.
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83. “High Treason,” in *Dublin Evening Post* (25 February 1817), 8333:2.
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98. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 782; Hone, *For the Cause of Truth*, 320–21; Chase, *The People's Farm*, 145–46; Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 63–105.
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100. On the different stages of Owen's thought, the Owenites, and the radicalism of their social schemes, see: Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 63–105, 169–267; Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*; Krishan Kumar, "Utopian Thought and Communal Practice: Robert Owen and the Owenite Communities," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 1 (1990): 1–35; Chase, *The People's Farm*, 129–43; Gregory Claeys, "Robert Owen and Owenism," in *The Cambridge History of Socialism*, ed. Marcel van der Linden (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1:146–66.
101. The Black Dwarf [Thomas J. Wooler], "Owen's Plan for the Growth of Paupers," in *The Black Dwarf: A London Weekly Publication*, ed. Thomas Wooler (20 August 1817), 30:465–76 (465–66, 471–73). Emphasis in original. See also Richard Hendrix, "Popular Humor and 'The Black Dwarf,'" *The Journal of British Studies* 16, no. 1 (1976): 108–28.
102. Amicus, "New Mode of Adapting Mr. Owen's Plan to the Exigencies of the Times," in *The Black Dwarf: A London Weekly Publication*, ed. Wooler (3 September 1817), 32:507–11 (511).
103. "Metropolitan Society for the Suppression of Mendicity," in *Westmorland Gazette, and Kendal Advertiser* (6 March 1819), 1/42:6.
104. Stheno, "The Society for the Suppression of Vice Examined, and Its Hypocritical Conduct Exposed," in *The Medusa; Or Penny Politician: A Political Publication* (6 March 1819), 1/3:17–20

(17); A Spencean Philanthropist, "The Wrongs of Man; Or, Things as They Are," in *The Medusa; Or Penny Politician* (6 March 1819), 1/3:24.

105. Among the wide range of scholarly studies on Peterloo, see: John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest: Peterloo, Cato Street and the Queen Caroline Controversy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising*.

106. "Manchester Meeting—From The Volunteer of Saturday," in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* (9 August 1819), 78/4055:3.

107. Robert Wedderburn, "Rex vs Wedderburn: Deposition of Richard Dalton" [1819], in *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings by Robert Wedderburn*, ed. Iain McCalman (Markus Wiener Publishers, 1991), 118–19 (118).

108. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language, in Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers* (London: J. F. and C. Rivington, 1785 [1755]), 1:417. See also Thomas Kaminski, "Politics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Jack Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2022), 349–66.

109. Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792–3," *The Historical Journal* 4, no. 1 (1961): 56–77.

110. "One Penny-Worth of Truth from Thomas Bull to His Brother John" (London: 1792), The British Library, 74 648.c.26(21).

111. "A Few Words, But No Lies: From Roger Bull to His Brother Thomas" (London: 1792), The British Library, 74 648.c.26(20).

112. Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (London: D. I. Eaton, 1795), 4–5.

113. Penelope Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers: Friendly Societies in Modern Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4, 70–72; Daniel Weinbren, "Supporting Self-Help: Charity, Mutuality, and Reciprocity in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Charity and Mutual Aid in Europe and North America Since 1800*, ed. Bernard Harris and Paul Bridgen (Routledge, 2007), 67–88.

114. Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers*, 6, 23, 65, 89–96. On the gendered character of the British nineteenth-century labor market, see Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner: An Intimate Story of the Victorian Economy* (Yale University Press, 2020).

115. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 94–95; David Eastwood, "Men, Morals and the Machinery of Social Legislation, 1790–1840," *Parliamentary History* 13, no. 2 (1994): 190–205.

116. John Larcher, *Fraternal and Philanthropic Policy, or Articles of the British Fraternal and Philanthropic Community* (London: A. Larcher, 1796), 8.

117. Larcher, *Fraternal and Philanthropic Policy*, 3–5, 10, 12, 29–30.

118. *Rules and Orders to Be Observed by the Philanthropic Society of House Carpenters and Joiners* (Newcastle: J. Marshall, 1812), 4, 7.

119. Bernard, "Prefatory Introduction to the Second Volume," 20; see also Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers*, 96.

120. Thomas Spence, "An Address to All Mankind" [1810?], in Spence et al., *Spence's Songs*, unpaginated.

121. See “Meeting at the Crown and Anchor,” in *The Star* (29 June 1819), 1. Among the tokens coined by Spence, there were two ambiguous ones displaying Janus-faced characters (the first half King George III and half donkey, and the second half William Pitt Jr. and half Charles James Fox) juxtaposed with the inscription “Odd Fellows”—possibly a not overly appreciative hint at the fraternity of Odd Fellows, a convivial club which developed into a mutual aid society in the early nineteenth century (Thompson, “The Dies of Thomas Spence,” 134, 137, 149). On the Odd Fellows, see: Arthur Downing, “The Friendly Planet: ‘Oddfellows,’ Networks, and the ‘British World,’ c. 1840–1914,” *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 3 (2012): 389–414; Penelope Ismay, “Between Providence and Risk: Odd Fellows, Benevolence and the Social Limits of Actuarial Science, 1820s–1880s,” *Past & Present* 226, no. 1 (2015): 115–47; Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers*, 120–61. The Odd Fellows were praised by George Smith, “A Sermon to the Lodge of Odd Fellows,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* (October 1798), 1:432–34.
122. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 169, 418–23, 497–501, 639; Frederick Burwick, *British Drama of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 76–155.
123. [Beaumont], *The Beggar’s Complaint*, 108. Emphasis in original.
124. “Philanthropic Society” [1818], in *Workers and Employers: Documents on Trade Unions and Industrial Relations in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Towers Ward and W. Hamish Fraser (Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), 19–20; Poole, *Peterloo: The English Uprising*, 173.
125. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746–1946* (Methuen, 1981 [1938]), 225; Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1987 [1963]), 27.
126. [Untitled], in *The Gorgon: A Weekly Political Publication* (23 May 1818), 1/1:1–8 (4, 8); “Philanthropic Hercules,” in *The Gorgon* (23 January 1819), 2/36:286–87 (286). Emphasis in original.
127. J. G., “An Address to the Mechanics and Labourers of the United Kingdom,” in *The Medusa: Or Penny Politician* (3 July 1819), 1/20:153–55.
128. Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, 105; Protheroe, *Artisans and Politics*; Robert G. Hall, “Tyranny, Work and Politics: The 1818 Strike Wave in the English Cotton District,” *International Review of Social History* 34 (1989): 433–70.
129. Cunningham, *The Reputation of Philanthropy*, 96–102, 116–22.
130. Claudius Fergus, “‘Dread of Insurrection’: Abolitionism, Security, and Labor in Britain’s West Indian Colonies, 1760–1823,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 757–80.
131. “Who and What Is a Slave?,” in *The Colonist, and Commercial Weekly Advertiser* (1 February 1824), 4. See also Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (Macmillan, 1984).
132. On revolts of the enslaved in the British West Indies, see, among others: Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Cornell University Press, 1982); Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Vincent Brown, *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Harvard University Press, 2022).
133. Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo* (London: J. Stockdale, 1797), xxi, 13, 193, 236. See also Erica R. Johnson, *Philanthropy and Race in the Haitian Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
134. Henry Brougham, *An Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers* (Edinburgh: D. Willison, 1803), 2:308–10, 431–32.

135. On Brougham and “revolutionary emancipationism,” see Fergus, “Dread of Insurrection.”
136. *Constitution Impériale d’Haïti* [1805], in *Documents constitutionnels d’Haïti, 1790–1860*, ed. Laurent Dubois, Julia Gaffield, and Michel Acacia (De Gruyter, 2013), 63–68 (68).
137. Matilde Cazzola, “‘All Shall Be Happy by Land and by Sea’: Thomas Spence as an Atlantic Thinker,” *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 15, no. 4 (2018): 431–50; Ajmal Waqif, “Cato Street and the Spencean Politics of Transnational Insurrection,” in *The Cato Street Conspiracy: Plotting, Counter-Intelligence and the Revolutionary Tradition in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Jason McElligott and Martin Conboy (Manchester University Press, 2020), 101–17.
138. Thomas Spence, “An Interesting Conversation” [1793], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 67–75 (69).
139. Thomas Spence, *The Rights of Man, as Exhibited in a Lecture, Read at the Philosophical Society, in Newcastle* (London: T. Spence, 1793), iii–iv.
140. Thomas Spence, “The Constitution of Spensonia” [1803], in *Pigs’ Meat: Selected Writings*, ed. Gallop, 166–85 (185).
141. Evans, *Christian Policy*, 10.
142. Society of Spencean Philanthropists, *Address of the Society*, 16.
143. Robert Wedderburn, “From Miss Campbell to Robert Wedderburn, the Spencean” [1817], in *The Horrors of Slavery*, ed. McCalman, 105–11 (106). Wedderburn is the object of a growing number of studies investigating prominent voices of the Black radical tradition; see: Iain McCalman, “Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn,” *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 7, no. 2 (1986): 99–117; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Beacon Press, 2000), 287–326; Albernaz, “Abolition, Black Ultraradicalism, and the Generation of the General Strike”; Éric Doumerc, “Robert Wedderburn as a Black Atlantic Figure at the Crossroads of British Radicalism and Caribbean Performance,” *Caliban* 65/66 (2021): 261–75; Ajmal Waqif, “Robert Wedderburn’s ‘Universal War’: Anti-Colonial Universality in the Age of Revolution,” *Historical Materialism* 32, no. 3 (2023): 193–218; Ryan Hanley, *Robert Wedderburn: British Insurrectionist, Jamaican Abolitionist* (Yale University Press, 2025).
144. “Adjourned Meeting to Take into Consideration Mr. Owen’s Plan for the Relief of the Poor,” in *Drakard’s Stamford News* (28 August 1817), 4. See also Robert Wedderburn, “Letter to the Editor,” in *The “Forlorn Hope,” or a Call to the Supine, to Rouse from Indolence and Assert Public Rights*, ed. Robert Wedderburn (1817), 1:14–16 (15–16), The British Library, P.P.3557.nb; here, Wedderburn wrote that Owen was “the tool to the land-holders and the Ministers” to “make the people fools.”
145. “Meeting at the Crown and Anchor,” 1.
146. Robert Wedderburn, “The Axe Laid to the Root or a Fatal Blow to Oppressors. No. 1” [1817], in *The Horrors of Slavery*, ed. McCalman, 81–88 (82, 86–87). A few years later, Wedderburn seemed to have adopted a more gradualist and non-violent approach to emancipation; arguably, this might have been a tactical reaction to state repression. In *The Horrors of Slavery* (1824), he wrote, “as Mr. Wilberforce truly observed, the consequence of disappointed hope might be to drive the Negroes to ‘take their cause into their own hands.’ With him, we trust that such may not be the case”: Robert Wedderburn, “The Horrors of Slavery” [1824], in *The Horrors of Slavery*, ed. McCalman, 43–63 (57). Emphasis in original. On Wedderburn’s—changing and sometimes contradictory—views on the methods of emancipationism, see Ryan Hanley, “A Radical Change of Heart: Robert Wedderburn’s Last Word on Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 37, no. 2 (2016): 423–45.

147. Joseph Marryat, *More Thoughts, Occasioned by Two Publications* (London: J. M. Richardson, 1816), 89–92, 96–99, 127.
148. *The Report from a Select Committee of the House of Assembly, Appointed to Inquire into the Origin, Causes, and Progress, of the Late Insurrection* (Barbados: W. Walker, 1818), 23, 31–34; see also Hilary McDonald Beckles, “The Wilberforce Song: How Enslaved Caribbean Blacks Heard British Abolitionists,” *Parliamentary History* 26 (2007): 113–26. On the colonial, including West Indian, reception of Spenceanism promoted by newspaper circulation, see Matilde Cazzola and Anselm Küsters, “Transnational Echoes of Spenceanism: A Text-Mining Exploration in English-Language Newspapers (1790–1850),” *International Review of Social History* 69, no. 1 (2024): 67–97.
149. “To Mr. T. J. Wooler, Editor of the Black Dwarf,” in *The Black Dwarf: A London Weekly Publication*, ed. Wooler (18 June 1817), 21:336.
150. “The African Institution and the Slave Trade,” in *The Antijacobin Review: True Churchman’s Magazine* (July 1816), 50/218:636–58 (637, 645).
151. On abolitionism, racism, and the British working classes, see: Patricia Hollis, “Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform,” in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, ed. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Archon Books, 1980), 294–315; Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1987); Alastair Bonnett, “How the British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 11, no. 3 (1998): 316–40; Ryan Hanley, “Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814–1833,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (2016): 103–23.
152. “Distinction Between Rebellion and Resistance,” in *The Black Dwarf: A London Weekly Publication*, ed. Wooler (31 July 1822), 9/5:148–52 (151–52).
153. An Inhabitant of Demerara, “State of the Colonies,” in *The Times* (10 February 1824), 12106:3.
154. “Jamaica: Trials of the Rebellious Negroes in Hanover” and “Jamaica,” in *Additional Postscript to the Royal Gazette* (17 July to 24 July 1824), 46/30:27–29, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO/137/158 (95–97).
155. “Discordant Concord,” in *The Morning Post* (1 January 1817), 14336:2.
156. Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest*, 103–55.
157. Juvenis, “To the Editor,” in *The Black Dwarf: A London Weekly Publication*, ed. Wooler (16 February 1820), 4/6:209–14 (210).
158. On the Cato Street Conspiracy, see the recent studies: McElligott and Conboy, eds., *The Cato Street Conspiracy*; Vic Gatrell, *Conspiracy on Cato Street: A Tale of Liberty and Revolution in Regency London* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).
159. George T. Wilkinson, *An Authentic History of the Cato-Street Conspiracy* (London: T. Kelly, 1820), 335, 344. In 1817, Robert Wedderburn charged British ministers with “a crime of high treason against Human Society”: C. P., “Ministerial Profligacy, &c.,” in *The “Forlorn Hope,” or a Call to the Supine*, ed. Wedderburn (1817), 1:11–14 (13). Emphasis in original.
160. Linebaugh, *The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful History of May Day*.
161. George Parsons, “The Cato Street Conspirators in New South Wales,” *Labour History* 8 (1965): 3–5.
162. Wilkinson, *An Authentic History*, 401–2.

163. [Untitled], in *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* (4 March 1820), 60/18343:2; see also Ryan Hanley, "Cato Street and the Caribbean," in *The Cato Street Conspiracy*, ed. McElligott and Conboy, 81–100 (88).

164. Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain*, 37–38, 288–89; Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

165. Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism," 8.

166. This "conviviality" was conceived by radicals in highly gendered terms. Whereas the entire debate around associational and insurrectionary philanthropy reconstructed in this article seems to have entailed a masculine ideal of the modes of doing good to one's fellow labourers, in those years, upper-class philanthropy was open to the participation of women from the middle classes, who found in charitable activism the way to engage in the public sphere before their incorporation into the electorate; see: Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*; Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815–1867* (Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), 66–74, 136–47.

167. William Allen to Czar Alexander I [1823], quoted in James Sherman, *Memoir of William Allen* (Philadelphia: H. Longstreth, 1851), 386.

168. Marco H. D. Van Leeuwen, *The Logic of Charity: Amsterdam, 1800–1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 7, 26, 78, 129, 153–59.

169. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9–13.

170. Eileen Yeo, "Class," in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. McCalman, 142–52; Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England," in *Essays in Labour History*, ed. Asa Briggs and John Saville (St. Martin's Press, 1967 [1960]), 43–73; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

171. Feargus O'Connor, *A Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms* (London: J. Cleave, 1843), 19; Malcolm Chase, "Chartism and the Land: 'The Mighty People's Question,'" in *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1850*, ed. Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57–73.

172. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* [1844], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Karl Marx, March 1843–August 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan and Dirk J. Struik (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010 [1975]), 3:229–346 (297).

173. Henry M. Hyndman, *The Nationalization of the Land in 1775 and 1882, Being a Lecture Delivered at Newcastle-upon-Tyne by Thomas Spence* (London: E. W. Allen, 1882); Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, xv–xvi.