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[insurgencies]

Anarchism: A critical analysis.

CHRIS HOWELL¹

Anarchism is a radical social-political theory that aims to de-construct the State in order to empower every one; empower by granting liberty and equality. An old saying of Bakunin is paraphrased, “equality without liberty is tyranny, liberty without equality is gross injustice” (Shantz, 2013). Anarchism asserts that in order to grant liberty to all and treat all as equals, we must abolish the authoritarian state. So, the three, interconnected ideals discussed here are foundational to anarchism: 1) abolishing the authoritarian state; 2) liberty; and 3) equality. After examining the interrelations of the three key ideals, I shall focus on one criticism surrounding human nature.

Of course, there are more than a few conceptualizations of anarchism, however the tradition I focus on here is communal anarchism—as opposed to individualized anarchism or other forms—as conceptualized by Peter Kropotkin and others (Guerin, 2005, Kropotkin, 2009, & Chomsky, 2005), which relies on cooperation and compassion (Kropotkin, 2009).

As can be seen in Canada and other capitalist societies, capitalism is structured in a manner that benefits the few at the cost of the many, communism is the opposite, it is structured in a

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manner that benefits the many at the cost of the few (Kropotkin, 2005 as presented by Guerin). According to anarchism, in both cases the State—whether representing one, few or many—through the rule of law and the criminal justice system, imposes their will onto others by force (Russell, 1966). In its purest sense, anarchism aims to give the power back to the people; all people; equally. From my understanding, anarchism rejects both models by arguing no authoritarian state should be in control, thus empowering everyone through liberty and equality, not merely transferring power from one group to another nor merely relying on economic equality.

ABOLISH THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE

To abolish the authoritarian state means there should not be an external power that creates, imposes, and/or enforces rules on others (Chomsky, 2005, Guerin, 2005, Kropotkin, 2009, & Russell, 1966). In other words, anarchism argues we must remove the forcible government as seen in capitalist, communist, dictatorships and so forth. The authoritarian state has control of the rules society must abide by and the State is granted the power to enforce these rules. This inherently grants them power of our freedoms. Look at Canada for example, the Canadian Criminal Code controls what all persons in Canada cannot do, the Canadian Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms controls which freedoms are upheld, and the Canadian Criminal Justice system enforces those rules. Thus, the Canadian State controls, legally speaking, what we can and cannot do, thus it sets the parameters of *our freedoms*.

Noam Chomsky argues, in reference to all forms of authority that include the State, that we must challenge all authority and place the burden of proof on the authority to justify their legitimacy in restricting our freedoms. From this it can be inferred that anarchists place a high burden of proof on the authoritarian state but a necessary one. Meaning, if we grant the Canadian government the power to control its citizens (and visitors) then they must justify their actions, since in order to grant the State this power, we must lose freedoms. You cannot have absolute freedoms and external force that controls your actions. Anarchism asserts that there is no sufficient justification for

giving up any freedoms; hence we must abolish all authoritarian control.

LIBERTY

Liberty, as defined by Thomas Hobbes, a social contract philosopher, is “the absence of Opposition; (by Opposition I mean external Impediments of motion) and may be applied no lesse to Irrational, and Inanimate creatures, than to Rationall [sic]” (Hobbes, 2007, p. 94). J.S. Mill, a pioneer utilitarian philosopher, argues persons ought to be free—thought, speech, and action—as long as their actions do not harm others (harm principle) (Mill, 2011). In sum, these definitions define liberty as individual freedoms of thought and action, not controlled by an external force (state control) rather controlled by the individual. The first two definitions are by philosophers whom conceptualize the term, but are both promoters of the social contract and state control (although state control in a more limited manner than the current Canadian model). However, the problem with these philosophers’ approaches are that they believe state control is necessary in granting and enforcing liberty. As argued earlier, if the state or any external force controls liberties then it undermines the definition of liberty; absolute freedoms.

Anarchists argue for the same ideal; absolute individual freedoms or liberty, but disregard the notion that persons need a social contract held by an external power (typically state control) controlling, in essence, their lives and definitely controlling their freedoms. Michael Bakunin (2005) states,

... liberty that consists in the full development of all of the material, intellectual and moral powers that latent in each person; liberty that recognizes no restrictions other than those determined by the laws of our own individual nature, which cannot properly be regarded as restrictions since these laws are not imposed by any outside legislator beside or above us, but are immanent and inherent, forming the very basis of our material, intellectual and moral being—they do not limit us but are the real and immediate conditions of our freedom (As quoted by Chomsky, p. 122).

In this case Bakunin, an anarchist, argues that if we are to be truly free agents (absolute freedom), then we ought to be restricted only by our own individual nature and our own moral code, not by state controlled freedoms. Only then can ‘absolute

freedoms' be given their name, not when an external force deems it with limitations.

MUTUAL AID

In order to obtain absolute freedoms, we must abolish state control and uphold true individual autonomy of rights. Kropotkin argues, and I agree, that in order for absolute liberty to flourish, we must work together in a cooperative and compassionate manner (Kropotkin, 2009). Since, persons are generally good (Marxist/Anarchist belief), if liberty flourishes then human beings will progress in a positive manner as a community.

Mutual aid is conceptualized as the state of human nature that persons are protective, equal and supportive of one another (Kropotkin, 2009). Notably, that does not mean that human nature cannot also be selfish, it merely means that under the appropriate structure human beings are capable of cooperating. In other words it is natural for persons to be both selfish and cooperative. Kropotkin comes to his conclusion of human nature by analyzing the historical evolution of humankind; social Darwinism. As Kropotkin (2009) states,

It is evident that it would be quite contrary to all that we know of [human] nature if men were an exception to general a rule: if a creature so defenceless [sic] as man was at his beginning should have found his protective and his way to progress, not in mutual support; like other animals, but in reckless [sic] competition for personal advantages with no regard to the interests of the species (p. 74).

Kropotkin uses the early stages of humanity to support, effectively, the notion that history proves that we can work cooperatively and compassionately without state control, otherwise we would not have survived.

Kropotkin argues that human beings evolved from band-based animals, which are meant for group settings not intended for individual settings nor small group (family/communal) settings as representative of our current model (Kropotkin, 2009). "Zoology and palaeo-ethnology are thus agreed in considering that the band, not the family, was the earliest form of social life" (Kropotkin, 2009, p. 149). The evolutionary history supports that human beings not only can work together in a cooper-

ative and compassionate manner (mutual aid) but they can progress as a species more effectively.

In extension, Kinna (2005) writes, “On the contrary, the abolition of the state will put an end to violence and repression and herald a new—more harmonious—social order. Moreover, it will release individuals from constraints of authority and enable them to enjoy their freedom” (p. 76). “[Mutual aid] is that individuals are legitimately shaped by the moral, social and cultural mores of their communities . . . the making of that “whole” we call a rounded, creative, and richly variegated human being crucially depends upon community supports” (Kinna, 2005, p. 76). Kinna’s quote shows the dependency and interconnection between equality/mutual aid, absolute freedoms, and the abolition of the State. Mutual aid helps connect individuals through bonds; liberty flourishes through mutual aid; mutual aid and liberty are only possible through abolishing the authoritarian state. Through a process of breaking state interference, and building greater horizontal community connections and support networks, persons value themselves and others more; these are common principles of anarchism.

CRITIQUE OF ANARCHISM

A criticism of anarchism focuses on human nature, criticizing the belief that people are capable of being cooperative and compassionate if there is no external authoritarian force. In order to thoroughly look at the criticism presented, I look to G.A. Cohen and Bertrand Russell, whom are both philosophers that advocate for socialism but use differing arguments. Cohen in “Why not Socialism”, argues for a communal socialism (which is not anarchism), however his argument applies to anarchism. Cohen provides a construction of the criticism and a rebuttal to the criticism. On the other hand, I look to Russell in “Roads to Freedom”, whom provides a legitimate account to anarchism (as well as socialism and syndicalism), then critically analyzes the theory. Both these philosophers argue for a socialist state that would have an authoritarian state in control which is inconsistent with anarchism but their arguments help understand a criticism of anarchism. The criticism is that human nature is not cooperative and compassionate, or at least not cooperative and compassionate enough for an anarchist society to work.

The criticism that Cohen and Russell present is that persons are not generally good (cooperative and compassionate), rather they are egoists (Cohen, 2009 & Russell, 1966). If persons are egoists then people will not work well together on their own, humanity will not positively progress, therefore we need a social contract in order to work together in a manner that all persons may work well together; a simplified version of a commonly accepted argument for a state-controlled social contract (Cohen, 2009). The initial conflict lies with assumptions of human nature; egoism versus mutual aid. Hobbes goes on to argue that the state of nature is a “war of each against all”, which is a form of extreme competition (Kropotkin, 2009, p. 75 as Kropotkin displays Hobbes’ argument). If human nature is an extreme competition between individuals, then anarchism will not work, since people will do whatever it takes to personally gain, even if that causes harm to others.

According to this criticism, the only way for persons to work well with others is if there is a ruler that will impose, enforce, and control us in a manner that is conducive to us cooperating with one another. Without the State, we will naturally return to our selfish actions, thus be unable to cooperate in a manner that is needed for anarchism to work as a communal and/or societal structure. Thus Russell asserts anarchism cannot be designed in a manner that will force us to work against our human nature (Cohen, 2009).

Cohen provides an example to help refute the claim that we are egoists; the hypothetical camping trip. In brief, the hypothetical camping trip refers to a group of people that cooperate together in order to collectively provide food, shelter, preparation, cooking, cleaning, and supplies among other means that individuals may work collectively (Cohen, 2009). There is no hierarchy that separates individuals within the group and the group works cohesively to provide sufficient supplies for everyone, but enables different persons to provide different help, according to their skills and interests (Cohen, 2009). For example, imagine that you are an excellent hunter but hate cooking and cleaning, while I prefer cooking and cleaning. In this example we would work together so that you supply and prepare the food, and I cook the food and clean the mess afterwards. An oversimplification of the camping trip, but the point is to show

that there are a group of various people with differing interests and skills, like in society, that are capable of working well together in a cooperative manner that benefits everyone.

Now, one could criticize the hypothetical camping trip by arguing that it does not truly represent a larger community or society. Merely because it is imaginable or practical for a camping trip does not mean it will work for a larger, more complicated group. To which, Cohen states that there are cases in which the camping trip work for a larger community; merely look to any emergency situation (Cohen, 2009, p. 54). Take the flood in Calgary, Alberta that happened in 2013, and that caused immense damage to communities in the area. After the flood, rather than selfishly work for one's own needs and desires, individuals from the local communities (and beyond) worked together to provide care, support and compassion to affected members of the community (McMurray & Sun, 2013). If we are merely egoists as Hobbes and Russell believe, then why were so many people willing to help Calgary flood victims? I believe, as Cohen exemplifies, that we are capable of cooperating and compassion, but it is the societal structure (capitalism) that conditions and/or promotes us into being egoists.

Although Cohen's example of the emergency situations extends to a larger community unlike in the hypothetical camping trip, there remains a concern of generality; can emergency situations indicate the same response as in everyday life? I believe Cohen successfully shows that we are capable of cooperation and compassion, thus not merely egoists, but are we naturally or can we be sufficiently cooperative and compassionate to remove all authoritative power?

Bertrand Russell argues no. Russell states that if every one is given absolute freedoms without external forces given control, then "the strong would oppress the weak, or the majority would oppress the minority, or the lovers of violence would oppress the more peaceable people" (Russell, 1966, p. 82). Russell's argument is that if we are given absolute freedoms, then one may act according to whim, since there would be no deterrent or power enforcing one's will. Let us take an extreme example of a sociopath or psychopath such as Robert Pickton. Pickton murdered numerous women largely from the downtown eastside of Vancouver, B.C. and was convicted in 2007

(Cameron, 2011). According to Russell, if people like Pickton lived in an anarchist society, then there could not be legal ramifications or imprisonment since that would restrict Pickton's freedoms and impose the will of others onto Pickton. Although likely a small number of people there will be people with violent impulses. In which case in order to be consistent with anarchism either we must grant everyone the ability to act on whim—even if they bring harm to others—in accordance with absolute freedoms, or we must have a force that reacts to innately wrong actions such as violence (Russell, 1966). Russell states, "The conclusion which appears to be forced upon us is that the Anarchist ideal of a community in which no acts are forbidden by law is not, at any rate for the present, compatible with the stability of such a world as the anarchists desire" (Russell, 1966, p. 87). This objection to anarchism does not argue that all are merely egoists, rather in a mixed group of individuals, there will be people that do not always act compassionately or cooperatively, people such as Robert Pickton or other violent offenders.

We could try to refer to the previous rebuttal again as a response to Russell's criticism, saying that capitalism produces these persons that act innately wrong. Once we restructure society in accordance with anarchist ideals, then people like Pickton will cease to exist. However, I do not believe that anyone (including an anarchist) would argue that all violence and wrongdoing would cease to exist in any society. Notably, it is conceivable that crime and egoist tendencies would be significantly lower in an anarchist society, which Russell asserts himself (Russell, 1966).

A more plausible response to Russell's criticism is to argue that he presents a false dilemma. That is in order to be consistent with anarchist ideals, if an individual commits a violent act, an anarchist must either accept the act as the individual using their freedom, or be inconsistent with their ideals and restrict the individual's freedoms in order to prevent further actions.

It seems that Russell argues that the only viable response to a crime is retribution, crime control, and/or due process models. However, there are clearly more responses to crime, such as restorative justice. Duane Ruth-Heffelbower (2011) argues that anarchism is consistent with restorative justice, since restorative

justice, also, removes power from an external power and gives it to the victim, offender, and community. Restorative justice is a response to crime that effectively focuses on and discusses the victim's needs, the offender's needs and the community's needs, in a manner that does not restrict freedoms but does respond to the wrongdoing in order to 'restore' the community to how it was prior to the act (Ruth-Heffelbower, 2011). For instance, if a person struck another person, then through a restorative justice model the three parties could work together to tell their story, uncover their needs, and work together in order to come to a solution. I agree with Ruth-Heffelbower's argument that as opposed to retribution, crime control models, and due process, restorative justice is not only a possible response to crime but a more effective response in helping the collective good.

In this case, Ruth-Heffelbower (2011) provides a response to crime that seems consistent with anarchism. Perhaps Russell would respond that in order for restorative justice to be consistent with anarchism, it cannot punish or restrict any freedoms of the offender. Further, the victim and/or community could not even force the offender, victim, and/or community to participate in the restorative process, as that would be restricting on one's freedoms.

I do not have a definitive answer to Russell's criticism, there seems to be something significantly wrong with ensuring absolute freedoms to those that harm others. I feel one plausible response would be to grant absolute freedoms but if they commit a heinous act—for instance theft and violence—that restricts another person's freedoms, then the community is granted the ability to limit rights. However, this would only work if the community can agree on terms through a participatory democracy of all individuals. Meaning if an offense is agreed on by all, then all would agree on an appropriate reaction from the community.

CONCLUSION

There remain questions about the feasibility of anarchism in connection with human nature. On the one hand, absolute freedoms for all is desirable, which necessitates abolishing the

State, however, on the other hand, how can or how should anarchism respond to agreed upon criminal acts? Is it consistent to say that you are granted absolute freedoms until you harm others, then the community is justified in restricting your freedoms. If one is to go down that path then it seems the agreed upon “laws” would have to be very narrow, and follow J.S. Mill’s “harm principle” which would mean the community only reacts to offenders, when the offender causes harm (physical or monetary) to the victim(s). It is an area that definitely brings up consistency issues, but the anarchist ideals are worth pursuing.

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