

## **Anarchism and Global Ethics**

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### **Introduction**

In this essay, my aim is to clear some ground for thinking about global ethics from an anarchist point of view. With one or two exceptions (Falk 1978, 2010, Weiss 1975, Gaby 2008, Prichard 2013), anarchism has had no voice in academic debates about the means and ends of global justice, even though broad swaths of the global justice movement is today at least *anarchistic* in political orientation (Epstein 2001, Graeber 2013).<sup>1</sup> This relative absence in academic circles is almost certainly partly due to the association of anarchy with the theory of the state of nature in IR and political theory, as well as general misconceptions about anarchism as an ideology.

In relation to the former, Thomas Nagel's view is fairly typical. For him, "the path from anarchy to justice must go through injustice" (Nagel 2005: 147). Following a broadly secular theodicy, of the sort we see in thinkers from Hobbes to Kant and

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<sup>1</sup> What passes as anarchism in contemporary political theory and ethics, philosophical anarchism and/or libertarianism, is not really anarchism at all. I do not have the space to set out the terms of this debate here and will simply say that it has been done perfectly well elsewhere by Nathan Jun (2016), Magda Egoumenides (2014), and Paul McLoughlin (2010).

beyond, our human failings are the means through which we have to negotiate a philosophical and epochal shift from barbarism to civility. This association of anarchy with barbarism is typical, but a definitional choice that betrays a number of Eurocentric biases, from the association of anti-state, anti-proletarian and anti-sedentary social orders with backwardness (Scott 2009, Krasner 2011, Jahn 2000), to philosophies of history that presumed that the success of European civilization would necessarily emerge out of conflict with the uncivilized rest (Behnke 2008, Keene 2002). Bringing state-like order to the former, and resolving the latter in similar fashion, is at the heart of variations of the ‘domestic analogy’, replete within a range of world state theories to this day (e.g., Albert et al 2012).

However, there are other ways of understanding the concept of anarchy, and these can be found in the anarchist tradition, better remembered on the street than in the academy, consequently rarely discussed in political theory or IR, let alone global ethics. This conceptual recovery is underway elsewhere and promises to revive debate around a central but remarkably uncontested concept in political science as well as IR (Alker 1996, Prichard 2016, Havercroft and Prichard 2017). In this chapter I want to set out how the concept of anarchy, as used by anarchists, might help reshape how we approach global ethics.

To do this, I have structured the chapter in three parts. In part one I reclaim the concept of anarchy, central to anarchist politics, from the mainstream IR usage. In particular, I wish to show how, with an anarchist inflection, the concept of anarchy becomes radical and emancipatory in anarchist hands. In part two I deploy this reformulation of the concept of anarchy to engage standard questions in the study of global ethics. In part three I consider three objections, from the left, to this anarchist praxis: first that contemporary anarchism is an individualist protest movement not a

coherent politics. Secondly, that the anarchist rejection of the state makes it democratically illegitimate. Finally, that anarchist anti-representationalism makes it practically useless in a globalised world. Each of these is connected and presents a powerful objection to anarchism. Responding to these criticisms is central to underpinning the ethical credentials of anarchism. I conclude by making the case for an anarchist theory of anarchy to help reorient thinking about global ethics.

### **Anarchy and Global Ethics: from International Relations to Anarchism**

To think about ethics from an anarchist point of view demands we reclaim the concept of anarchy from mainstream and normative International Relations (IR) theory. After all, if anarchists are not defenders of anarchy, then the moniker is a misnomer at the very least. The problem is that in IR, thinking ethically about world politics, or thinking about ethics in world politics, has generally started from a rejection of anarchy. Typically, anarchy is understood as synonymous with a state of nature and the antithesis of the social contract, something which the modern state releases us from. In much hackneyed realist IR theory, the key reference point is Hobbes, though this association has recently and rightly been overturned (Grewal 2016, Christov 2013, Armitage 2013).

Late twentieth century IR theory presents the international system as an anarchy. Anarchy emerges out of the material scarcity and threats that arises from the co-action of sovereign states, themselves having resolved the problem of anarchy within. In this secondary realm of a well-ordered commonwealth, anarchy imposes limits and conditions on state behaviour instead. In the strongest articulations of this view, anarchy forces us to act with a tragic disregard for ethics.

This presumption of anarchy is also central to the positivist approach to world politics, which takes anarchy as one three analytical starting points (the others being rationality and state actorness), and from this reasons that the methods of IR can be value free on the basis of this prior empirical/conceptual assumption about world politics (e.g., Kydd 2015: 2). But this view of the world cannot be value free, precisely because the description of the state and of anarchy is always already a moral normative claim about how we ought to organise. Anarchy is not an empirical feature of the world. Rather it is a theoretical idea, a concept, that involves a complex set of normative assumptions about how we ought to live (see Prichard 2016 for more). In other words, positivist IR is only possible on the basis that the prior assumptions about the normative and ethical foundations of world politics have already been settled, which they have not, of course.

More progressivist readings of world politics, however, do not differ substantially from this general tendency. English School theorists and neo-Kantian critical theorists, many of whom are cosmopolitans too (e.g., Linklater 1998), foresee a future beyond the state, or envision a system of global governance with features more or less like a world state (Held 1995. For an important set of criticisms from within the cosmopolitan tradition see Brown 2012). Marxist and liberal readings of history are most common here, seeing anarchy as either a first step, or a stepping stone to a better world beyond.

If we are to develop an anarchist ethics for IR, then we need to rethink the moral value of the concept of anarchy. There is some precedent here, but it is hardly anarchist. For example, Hedley Bull (1977), Kenneth Waltz (1962, 1979) and Mervyn Frost (2009), have each sought to demonstrate the virtues of anarchy for guaranteeing the freedom of peoples in international politics (for a good discussion see Lechner

2017). All three defend an understanding of the international community of states as one structured around the prior normative value of sovereignty. Anarchy is a virtue precisely because it permits and formalizes the structural and normative framework for different conceptions of the good to be pursued within sovereign states without interference from outside.

Bull draws from Burke and H. L. A. Hart, Waltz draws on Durkheim and Kant, and Frost from Hegel and Nozick. All three share a liberal vision of anarchy as consecrating a zone of non-interference within states, which provides the basis for pursuing the good and grounding ethical claims against others. There is no question that these conceptions of the good defend particular, parochial, European accounts of the good. This led Bull to famously prefer order over justice, most tellingly in his rejection of the anti-Apartheid campaign in South Africa. For Waltz, the pressures of self-help forced development, which led to functional differentiation and thus the moral autonomy of political community. This led him to defend nuclear proliferation on the basis that modernization and development was an inevitable by-product of developing nuclear weapons (Waltz 1990).

Frost argues that there are two anarchies in contemporary international politics, not one, with an anarchy of civil society overlaying the anarchical society of states. The UN Declaration of Human Rights transforms the world's population into rights holders against their states. While this is a development on the statism of Bull and Waltz, the two anarchies are mutually reinforcing. Moreover, they are reinforcing of a very specific type of political subjectivity, one premised on the possession of rights in one's self, and the right to alienate those rights, whether for employment or to the state.

There is then, in IR, a small but important tradition of thinking about ethics from within the conceptual discourse of anarchy. But this is a highly contentious and contested set of debates and of course no less ideological than any anarchist alternative (Freeden 1996, Prichard 2017b). And yet, these ideologies of anarchy have proceeded with no engagement with anarchism whatsoever.

Anarchism, arguably the only political philosophy of anarchy, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century at precisely the time the modern nation state was born (Prichard 2013). Anarchists rejected the centralizing and dominating institutional forms the modern state took, and the commodification of work and society that emerged as a consequence of the rise of capitalism and the transformation of chattel slavery into wage slavery. For anarchists, the functional integration promised by Auguste Comte, the father of sociology, and later Durkheim and others, argued for the hierarchical submission of individuals to an unaccountable scientific elite within a determined hierarchical state. In Comte's fantastic utopia, a legion of Priest Scientists was destined to rule, and total obedience to them was demanded by the providential unfurling of history that led them to the pinnacle of society. This philosophy was only slightly more insane than the prevailing ideas about monarchy, the rights of the emerging bourgeoisie, or Europe more generally.

Anarchists were primarily anti-capitalist who rejected the idea of private property. The establishment of private property, much like state sovereignty, developed out of the logic and practice of slavery (Proudhon 1994). Under slavery and colonialism, property was held directly in another. Under sovereignty and private property regimes, title had to be alienable, first to the state, then to the capitalist. The conceit then was that the demand for self-ownership prefaced the need for this to be alienated such that title in the self and other things could be commodified and

exchanged. As Anthony Anghie (2005) has shown, the mandate system of colonial administration in the nineteenth century was a testing ground for developing these theories of sovereignty, a development anarchists saw taking place within the emerging nation states too, usually to the detriment of innumerable minority ethnic and cultural groups (Holland 2010). Likewise, the development of a system of alienable property in the self was central to the development of wage labour and liberal conceptions of rights (Proudhon 1994, Bakunin 1964: 187. Cf. Gourevitch 2011).

Nineteenth century anarchists drew on the republican tradition to conceptualize personality and freedom differently, and in so doing developed an alternative theory of anarchy. The primary focus was freedom from domination and oppression, rather than freedom as independence. Slavery was a paradigm case of unfreedom, where ones actions could be arbitrarily curtailed because there was no constitutional provision restricting the actions of the powerful. Anarchists rejected the idea that states could decide the terms of this constitutional provision unilaterally and without participation from the masses, and argued that universal suffrage would merely embed this oligarchic tendency rather than curtail it (cf. Michels 1968). For anarchists, to be a fully free individual meant to be an active and undominated participant in society, with the opportunity for full participation in collectively deliberating and taking the decisions likely to affect you and your family or associates. This form of radical democracy was labelled anarchy or anarchism, precisely because it rejected any final point of authority, not because anarchists demanded a voluntarist society without rules (Graeber 2013, Maekelbergh 2009).

Active participation was impossible, anarchists argued, within the structure of the modern state and capitalism, hence the demand to break both up into an infinite

plurality of parts, then re-federating them according to a principle of subsidiarity and horizontality. In relation to property, this meant the negotiation and commutation of title, such that property met commutative (negotiated) ends rather than individual or collective desires alone, for example via worker, producer, or property cooperatives. This negotiated title stands in stark contrast to private title, and the notion that democracy might be participatory contrasts quite starkly with the representative system that dominates mainstream institutions. But we need to see anarchy as a normative principle too, because in so far as defending this plurality demanded an institutional framework that would defend this variety, the benchmark was anarchy, that is the absence of a final point of authority. Only in systems in which finality was absent, and subsidiarity defended, could freedom to change and reject the terms of association be guaranteed.

This brief summary no doubt leaves many unanswered questions. But the point I wish to drive home here, is that traditional associations of anarchy with freedom defend an account of freedom that is associated with property in the self, in others, or other things, and defend anarchy as the structural form within which this account of freedom is best preserved, with all its attendant statist inequalities. This account of anarchy is predicated on a conception of rights that are derived from one's autonomy and self-ownership. Anarchists reject this account of rights and property in favour of infinite and plural agreements, where 'the political centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere', as Proudhon put it (Proudhon 1865: 182). In the next section I explore the implications of this notion of anarchy in relation to three key problems in contemporary global ethics: global governance, capitalism and the proper scope of our moral identification with others.



## The Problems of Global Justice Revisited

*What is justice?*

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's extensive analysis of the historical sociology of justice are both the earliest and most extensive in the anarchist canon (Prichard 2013, chapter 4. See also Kropotkin 1992), and needless to say almost entirely ignored by both anarchists and moral philosophers more generally. Proudhon's conception of justice also emerged out of the European republican tradition, specifically the work of Rousseau, but also Kant and Michelet, and further back still, to the writings of Aristotle. In short, Proudhon sought to historicize the virtues, and the primary virtue, for Proudhon, was justice. In his 200 page, four-volume Magnum opus, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* (or *On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*), first published in 1858, Proudhon made the case that justice was immanent to society, and to talk in terms of immanence made one "a true anarchist" (Proudhon 1988: 637). By this, Proudhon meant that struggles over conceptions of the good, and the realization of the virtues of justice, took place in concrete historical contexts, and were constitutive of them. So far, so hermeneutic, but Proudhon also claimed that our conceptions of right and wrong were natural, in so far as they were felt in our gut or conscience, and that these feelings were trans historical and universally felt, an innate sense of right and wrong that had to be socially mediated (cf. Smith 2002). However, he also claimed that women had innate natures that set them apart from men both in terms of physical strength, but also intellectual ability, and that their natural place was in the private domain, while men were made for the public.

Proudhon's sexism still requires systematic engagement and rebuttal in the English language literature, but the point I want to take from Proudhon is that he sought to derive justice from both an innate sense of right and wrong, which was always shaped by and manifested in concrete historical circumstances. Unlike Kant who believed our passions to be "pathological" and reason the only palliative, and Charles Fourier, who believed that reason was the "fifth wheel on the cart", and our passions to be the basis of a psychology of freedom, Proudhon saw the antinomy between reason and conscience to be a constitutive and generative antinomy of morality (de Lubac 1948), by this he meant that it was in the balancing of reason and conscience, in a social and material context, that justice was to be found. As a consequence, not only were there no transcendent grounds for justice, there was no telos to the history of right either. Rather, our innate conceptions of justice, whatever they might be, were re-shaped in social contexts, and were only one of many lenses through which we would engage concrete historical wrongs. Justice, by this conception was always immanent to society.

In his writings on European constitutionalism and on war and peace, Proudhon argued against the idea that there was a necessary telos to right. One example of this is war. The "moral phenomenology of war" (Proudhon 1998) showed us that not only is right central to the pursuit of war, but that war pervades the iconography of justice too: in exceptionally brief terms, consider that the ancients understood the wars between the gods to define nature; justice is a set of scales and a sword; we fight for what is right; wars are fought to defend social values and to consecrate new ones. But the pursuit of war always and everywhere undermined or contravened these virtues, and the history of mid-to-late nineteenth century industrialisation suggested to Proudhon that future wars would be decidedly barbaric.

What we find in contemporary anarchist praxis is not so far removed from what Proudhon championed. From the anarchist perspective, the virtues are conceptions of the good that need to be practiced in order to be actualized, with the good prefigured in context, not an outcome or a transcendent value (Franks 2010). In other words right does not exist independently of human agency. There are no transcendent benchmarks for the good, whether deontological or utilitarian. Anarchists use the concept of prefiguration to theorise this (van de Sande 2015, Gordon forthcoming). For anarchists, means are ends in the making. In other words, you cannot divorce the good from our actions that bring it into being. Thus, actions which are contrary to our conception of the good, are unlikely to issue in virtuous outcomes (see also Franks and Wilson 2010).

So, to sum up this first part, justice is immanent to society, so those institutions and conceptions of the good that are totalising and a priori are by definition illegitimate, because they close down the plurality of conceptions of the good and the possibility of their future emergence. Anarchy is a normative value precisely because it is permissive of multiple conceptions of the good, and it is critical because it can show where existing institutions limit this. It is also communitarian in so far as it valorises historical communities, but cosmopolitan in so far as it is post-statist.

*Do our obligations to others cross borders and generations?*

What I have argued about the source and context for justice would suggest a deeply communitarian account of ethics, one in which immediate communities of belief are the only viable locus of justice, where appeals to the good are relative, offering no

grounds for cross cultural critique, since it is within community that we can realise conceptions of the good. Traditionally, and ironically, this communitarianism is conflated with statism, the argument being that shared institutions, like those of the modern state, are the only ones capable of galvanising a political community. The converse argument is that our political institutions are secondary to our shared moral equivalence as individuals, and that a cosmopolitan ethics undergirds a more expansive conception of the good. By this latter argument, the institutions of the nation state are barriers to realising the good.

This framing is problematic for anarchists for three reasons. First, the institutions of the nation state have historically been built and defended on the basis that they restrict the ability of the people to change the laws. For example, both liberal and republican accounts of constitutional democracy presuppose and entrench capitalism, putting anti-capitalism beyond constitutional politics (Gill and Cutler 2015). Secondly, while some anarchists believed that a protean cultural identity was given in races, most now argue that nationalism and other forms of cultural identity are the products of political power, not its precondition. In other words, peoples are made, they do not await discovery (Prichard 2010, Breuilly 1993). Third, while cosmopolitans tend towards post-statist ends, the tendency is to universalise liberal values and political economy. This is not only a form of cultural imperialism, it is also a form of socio-economic imperialism (Springer 2011, Tully 2007).

But clearly, some institutions are better than others, and not all forms of identity are racial. So, for example, revolutionary syndicalist labour unions are both internationalist and federal in character, the CNT in Spain or France, for example. These have historically acted as a crucible for shared values and ethos, and anti-capitalist practices beyond and below the state. Likewise, one's identity as a worker is

also a highly significant basis for association, which has historically galvanised anarchist labour agitators globally (Levy 2010, Bantman and Berry 2010). This is not to say that anarchists do not consider themselves citizens of the world, many probably do, but this universalism usually corresponds with a defence of their most immediate community in the name of a wider, perhaps global ethic. The point is that the state is not the institutional framing for thinking about ethics in world politics and so in many respects, the typical binary between communitarian nationalism and cosmopolitanism drops away. We are left with a more complex and plural conception of political community, one in which anarchy retains a central place, since there is no final point of moral identification, and the spurious nature of the initial binary is exposed.

*What is the proper institutional arrangement for realizing the good?*

The simple answer for anarchists is that there is no ideal institution for realising the good. Society changes, as do our conceptions of the good. The problem is that while modern capitalism is able to adapt to the changed nature of political community, democratic constitutionalism has not. Even where there has been a hugely participatory constitutional redraft, such as in Iceland, which prompted in part by the catastrophic failings of capitalists, enacting this new constitution has met a conservative brick wall (Landemore 2015). The ability of the demos to change the conditions of its own association remain severely curtailed by the very thing that is supposed to guarantee their own freedoms (for more see Loughlin and Walker 2007).

Anarchists have taken a twin strategy to counter constitutional politics. The first is to criticise existing institutional arrangements, and the second to propose the foundations for radical alternatives. The latter strategy shows anarchists to be

inveterate experimenters. But as for the first, anarchists have spent the past thirty years engaging the injustices of global capitalism, but their arguments are not often read as treaties in global ethics. For example, Noam Chomsky's engagement with the post-1945 US imperial order are premised on the simple moral truism of reciprocity, that is, what's permissible for the USA is also permissible for other states, and vice versa, or that we ought to live by the values we expect others to live by (Chomsky 2003). As I have shown above, the ethical theory underpinning this conception of moral reciprocity dates back at least to Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, and we find a rearticulation of it in Proudhon's writings, particularly his theory of mutualism and reciprocity.

Contrast this with Signer's approach to moral duty: if you can, and it will increase happiness overall, you should. For anarchists, the alternative might be understood as follows: if all parties want something to go ahead, then it should, and the institutional barriers to that ought to be the objects of reflexive critique.

Our duties are not determined independent of context, but rather emerge from it. The most pervasive in recent anarchist writings revolves around questions of climate change and ecological collapse. Here, it is argued that the modern state and capitalism, synonyms for centralisation and consumerism, have led to the destruction of the ecosphere and the narrowing of the meaning of human flourishing to identity politics and consumption choices (Bookchin 1986). Communities of fate, whether transnational solidarity networks, ranging from the World Social Forum to Greenpeace, or solidarity with survivors of natural disasters such as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Crow 2011), face innumerable barriers to the effective change they require, most notably the state and capitalism.

There have been multiple alternatives. The point to make is that anarchists have celebrated the diversity of human communities, have been less concerned with the proper form of human community and more with the institutions and practices through which it might be realised. Central here has been direct democracy and/or anti-representational politics, horizontalism and prefiguration. These key concepts manifest in concrete terms, and with obvious caveats, in the municipalist and ecologically oriented direct democracy of Murray Bookchin (1987), in the topless federalism of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, in the multiple affinity groups, communes and other myriad cooperative living experiments that strengthen our communities from the ground up. None of these has a monopoly on the good, nor are they perfect. That is not the point. Rather they are contextually specific intentional communities that respond to real need, collectively, directly and horizontally. It is the way that they are constituted that defines them, more so perhaps than their *raison d'être*, and it is this commitment to horizontality, prefiguration and forms of direct democracy and consensus, that are perhaps the defining institutional features of all anarchist(ic) groups.

As Magda Egoumenides (2014) has shown in her outstanding book, the anarchists have developed powerful tools of critique of modern institutions and robust ethical standards against which all institutions can be evaluated, even anarchist ones. The point that Egoumenides makes is that no institution is immune from the anarchist critique and in the face of such critique, these institutions must justify themselves. While in many instances, anarchists would defend general values such as freedom as non-domination for example (Pettit 1997), they would disagree with the argument that the modern state lives up to this standard. Anarchism is a demanding ideology and established institutions carry the burden of proof that they meet anarchist objections.

No such debate has ever taken place in either political science or IR, let alone global ethics.

*How should we understand the problem of distributive justice?*

It is worth noting that anarchism and socialism in the mid-nineteenth century developed primarily as a critique of the church, not of capitalism as such. The latter did not develop into an object of study until much later in the century. The early anarchists and social reformers of Europe were therefore as much, if not more interested in the moral arguments for distributions of wealth than they were in what we now understand as strictly ‘economic’ or material ones. The significance of this is that anarchism has throughout its history offered a moral critique of capitalism that was almost completely absent in most mainstream, if no less revolutionary left wing praxis (see Franks 2012, Choat 2016).

The contrast is quite easy to illustrate in simple terms. Where liberal accounts of distributive justice prioritise rights and legal means, republican and Marxist ones focus on political and institutional ones. The former presupposes the obligations of subjects to the law, the latter of the law to subjects. The former seeks an equality of opportunity under the law, the latter is more concerned with an equality of outcome. Both presuppose a distributing centre that is mandated in some way (law or demos).

Anarchists take a different path: commutation or exchange relations (Simon 1987). By this commutative account, distributive justice is achieved through negotiation and agreement (for an interesting application of this theory see Walsh and Johnson 2016). Multiple relations of commutation, of agreement, can be reached between individuals and groups, and consecrated by pacts, contracts or agreements.



This commitment to *foedus* or pacts is what Proudhon took to be the basis of the federative theory (Proudhon 1979).

This approach to economic equity can be seen in a range of different experiments from the global cooperative movement, to syndicalism, to traditional gift economies (Graeber 2002, 2004, 2011), each of which builds community by addressing material inequality. Clive Gabay has argued that this impulse has a cosmopolitan dimension in so far as micro exchange relations always overspill their localism and have macro implications (Gabay 2008). For example, giving to address need, or in order to satisfy a moral imperative, without due attention to the means through which aid is distributed, or managed, can do more harm than good. Understanding aid relations as exchange relations demands also an engagement with the lived practices across that chain, which invariably demands a cosmopolitan sensibility, even if the good must always be negotiated. Reconciling community with cosmopolis, through processes of equal exchange that empower and build solidarity in this way, is an anarchist ethic because it aims to prefigure horizontality, participation and the good within social practices. The relations of solidarity that underpin pacts such as these are designed to fulfil immediate need and build a global political economy from below (Knowles 2004, Falk 1997, Shannon, Nocella, Asimakopoulos 2012).

Taking commutation and equal exchange seriously forces us to admit that there are no a priori foundations for justice, but also helps us see the conceit at the heart of much global ethics. Theories of distributive justice tend to presuppose a hierarchy of institutions that are empowered to resolve problems. This, from the anarchist point of view, exacerbates the problem. The solution cannot presuppose the moral claim of a central distributing institution, whether that is the state or a

commitment to private property. The tautology is clear when both of the following are held to be true at once: what is moral is determined by institution x; without institution x morality is impossible. Independently these are empirical claims and might be assessed as such, but in moral philosophy they are generally held together and *apriori*, hence the problem.

To conclude this section, it is worth remarking that none of these three questions can be asked and answered in isolation from the other: each implies the other and numerous others. Rather, the point I am trying to make here is that there is no unique or Archimedean vantage point from which to adjudicate on the pressing questions of global ethics. This contingency and contextualism is not a regrettable irritation, it is fundamentally the generative motor of the problem of ethics itself. This context is also of such a highly complex and irreducible nature as to make it anarchic at its epistemological core. Defending anarchy is thus to defend the possibility of contingent, emergent and unpredictable outcomes, to defend the infinite ways in which we might realize the good in contingent communities, and to be open to an ontological anarchy, a fluid and emergent becoming.

### **Contesting Anarchism**

It is an increasingly small portion of the left who today would reject these anti-capitalist and anti-statist arguments completely. Rather, the rejection of anarchist politics on the left relates to the legitimacy of anarchist populism, the limits of anarchist practice, and the problem of scaling anarchy (see for example Srnicek and Williams 2015). These criticisms go to the heart of an anarchist account of global ethics, as I will show, and answering them is central to the future of anarchism as a

global ethics. The first is a tactical critique: what are the limits of protest politics and affinity groups? The second is a strategic critique: can anarchists afford to shun the established institutions of global power? The third is a philosophical critique of anarchist anti-representationalism: if not everyone can always be present, what are the legitimate grounds for an anarchist politics that aspires to be universal?

The Occupy Wall Street movement was arguably the most identifiably anarchist global movement for social justice in recent times (Bray 2013, Graeber 2013, Schneider 2013). Indeed, its anarchist credentials were as forcefully pressed by those who sought to criticise it, as those who sought to claim it as their own.

For critics, the horizontalism and consensus decision making at the heart of anarchist politics and the Occupy movement is predicated on a misplaced individualism, an individualism which is effusive and generative, but essentially reactionary rather than proactive. The presupposition that each individual has a veto in consensus decision making, and that each individual brings with them a personal politics of identity or political grievance, means that the horizontality at the heart of the anarchistic Occupy Wall Street movement will forever render it a protest politics and nothing more. Individualism and a refusal to generate collective demands, is fundamentally at odds with the collectivism necessary to galvanise a political movement that can affect the changes the socialist ethics of anarchism demands (Dean 2016).

This critique is important to consider but it misses the central element of the Occupy movement almost completely. Not only does anarchism correctly foreground the individual both morally and politically, but so too, the means through which this takes place is the politics. As I will discuss further below, individuality is not given, but created through the community that precedes it. But to make that process of self-

realisation democratic it must be participatory and non-dominating. We cannot lose the individual in a crowd as Dean (2016) would like, nor should we crowd source the general will. Rather, conscious direct participation and the tacit right of veto demands a political process that respects the dignity of each individual. The alternative is anti-individualist, and the history of the communist left is hardly a glowing endorsement of this (Courtois 1999).

Organisational criticisms of Occupy miss the protest for the politics. The anarchists of Occupy developed highly sophisticated institutional and decision making mechanisms, that were horizontal and sensitive to the power asymmetries that intersected within the movement. These included spokes councils, progressive stacks, the General Assembly and a vast number of committees, each designed to counter material, racial, gendered, and cultural power asymmetries. Each of these institutions checked one another, but also acted as the vehicle for developing a plural collective consciousness within an open, horizontal and participatory political institution. This anarchy at the heart of the institutional framework of Occupy was prefigurative of the anarchy to come, ensuring no single institution or collective voice was the final word, and rather than conflating the collective with the crowd, it rather disaggregated and institutionalised a plural consciousness. It was not the occupations themselves that were significant, but the attempt to develop a new means of organising politically, which has arguably come to dominate the non-mainstream left (Maiguashca, Dean and Keith 2016).

The second critique of anarchist politics is the following: how can anarchists make a claim to the legitimacy of their activities and claims, when they have refused to speak on behalf of, let alone gain the formal support of, a recognisable public constituency? Far from being legitimate then, the exponential rise of NGOs, of

grassroots community activism and global civil society is evidence, critics argue, of the de-politicisation and the de-legitimisation of politics, for refusing to engage with the established institutions of the modern state. Moreover, and compounding this, the prevalence of either a universalist ethic of cosmopolitanism, or a poststructuralist suspicion of ethics *tout court* within the current anti-globalisation movement, makes it increasingly difficult to ground an ethical critique of anything at all (Chandler 2004a, b, Bickerton et al, 2006). The response, for these authors, is the revitalisation of the nation state, currently being hollowed out by neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism and anarchism, with a clear ethics aligned with democratically agreed political interests that can galvanise a new political subject.

Building constituencies and developing a counter political economy is no doubt a key aspiration of the anarchist left too. But there is a problem with the notion of political subjectivity implied by this account of constituency, and that is that it totalises it, thereby making each conception of the people exclusionary. But this notion of a singular public is itself a chimera. Political subjectivity is indeterminate at its core, evoked or conjured epistemically, not objectively identifiable. While the attempt to reify or essentialise community for the purposes of politics may be expedient, it is hardly ethical if one such identity is taken to dominate the others, arbitrarily or otherwise. If what we value is the endless potential for becoming implied in a humanist or post-humanist politics, then anarchy of identity is also central here (Rossdale 2015).

Finally, drilling down further, how can anarchists scale their advances in terms of a new anarchist sensibility on the left, to develop a non-representational mass movement? Direct democracy is a privilege of scale and access. In other words, it is more likely you will be able to participate directly in the small gatherings you are able

to reach and have your voice heard. Large ones, or those at an inaccessible distance, will demand resources not available to most. In large gatherings, not everyone has the confidence to speak, while not everyone has the same resources to facilitate attendance. This is compounded in places like the World Social Forum, where mass gatherings often require inter-continental travel, and language and public speaking skills that many people lack. Anti-representational politics will cede this discursive ground to non-anarchists, while the privileging of presence will discount the legitimate claims of millions that cannot attend, but are happy to be represented by others (Teivainen 2016).

This critique goes to the heart of the other two, and is one that anarchists will have to negotiate in order to avoid the trappings of elitism, vanguardism and the totalisation of political subjectivity. Put in other words, can we find ways of representing the views of others which are not dominating? The simple answer is no. The more complex answer is we must try. The process of vocalising, of writing and of communicating is itself a process of translation, in which my thought is imprecisely, stumblingly, made into something else. Self-expression, let alone communication with others demands, is always mediated, with meaning translated and retranslated, into new vernaculars. We do not have direct unmediated access to anything. As this process widens, with multiple interlocutors, meaning becomes more and more difficult to manage and to transmit. The process of translation itself is often mediated by tools, like computers, megaphones or instant messaging, but also via non-verbal communication. Representation is thus given in communication and translation is inevitable (Coleman 2015, Cohn 2006).

But all acts of representation take place in epistemic communities, as well as material ones. These communities are themselves constituted by these process of

representation and communication. Whatever the distances or the modes of mediation, it is the process of communal retranslation in the name of the community that gives meaning to this cacophony. This does not undermine the anarchist critique of the state and modern society, it reinforces it and its palliative alternative. It is through maximising participation and flattening social hierarchies that representation can be open and dialogical, but also of value to communities. An anarchist politics cannot avoid representation, but it has the ethical tools, practices and institutional experiences to make representation anarchist again.

### **Conclusion: anarchy revisited**

The account I have given here of the relation of anarchy to global ethics differs quite dramatically from that offered by Thomas Nagel at the outset. The state cannot deliver us from anarchy – anarchy is our lot, both epistemically and ontologically, let alone what happens in international relations. But this is no cause for dismay. Anarchy is also the crucible and benchmark of justice itself. This anarchy as absence of finality is the antithesis of much we take for granted in modern politics and ethics, particularly on the left, but also on the right. Sovereignty and private property, in so far as both are predicated on dominium, are antithetical to anarchy as I have described it here, and so unethical.

This alternative is predicated upon, or issues in an idea of justice as immanent to both the individual and society, with the antinomy between them constitutive of the phenomenology of justice. It sees political community as more immediate, but ethics as more expansive than possible through the institutions of modern liberal society. Anarchy, from this perspective, signifies the absence of finality, whether of authority,

of identity, or of justice. This anti-transcendentalist promise at the heart of an anarchist ethics suggests opens plural conceptions of the good, and of the proper institutional framework through which it might be realised. To that end, the praxis of prefiguration, participation and horizontality are key.

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