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Anarchist Philosophy: Past, Problems and Prospects

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This chapter is concerned with three specific questions. First, has there ever been a distinctive and independent 'anarchist' political philosophy, or is anarchism better viewed as a minor sect of another political philosophy – for example, socialism or liberalism – which cannot claim any critical and conceptual resources of its own? Second, if there has been such a distinctive and independent philosophy, what are its defining characteristics? Third, whether there is a distinctive and independent anarchist political philosophy or not, *should* there be?

The answers to these questions depend crucially on how one understands the nature and purpose of political philosophy, to say nothing of how one defines 'distinctive' and 'independent'. As I will argue, anarchism does qualify as a distinctive and independent political philosophy – one that emerged historically as a unique *tertia via* (third way) between liberalism and Marxism replete with novel philosophical concepts and ideas. At the same time, however, it must be admitted that anarchist thinkers seldom articulated and developed these ideas with the level of rigour and precision characteristic of other political philosophers, and few made any forays into systematic philosophy.

Although there are specific and justifiable reasons for this – some historical and contingent, some philosophical and conceptual – the omission of anarchism from standard canons of political philosophy has much to do with its perceived theoretical and systematic underdevelopment. I will discuss this issue in brief detail. Lastly, I will argue that recent developments in, and refinements of, anarchist philosophy are beneficial for the contemporary anarchist movement, though much work remains to be done.

4.1 What is political philosophy?

Political philosophy, writes Todd May (1994: 1), 'is a project perpetually haunted by crisis . . . because it inhabits that shifting space between what is and what ought to be'. Unlike moral philosophy (which May, following Kant, identifies with the study of 'what ought to be') and metaphysics (which he identifies with the study of 'what is'), 'the work of political philosophy is dictated by the tension between the two, rather than by one of the poles' (1; cf. Kant, 1965). It is not really possible, he thinks, to study 'what ought to be' without also studying 'what is', and vice versa (2). This is because all moral theories depend to a greater or lesser extent on descriptive analyses (whether metaphysical or otherwise), whereas all metaphysical theories depend on 'the normativity inhabiting the epistemology that provides [their] foundation' (2). Nevertheless, 'political philosophy . . . has only discussed the ought *given what is*', thus 'as the social configuration shifts, so must the philosophical approach' (2). The idea that political theories are constituted by a tension between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' underlies May's three-fold taxonomy of political philosophy. The danger of this taxonomy is that it confuses political philosophy with politics and, in so doing, divests political philosophy of any distinctive *raison d'etre*. Despite this flaw, May's taxonomy – as well as his approach to political theory more generally – is helpful for understanding anarchism in itself and in relation to other political philosophies.

The first type of political philosophy, which he calls 'formal political philosophy', aims at discovering 'the nature, or at least the important characteristics, of a just society' (May, 1994: 4). It does this by attaching itself to one or the other of the two 'poles' mentioned above (is versus ought, descriptive versus normative) and builds its analysis upon this attachment (4). Most classical political philosophy can be seen as operating in this way. For example, Aristotle, Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke all attempt to determine 'what ought to be' on the basis of certain descriptive assumptions about human nature.

The same is true, May thinks, of much contemporary Anglo-American political philosophy. For example, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) is founded on a variety of descriptive assumptions, most importantly the notion that human beings are by nature rationally self-interested. As May points out, 'By utilizing the maximin principle of decision theory in a situation (the original position) of ignorance about one's eventual place in society, Rawls tries to provide the principles which all rational beings would choose as the cornerstone of [a just] society' (4). Like his

classical forebears, Rawls begins with an account of what is allegedly the case (i.e., human beings are rationally self-interested) and on this basis produces an account of what ought to be the case.

Formal political philosophy can also hew to the 'is' pole (i.e., to empirical or descriptive claims about the way the world actually is). Of particular interest here are certain Marxist theories that espouse strict historical determinism. If history is necessary, as such theories suggest, then the moral responsibilities of individuals are 'negated, if not severely diminished' (May, 1994: 6). This, in turn, implies that normative considerations are at best of secondary importance. In their place, these theories offer a description of society and proceed to demonstrate by means of dialectical analyses how society will naturally evolve. In Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), to cite just one example, bourgeois capitalism automatically introduces commodification (or 'reification') across society that, in turn, produces revolutionary class consciousness among the proletariat. As proletariat consciousness grows it will eventually 'overcome reification by overthrowing the capitalist order' and replacing it with a communist society (May, 1994: 6; cf. Lukács, 1971: 161–6).

The second type of political philosophy is what May calls 'strategic political philosophy' (1994: 7). Unlike the formal, which relies on one or the other pole of political philosophy, the strategic involves 'an immersion into the tension between the two' (7). For example, whereas the formal philosophy of Rawls employs normative analyses to determine what a just society would be like, strategic philosophy employs analyses of context, including historical and social conditions, in order to answer the question famously raised by Lenin, that is, 'what is to be done?' According to May, although formal political philosophies seek to formulate conceptions of justice, they generally avoid devising concrete strategies for the realisation of justice in society. Occasionally they provide critiques of extant political institutions or sketch out hypothetical 'alternatives' that might be implemented in the future, but they seldom explain how we are to realise such alternatives in practice (a task that is instead left to activists, politicians or policy analysts).

Strategic political philosophy sometimes produces normative critiques which are in turn levelled against real historical, social and cultural institutions. This is especially true of socialists and other 'progressives' of the early nineteenth century who criticised capitalism on squarely moral grounds. More often, however, such moral critique is simply assumed or otherwise taken for granted within strategic political

philosophy. Arguably there are some instances, say, in the case of Niccolò Machiavelli, where normative critique is ignored altogether. Barring these limited exceptions, given that this or that institution is unjust, the predominant question for the strategic philosopher becomes 'what are we going to do about it?' As May notes by way of summary:

Strategic political philosophy recognises that history and social conditions unfold not of necessity but are mutable and perhaps even regressive at times. However, neither are history and social conditions secondary; they are consulted not merely to realise an ethical programme but to determine what concrete possibilities present themselves for intervention. In this sense, not only is the historical and social situation read in terms of ethical demands, but the ethical programme is limited and perhaps partially determined by the situation. This is why much – though by no means all – political philosophy that falls under the category 'strategic' addresses itself to the concrete historical conditions under which the philosophizing takes place (1994: 7).

The idea here is that the normative and programmatic analyses of strategic political philosophy are self-reflexive: they recognise their embedded-ness within a particular context and the extent to which this context shapes and reshapes them. As the context shifts, so must the philosophy that would seek to analyse and, ultimately, change it. This is generally not true of formal political philosophy, which attempts to arrive at abstract and universal principles and prescriptions by disentangling itself from the vicissitudes of history and context.

Another important feature of strategic political philosophy, according to May, is that it usually 'involves a unitary analysis that aims towards a single goal' (1994: 10). Marxist philosophy, for example, locates the source of power within the substructure of economic relations with a mind to the eventual abolition of capitalism: 'Political and social change, if it is to be significant, must rest upon a transformation at the base [...]. All problems can be reduced to the basic one' (10). The same is true of certain strands of radical feminism which reduce all oppression to patriarchal dominance. Strategic feminist philosophy of this sort therefore relies on radical critique of gender relations with a mind to 'overthrowing' patriarchy. In all cases, the basic idea is that oppressive power emanates from a unitary source that must be combated and destroyed in order to achieve the goal of liberation.

The third and final type of political philosophy that May discusses is 'tactical political philosophy' (1994: 11). Like strategic philosophy, tactical philosophy subsists in the tension between the is-pole and the ought-pole, but it does not attempt to reduce political analysis to a

central and foundational problematic. For the tactical philosopher, any attempt to locate power in a single centre radically circumscribes the sphere of possible intervention. Tactical political philosophy instead acknowledges the 'many different sites from which [power] arises and [. . .] the interplay among these various sites in the creation of the social world' (1994: 11). Power does not originate in or flow from these sites but rather builds up around them in varying degrees. One of the central theses of May's *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* is that 'poststructuralism, particularly as it is embodied in the works of Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard, has defined a tradition of the type of political philosophy . . . called "tactical" ' (1994: 12). The same is true, he thinks, of various 'classical anarchist' writers such as Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. Anarchism is a 'tactical philosophy' because it recognises the multifarious and diffuse nature of power and refuses to reduce all particular instances of oppression to a more basic form. In the next section, I shall explore anarchist philosophy in greater detail.

4.2 Anarchism as political philosophy

To many it may seem odd to regard anarchism as a genuine 'political philosophy' at all since, unlike some of the others mentioned previously, it has never been, nor ever aspired to be, a fixed, comprehensive, self-contained and internally consistent system of ideas, set of doctrines or body of theory. On the contrary, anarchism, from its earliest days, has been an evolving set of attitudes and ideas that can apply to a wide range of social, economic and political theories, practices, movements and traditions. As a result of its theoretical flexibility and open-endedness – or perhaps as a contributing factor to it, or perhaps both – anarchism has historically tended to emphasise revolutionary praxis over analysis of, and discourse about, revolutionary strategy (Graeber, 2004: 54). This explains why some Marxist-Leninists have accused anarchism of being an 'anti-intellectual', 'unscientific' and/or 'utopian' doctrine, and why some anarchists, in turn, have regarded political theory with impatience and suspicion, if not outright disdain.

Although anarchist theory has a unique tactical dimension, it also has a long and impressive history as a distinctive formal – and specifically ethical – philosophy. Moreover, both tactical and formal philosophy have played and continue to play a crucial role in anarchist interventions in working-class and labour movements. Too often the writings which were disseminated to, and hungrily consumed by, workers in these movements are dismissed as 'propaganda'. However, insofar as

they articulate and define political, economic and social concepts; subject political, economic and social institutions to trenchant critique against clear and well-defined normative standards; offer logical justifications of their own positions; and advance positive alternative proposals; why should these writings *not* be regarded as philosophical texts and analysed accordingly? Obviously they should, and the fact that they have been so long ignored by political philosophers, historians and other scholars has everything to do with academic prejudice and nothing to do with the intellectual and philosophical merit of the writings themselves.

In scholarly literature, the term 'classical anarchism' is most often used in reference to the pre-1918 European anarchist movement (e.g., Crowder, 1991). Once in a while, however, 'classical anarchism' seems to be something like a catch-all for the work of three thinkers – Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin – whose ideas are allegedly close enough that we are justified in treating them all as a single, homogeneous unit. As it turns out, 'classical anarchism' in this sense is an academic myth. Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin – indeed, most anyone who could be identified, or would have identified herself, as an anarchist prior to 1918 – disagreed on a wide array of issues: for example, whether and to what extent the use of violence is justified in revolutionary activity, what the role of labour unions is or should be, what the role of women in the movement should be, whether to advocate free love or to maintain 'conventional' sexual partnerships, how to answer the so-called 'Jewish question', whether and to what extent to collaborate with other revolutionary and left-wing parties, how and when the revolution will be initiated and how post-revolutionary society will be organised. In fact, anarchists probably disagreed more on balance than they agreed. Yet somehow, despite these often massive differences of opinion, they *mostly* managed to stick together without internal purges, executions, assassinations or jailings. How was this possible?

As L. Susan Brown (1993: 106) notes, 'Anarchist political philosophy is by no means a unified movement [. . .] Within the anarchist "family" there are mutualists, collectivists, communists, federalists, individualists, socialists, syndicalists, [and] feminists.' Different 'anarchisms' may provide different definitions of anarchy, different justifications for pursuing anarchy, different strategies for achieving anarchy and different models of social, economic and political organisation under anarchy (Brown, 1993: 106; cf. Rocker, 1938: 20–1). Notwithstanding such differences, all 'anarchisms' are properly so called in virtue of endorsing

certain distinct ideas and practices. The question, of course, is what such ideas and practices might be.

One common misconception, which has been rehearsed repeatedly by the few Anglo-American philosophers who have bothered to broach the topic such as A. J. Simmons (1996) and R. P. Wolff (1970), is that anarchism can be defined solely in terms of opposition to states and governments. Simmons (1996: 19) writes, for example, that 'commitment to one central claim unites all forms of anarchist political philosophy: all existing states are illegitimate.' From this it allegedly follows that the 'minimal moral content' of anarchism is just that the subjects of illegitimate states lack general political obligations (22).

Wolff's and Simmons' definition of anarchism, and all others like it, is *extremely* idiosyncratic in view of the anarchist tradition we are discussing. The word 'anarchy', which comes from the Greek *anarkhos*, does not principally mean 'without a government' or 'without a state', but rather 'without authority'. As David Wieck (1979) notes, 'anarchism is more than anti-statism, even if government (the state) is, appropriately, the central focus of anarchist critique' (139). As 'the generic social and political idea that expresses negation of all [repressive] power' (1979: 139; cf. Kropotkin, 1970b: 150), anarchism is committed first and foremost to the universal rejection of coercive authority. To be sure, the various schools of anarchism may disagree among themselves concerning *how* coercive authority ought to be opposed. But they are generally agreed that coercive authority includes all centralised and hierarchical forms of government (e.g., monarchy, representative democracy and state socialism), economic class systems (such as capitalism, Bolshevism, feudalism and slavery), autocratic religions (whether fundamentalist Islam, Roman Catholicism or many others), patriarchy, heterosexism, white supremacy and imperialism (Rocker, 1938: 20; Proudhon, 1969; Morris, 1995: 35–41). All anarchisms are properly so called in virtue of endorsing a common moral position. At the deepest and most fundamental level anarchism as *philosophy* is an *ethics*; everything it affirms or denies, champions or condemns, must ultimately be understood in ethical or moral terms.

But what exactly is this moral commitment which all anarchists share in common? It has already been intimated. The ethical core of anarchism is the claim that all forms of coercive authority are morally condemnable. Notice that the form of this claim is evaluative (i.e., having to do with values) rather than normative (i.e., having to do with norms or principles of conduct). In other words, it is not a prescription or a recommendation but rather a value judgement, one that asserts that

coercive authority is, in essence, 'bad'. When one consults the writings of the anarchists, moreover, one finds this assertion, this *condemnation*, repeated so often that it takes on the appearance of a motto. This strongly suggests that anarchism is founded first and foremost on a conception of the good – an *axiology* – rather than on a conception of the right. But in what does this conception of the good consist? The universal condemnation of coercive authority is a negative judgement – it specifies what is 'bad' but does not directly indicate what is to be regarded as 'good' or 'praiseworthy'.

The answer to this question depends entirely on what 'good' stands in opposition to the 'evil' of coercive authority. It also depends, quite crucially, on what is meant by 'coercive authority'. As we mentioned earlier, authority is a type of power relation – one that involves not just the *de facto* capacity to exercise power over others, but also a *de jure* license or warrant to exercise power over others. Defined in this way, authority cannot reasonably be regarded as evil in itself. Indeed, all the anarchist thinkers we have discussed recognise that there are many types of authority relations, not all of which are objectionable. As Richard Sylvan (1993: 221) notes,

> Consider, for example, the relation of a student to an authority in some field of knowledge, who can in turn back up expert judgments by appeal to a further range of assessable evidence [...]. [A]nyone with time and some skill can proceed past the authority to assess claims made.

Such authority relations, which Sylvan calls 'transparent' or 'open', stand in opposition to

> '[O]paque' (or 'closed') authorities, who simply stand on their position or station [...or] appeal to a conventional rule or procedure ('that is how things are done' or 'have always been done') without being able to step beyond some rule book...which has been enacted (for reasons not open to, or bearing, examination) by a further substantially opaque authority.
>
> (1993: 221)

Anarchists have typically objected to opaque authority relations because they lack precisely what authority in general claims to have – that is, adequate justification. In other words, opaque authority is arbitrary, which in turn implies that people have no reason to recognise its

power over them. Submission to arbitrary authority is objectionable in itself because it 'divest[s] the personality of its most integral traits; it denies the very notion that the individual is competent to deal [...] with the management of his or her personal life' (Bakunin, 1974: 202). Put another way, arbitrary authority violates psychological and moral autonomy – the ability of the individual to think and act for herself in accordance with reason and conscience (Fromm, 1986: 10; Goldman, 1998: 435).

Without a theoretical or moral justification, opaque authority invariably backs up its power with coercion and violence. Anarchists oppose coercion for the same reason they oppose opaque authority more generally: because it violates the 'self-respect and independence' of the individual (Goldman, 1998: 72). As Bakunin (1970) says, authority that purports to be 'privileged, licensed, official, and legal, even if it arises from universal suffrage...' will inevitably be enforced through violence 'to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters' (35). Compelling obedience to, or recognition of, authority through the use or threat of coercion (violent or otherwise) constitutes a fundamental denial of individual liberty, and for this reason alone deserves condemnation. In opposing 'coercive authority,' therefore, anarchists oppose arbitrary authority coupled with the use or threat of coercive means to underwrite said authority. They do so, moreover, because coercive authority is by definition at odds with individual freedom.

Yet there is more to anarchism than this. After all, while anarchists obviously value freedom, the same is true of liberals and non-anarchist socialists. In fact, several of the most radical early liberals understood coercive authority in the same basic way as anarchists did, and opposed it for the same basic reasons. Of particular relevance here is the English political philosopher William Godwin, who argues in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice* that freedom is logically incompatible with government. Indeed, Godwin valued freedom to such an extent that he advocated the abolition of the state. (It is not surprising, for this reason, that Godwin is often regarded as an important precursor to modern anarchism.)

We must recall, however, that the 'freedom' which Godwin and other classical liberals value is *negative* freedom ('freedom from'). To be sure, negative freedom is also valued by anarchists, and the liberal conception of negative freedom was extremely influential in the development of early anarchism, especially in post-Revolutionary France. Yet Proudhon, the first thinker to refer to his own political theory as 'anarchism', devotes most of his attention to the abolition of private property and

the collective ownership of the means of production rather than the elimination of governments. When he does talk about eliminating governments, he does so only to motivate his positive proposal – namely, the establishment of a federal system of voluntary associations. The point, simply put, is that Proudhon was a socialist, not a liberal, and like all early socialists his primary ethical and political concern was not so much freedom as it was *justice*.

As we noted earlier, justice for the socialists is a function of equality, which is surely the *summum bonum* of socialism if anything is. Like other socialists, Proudhon understands equality not just as an abstract feature of human nature but as an ideal state of affairs that is both desirable and realisable. This state of affairs does not involve forcing human beings into a 'common grove' or making them into 'will-less automatons without independence or individuality'. It does not mean 'equal outcome' but 'equal opportunity'. Thus Alexander Berkman (2003: 164–5) writes the following:

> Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse in fact [...] Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse [...]. Free opportunity of expressing and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations.
>
> (cf. Bakunin, 1994: 117–18; Guerin, 1998: 57–8)

It is worth recalling at this point that the word 'anarchy' refers not only to the absence of coercive authority but to the absence of a 'chief', 'head' or 'top' – in other words, to the absence of concentrated power exercised 'from the top down'. Anarchist equality, therefore, entails the equal distribution of power, which in turn implies the categorical rejection of centralisation and hierarchy. Such equality is necessary, moreover, in order to maximise individual freedom – not just 'freedom from' (negative liberty) but 'freedom to' (positive liberty).

Positive liberty, as Emma Goldman (1998: 439) explains, is necessary for a human being 'to grow to his full stature ... [to] learn to think and move, to give the very best of himself [... to] realise the true force of the

social bonds that tie men together, and which are the true foundations of a normal social life'. This quotation underscores two indispensable features of the anarchist conception of freedom: first, that freedom involves the capacity of the individual to create herself, to resist what Foucault calls 'subjectivation' by cultivating new identities and forms of subjectivity; and second, that freedom is a capacity that emerges in, and is made possible by, social existence (as Proudhon (Quoted in Buber, 1958: 30) says, 'all associated and all free [...] the autonomy of the individual within the freedom of association').

The second feature belies a crucial difference between anarchism and liberalism. In a state of negative freedom, the rational, egoistic and atomistic agent of liberalism recognises her interests (understood not just as personal desires but as various ends determined by universal human nature) and takes means to achieve them. For the anarchists, however, 'the making of a human being is a collective process, a process in which both the community and the individual participate' (Bookchin, 1986: 79). Human subjectivity is produced in part by social forces, which can be either positive or negative, as well as by the individual force of self-creation (i.e., 'positive freedom').

The realisation of individual freedom, as Bakunin stresses, depends on recognising and 'cooperating in [the] realization of others' freedom' (quoted in Malatesta, 2001: 30). 'My freedom', he continues, 'is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men and women who are my equals' (30). As Malatesta (1965: 23) further notes,

> We are all egoists, we all seek our own satisfaction. But the anarchist finds his greatest satisfaction in struggling for the good of all, for the achievement of a society in which he [*sic*] can be a brother among brothers, and among healthy, intelligent, educated, and happy people. But he who is adaptable, who is satisfied to live among slaves and draw profit from the labour of slaves, is not, and cannot be, an anarchist.

In sum, freedom and equality are, for the anarchists, symbiotic concepts: individual freedom is positively constituted by and through social relations, which are in turn positively constituted by and through individual freedom.

The first feature of the anarchist conception of freedom is merely a reiteration of a point made earlier – namely, that freedom is a practice

of self-creation, 'the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual [...the] display of human energy' (Goldman, 1998: 67–8). At the same time, the 'desire to create and act freely [and] the craving for liberty and self-expression' are not innate characteristics but rather capacities that can be variously liberated or repressed. Freedom therefore has both a negative and a positive dimension. On the one hand, it must be understood as a precondition for self-creation, the 'open defiance of, and resistance to, all laws and restrictions, economic, social, and moral' which impede the cultivation and expression of individuality (Goldman, 1998: 67–8). On the other hand, freedom is coextensive with the process of self-creation itself, understood as the cultivation not only of individual subjectivity but also of social subjectivity or consciousness manifested concretely in healthy social environments (67). It is precisely this emphasis on freedom that distinguishes anarchism from other socialist theories, especially those that developed in the nineteenth century. For Engels and Lenin, no less than for Blanqui and Saint-Simon, the freedom of the individual is subordinate to the end of economic and social equality. This explains in part why anarchists are referred to – and refer to themselves – as 'libertarian socialists'.

Strictly speaking, then, freedom and equality are not distinct concepts for the anarchists. At the same time, it would be a mistake to suggest that anarchism simply fuses the liberal concept of freedom with the socialist concept of equality in a kind of synthesis. Rather, anarchist 'freedom-equality' is simply an expression of – a way of speaking about – human life itself. By life, moreover, we do not mean biological life but rather the immanent processes of change, development and becoming in terms of which Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin *inter alia* (among other things) describe existence. In both its potential to change and its actual transformations, in both its singularity and universality, human life is a reflection of the 'unity in multiplicity' which Proudhon ascribes to the universe as a whole. Individual and social, social and ecological, ecological and global, global and cosmic – these are just so many levels of analysis which, if they can be said to differ at all, only differ in terms of scope. For the anarchists, '*Il ya seulement la vie, et la vie suffit*' ('there is only life, and it is enough').

It is this hybrid concept – which we might term 'vitality' – to which anarchist ethics ascribes the highest value. Domination and hierarchy, in turn, are condemnable to the extent, and only to the extent, that they oppose this concept. Perhaps at the level of pure ethics it is enough to describe this opposition in terms of limitation: domination and hierarchy inhibit, impede, obstruct and ultimately destroy life, and that

is why domination and hierarchy are evil. For our purposes, however, a higher degree of specificity is necessary: we must explain not only *that* domination and hierarchy oppose life but also *how* they do. May (1994: 47) has argued, quite rightly in my view, that the principal mode of political domination is *representation*, the generic process of subsuming the particular under the general.

In the political realm, representation involves divesting individuals and groups of their *vitality* – their power to create, transform and change themselves. To be sure, domination often involves the literal destruction of vitality through violence and other forms of physical coercion. As a social-physical phenomenon, however, domination is not reducible to aggression of this sort. On the contrary, domination operates chiefly by 'speaking for others' or 'representing others to themselves' – that is, by manufacturing images of, or constructing identities for, individuals and groups.

These modes of subjectivation, as Foucault calls them, are in some instances foisted upon individuals or groups through direct or indirect processes of coercion. In other instances, modes of subjectivation are enforced and reinforced more subtly – for example, by becoming 'normalised' within a community. The result is that individuals and groups come to identify with the normalised representation, to conform to it, and so to regulate themselves in the absence of any direct coercion. Along these same lines, the anarchists were the first to acknowledge that representation is not a purely macropolitical phenomenon. Representation can and does occur at the micropolitical level – that is, at the level of everyday life – and needs to be avoided and resisted accordingly.

Deleuze (1977: 209) claimed at one point that Foucault was the first to teach us of 'the indignity of speaking for others'. Had Deleuze read Proudhon, Bakunin or Goldman, he might have come to a very different conclusion. For indeed, if anyone deserves credit for this 'discovery' it is the so-called 'classical anarchists'. It was they, after all, who first ascribed the highest moral value (and not merely dignity) to the ability of human beings and communities to 'speak for themselves', to act creatively upon themselves and to open up and pursue new possibilities for themselves – in short, to *live*. So, too, it was the anarchists who realised that political oppression is fundamentally constituted by wresting this ability from others, and, more importantly, that this 'wresting' involves 'giving people images [representations] of who they are and what they desire' (May, 1994: 48). It matters little whether that representation is legislated through an electoral process or imposed by a revolutionary vanguard, for the effect is the same. 'The life-giving order

of freedom', Bakunin (1974) writes, 'must be made solely from the bottom upwards [...]. Only individuals, united through mutual aid and voluntary association, are entitled to decide who they are, what they shall be, how they shall live' (206–7). When that power is taken over by or ceded to hierarchical, coercive institutions of any sort, the result is oppression, domination and un-freedom: in a word, *death*.

Although I have established that anarchism is defined in part by a theory of value, this theory of value does not directly entail or endorse a principle of anti-authoritarianism, nor any other explicitly normative principle. On the contrary, it is clear that 'the critique of representation in the anarchist tradition runs deeper than just political representation,' extending into a far wider range of discourses, including morality. Kropotkin (1970a: 105), for example, argues that the value of individual and communal vitality precludes 'a right which moralists have always taken upon themselves to claim, that of mutilating the individual in the name of some ideal'. In practice, if not also in theory, the prescription of universal normative principles and moral mandates is just one more form of representation. As Kropotkin argues, the authority of such principles – the motivating force that they supposedly hold over us – depends crucially on totalised conceptions of a universal human nature or essence, on representations of 'the human being' as such. This is, again, the very substance of oppression.

In the place of normativity, the anarchists offer two alternatives: first, an anthropologico-genealogical description of the origins and functions of moral systems; and second, a pragmatic or procedural theory of action referred to as 'prefiguration' (Graeber, 2004: 62; Purkis and Bowen, 2005: 220). The first alternative, which is articulated most fully by Kropotkin, examines morality as such from an anthropological, sociological and evolutionary-psychological perspective. It goes on to explore the extent to which particular systems of morality, ranging from Kantianism to utilitarianism, have functioned in practice as mechanisms of domination and control (Morris, 2002). Kropotkin is therefore not interested in the question of whether, how and to what extent particular practices can be morally justified; rather, he is interested in the question of how systems of morality – particularly those systems which allegedly provide normative grounds for the condemnation of oppressive practices – come to be oppressive practices in their own right.

The second alternative refers to a practical principle observed more or less uniformly by anarchists over the past two centuries, namely, the 'prefigurative principle'. Borrowing from Benjamin Franks' work on

the subject (2006: 97–100; 2009: 101–2), simply stated, the 'prefigurative principle' demands coherence between means and ends (Goldman, 2003: 261). That is, if the goal of political action is the promotion of some value and, by extension, opposition to whatever is at odds with that value, the means and methods employed in acting must reflect or *prefigure* the desired end. A helpful example is provided by Bakunin, who criticised certain Marxists for employing hierarchical, coercive methods in pursuit of egalitarian, libertarian ends: 'How could one want an equalitarian and free society to issue from authoritarian organization? It is impossible!' (Quoted by Bakunin in Kenafick, 1984: 7).

One can also point to the debate between Kropotkin, who disavowed the individual use of violent 'propaganda by deed', and the Russian revolutionary Sergei Nechayev, who advocated the use of terrorist tactics (Nechayev, 1989). As Paul Avrich notes, whereas Kropotkin insisted that means and ends are 'inseparable', which in turn implied that anarchists should not use the violent methods of the state in pursuit of the abolition of the state, Nechayev believed firmly that the end alone justifies the means (7–8; 29). More than one scholar has noted that Nechayev's uncompromising consequentialism shares more in common with Leninism than with the anarchism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Prawdin, 1961; Quail, 1978). That anarchism, as well as later anarchist movements within the New Left (Breines, 1982: 52–3) and in contemporary political struggles (Graeber, 2002, 2007), is distinguished very conspicuously by its strong commitment to the prefigurative principle – one that follows directly from the anarchist conception of power.

Anarchists hold that power relations, including those of an oppressive variety, can never be wholly abolished. This implies, among other things, that anarchy is defined by the ongoing process of contesting and reducing oppression rather than the utopian ideal of destroying oppressive structures and relations once and for all. In order to avoid reproducing oppressive power relations, moreover, the means and methods employed in this process ought to be consistent with their intended aims; the tactics used in pursuit of the value of freedom should themselves embody or reflect that value.

The prefigurative principle is not a normative prescription but a pragmatic recommendation (or, to use Kant's terminology, a 'hypothetical imperative'). The point of prefiguration is not to establish a foundation for normative judgement. The word 'ought' does not specify what is morally 'right' or 'wrong', but rather what is practical, prudent and

consistent. To this extent, the prefigurative principle provides a general procedure for action that does not rely upon transcendent moral concepts or totalised representations of human nature. Within the broad ethical boundaries established by prefiguration and the general anarchist commitment to freedom and equality, there is enormous room for diversity of opinion. There is also a great, pressing and omnipresent demand for action at the expense of talk.

Taken together, these considerations begin to explain why anarchists have not distinguished themselves as especially 'sophisticated' philosophers even though it is clear that anarchism has an extremely sophisticated philosophical core. They also gesture at why anarchists have always maintained a fundamental unity-in-diversity as concerns political theory. In all events, it is clear that anarchism is an independent political philosophy whose unique theoretical and ethical approach distinguishes it from liberalism, Marxism and other political traditions. It is also clear that anarchist political philosophy has both a formal and a tactical dimension, combining a critique of existing conditions with concrete proposals for intervention.

4.3 Political philosophy as an anarchist practice

In its self-mythologising, anarchism is occasionally said to have evolved piecemeal among the peasants and labouring classes of Europe – again, as compared to Marxism, which was allegedly cooked up all at once in Marx's brain (!!). Errico Malatesta (1965: 198) is typical when he claims that anarchism 'follows ideas, not men, and rebels against the habit of embodying a principle in any one individual [. . . and] it does not seek to create theories through abstract analysis but to express the aspirations and experiences of the oppressed'. As is often the case there are tiny grains of truth to be found in the mythology. Proudhon, Voltairine de Cleyre, Goldman and Rudolf Rocker, for example, all came from poor families (Rocker was orphaned) and were mostly self-educated. In contrast, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Élisée Reclus and Gustav Landauer were all very well-educated; the first two were Russian aristocrats and the rest were squarely bourgeois. For the most part, therefore, anarchist theory was very much a product of literate, mostly middle-class minds. Its alleged 'simplicity', whether it is a merit or a fault, cannot be attributed to rural or working-class origins.

As a movement, however, European anarchism was from the start almost exclusively associated with the peasants and the working class. Furthermore, whereas Marxist socialism initially took hold in France,

England, Germany and the Low Countries, libertarian socialism (anarchism) initially found its strongest footholds in Spain, Italy, Southern and Eastern Europe and European Jewish communities. We need not concern ourselves with the underlying causes of these geographic and cultural disparities. Suffice it to say that anarchism's early popularity among workers explains why so many anarchist texts were published as newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, brochures, transcripts of speeches and flyers rather than long-form books – because, for example, the former are cheaper and can more easily be read by working people between shifts or during breaks. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, therefore, the pamphlet became a standard genre for countless anarchist writers, including de Cleyre and Emma Goldman in the United States, Jean Grave and Sébastien Faure in France and Carlo Cafiero and Pietro Gori in Italy. Even denser works by Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and others were reprinted in excerpted or serialised pamphlet form to facilitate reading by busy workers.

Compared to a Marxist tome, which is typically long, dense and extremely technical, an anarchist pamphlet from the same period is brief, simple and fiercely but elegantly written. Not surprisingly, the anarchists' propensity towards *belle écriture* (beautiful writing) was often disparaged as frivolous by scientific socialists, a charge which contributed mightily to anarchism's reputation for theoretical shallowness. (Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg are remembered not as stylists so much as philosophers, whereas Gori, if he is remembered at all, is revered not for his brilliant essays but for his beautiful poems and songs.) In reality, this is only further evidence of anarchist pragmatism. For one thing, working people seldom had education enough to comprehend the intricacies of Marxist dialectics. For another thing, few of them had the time or inclination to teach themselves something as seemingly useless and remote from their everyday experiences as dialectical philosophy. Not only *could* anarchist philosophy be written in a simple and enjoyable-to-read manner; it was *obliged* to be written that way. After all, the point was not just to 'educate' but to inspire, uplift and even entertain as well.

We learn from Paul Avrich's *oeuvre* (see especially Avrich, 1970, 1989) that philosophy played a vital role in working-class anarchist culture. Because working families valued education, perhaps above all else, reading and studying philosophical texts was both a common and a highly valued activity. In New York, Chicago, Boston and other cities throughout the United States, anarchist groups and radical labour unions formed reading clubs in order to promote philosophical and cultural literacy

throughout the entire community. Among the anarchist workers, it was taken for granted that being educated was part and parcel of being revolutionary. It was also understood, however, that because knowledge is not freely given to the powerless by the powerful, the powerless must seek knowledge themselves and share it with one another. This sentiment was the driving force behind the establishment of dozens of libertarian educational projects, from countless informal anarchist book clubs to the first Modern School in New York City in 1911.

A few points are worth noting here by way of summary. First, anarchism has always been committed to a kind of 'populism' as concerns political theorising. Simply put, if the people to whom a political theory applies are by and large unable to understand, appreciate or relate to that theory, there is something wrong either with the theory itself or, more likely, with the manner in which the theory is articulated. I would add this commitment to David Graeber's (2004: 1–3) list of reasons why anarchism has never been especially popular among academics. Generally speaking, academics seem to have a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, commitment to theoretical elitism. (Why this is so I will leave to sociologists to explain.) Because we are generally under no obligation to make ourselves clear to anyone except other scholars in our disciplines or sub-disciplines, we almost inevitably end up communicating our ideas in a less-than-populist manner. If it turns out that most of us actually prefer it this way, it is easy to understand why most of us are not anarchists. But this just underscores the absurdity of dismissing anarchism as 'philosophically and theoretically unsophisticated' because it refuses, and has always refused, to play the game according to our (academic) rules. On the contrary, it is precisely anarchism's unyielding populism that gives us reason to take it seriously as a *genuinely* revolutionary and working-class philosophy.

Second, anarchism has always been committed to the inseparability of theory and praxis. Marxist-Leninists talk about this a great deal too, but that is exactly the problem according to anarchists. 'Inseparability' here is not *just* a theoretical or conceptual talking point. A work like Bakunin's *God and the State*, for all its logical and philosophical flaws, was intended to inspire both thought *and* action. All good anarchist philosophy is like this – authored with a mind towards drawing rooms *and* barricades, classrooms *and* streets. You cannot change the world without understanding it, and you cannot understand the world without trying to change it. What good is it in writing a book called *A Theory of Justice*, say, if it does not provide any possibility for meaningful political intervention? On the other hand, what good is it in protesting against the

government or the corporations if one is unable to explain *why* she is protesting or *what* she would like to see take their place? Anarchists have always understood this dialectic, which is why anarchist philosophy has always taken its particular and peculiar shape. If anarchist philosophy does not take up certain problems, it is because they are irrelevant as concerns real-world struggle, because they do not allow for meaningful political intervention.

Third, anarchist texts tend to be relatively brief and simple because, with a few important exceptions (e.g., Proudhon's oeuvre), anarchist philosophy is not comprehensive or systematic. Anarchism obviously has nothing comparable to *Capital* or *State and Revolution*. What is more, the anarchists occasionally borrowed from other political movements, including Marxism, and were usually quite fair in giving credit where it was due. From the 1860s, European socialists of all stripes accepted Marx's general critique of capitalism even if they rejected other aspects of Marxist theory. This was certainly true of the anarchists, who never developed a comprehensive economic philosophy of their own. (Interestingly, although anarchists argued along with Marx that capitalism exploits workers, adopted the labour theory of value and even made a habit of using Marxist language, they went a step further by claiming that exploitation was immoral and unjust. As scientific socialists, Marx and Engels rejected ethical language of this sort. But as Malatesta once said, working people care about what is right, not about what is scientific.)

Fourth, and crucially, let us not forget that the anarchist movement I have been discussing thus far had all but vanished by the end of the Second World War. (This is yet perhaps another reason for anarchism's being ignored in academia.) Anarchism has been struggling towards resurrection ever since, and while there have been a few false starts (e.g., in 1968 and 1999), we are only now beginning to witness a genuine rebirth. Why is that? To begin with, there are anarchist scholars everywhere now, whereas before there were only anarchists. They say the spirit of anarchism never dies, and while that is probably true, having the spirit of something is not the same thing as knowing that spirit or understanding it. Surely the *enragés* of 1968 and the anti-globalisation protesters of 1999 were anarchists in spirit. But were they the same kind of anarchists as those of 1900? In some broad sense, perhaps, but from a strictly historical and political vantage, the answer is 'no way'.

Amazingly, we have probably learned more about the classical anarchists in the past 4 years than we knew about them in the entire period running from 1968 to 1999. The reason for this, simply put, is that many

of those former anti-globalisation protesters have since earned doctoral degrees and are doing important – in some cases ground-breaking – research on all conceivable aspects of anarchism. This was not the case 10 years ago. Now, new texts are being translated and interpreted every day and our knowledge of classical anarchism is growing and changing as a result, especially in the area of philosophy. Anarchism is no longer quite as obscure, its texts no longer hidden away in dusty archives. The more it is brought to light, the less it can be ignored by scholars who would rather have nothing to do with it and had been much happier without it. This is especially true in my own discipline of philosophy.

4.4 Conclusion

The recent resurgence of scholarly interest in classical anarchism has been accompanied by hopeful developments in anarchist activist circles. For example, the lifestyle and identity politics which had prevailed among American radicals since the heyday of the New Left are slowly giving way to class-based, labour-oriented politics. Perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon is the colourful and conspicuous re-emergence of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Wobblies, who of late have been applying themselves full force to the organisation of workers in the service sector. It is also worth noting that many of the aforementioned scholars are also committed activists. As such, we can reasonably expect their academic research to shape, inform and influence their own political activities and those of other activists in several interesting ways. Indeed, this is already happening at annual and semi-annual conferences for anarchist scholars and activists around the world.

For the time being, however, it is clear that anarchist philosophy is mostly ghettoised within academic and activist subcultures. The question is not just how to bring anarchism (back) to working people, but how to make it theirs (again), as well as ours, the academics, the activists. Short of major political, social and cultural changes, my sense is that this will require certain kinds of people – people we have mostly lost and desperately need to find again: firebrand agitators and 'rabble rousers' of the Bughouse Square variety; soapbox orators and makers of sidewalk speeches; poor men's intellectuals who can ease complicated thoughts into smooth, supple prose; pamphleteers (bloggers?) with poets' hearts and tongues of gold. The anarchist philosophers of old were not only talented intellectuals but also gifted 'people persons' who had charisma,

charm and leadership skills. There is no shortage of great ideas in contemporary anarchism. What we contemporary anarchists need, it seems, are great people to bring them to life.

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