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ANARCHIST PHILOSOPHY AND WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE: A BRIEF HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

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Anarchist philosophy has often played and continues to play a crucial role in interventions in working-class and labor movements. Anarchist philosophy influenced real-world struggles and touched the lives of real, flesh-and-blood workers, especially those belonging to the industrial, immigrant working classes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Too often the writings, which were disseminated to, and hungrily consumed by, these workers 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 analyzed accordingly? Obviously they should, and the fact that they have been so long ignored by political philosophers, historians, and other scholars reflects academic prejudice rather than the intellectual and philosophical merit of the writings. This article is a preliminary step toward giving anarchist philosophy the hearing it so richly deserves.

Introduction

The role that philosophy has played and continues to play in anarchism is a matter of considerable dispute. Unlike Marxism—which, as David Graeber (2004) blithely points out, is "the only great social movement that was invented by a Ph.D" (3)—anarchism has never been and has never 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 emphasize revolutionary praxis over analysis of, and discourse about, revolutionary strategy (Graeber 2004, 54). This practical emphasis explains in part why some Marxist-Leninists have accused anarchism of being an "anti-intellectual," "unscientific," and/or "utopian" doctrine. It also explains why some anarchists regard political theory with impatience and suspicion, if not outright disdain.

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In reality, anarchist philosophy has a long and impressive history. More importantly, it has often played and continues to play a crucial role in anarchist interventions in working-class and labor movements. It is this latter aspect of anarchist philosophy that I am particularly keen to discuss in what follows—the extent to which it influenced real-world struggles and touched the lives of real, flesh-and-blood workers, especially those belonging to the industrial, immigrant working classes of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Too often the writings, which were disseminated to, and hungrily consumed by, these workers 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 analyzed 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.

What Is Anarchist Philosophy?

In scholarly literature, the term "classical anarchism" is most often used in reference to the pre-1918 European anarchist movement (see, e.g., Crowder 1991). Once in awhile, however, "classical anarchism" seems be something like a catch-all for the work of three thinkers—viz., 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 or himself 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 labor 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, how post-revolutionary society will be organized, etc. 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 (1991) 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" (106). 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 organization under anarchy (Brown 1991, 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 (e.g., Simmons 1996; Wolff 1970), is that anarchism can be defined solely in terms of opposition to states and governments. A. J. Simmons (1996) writes, for example, that "commitment to one central claim unites all forms of anarchist political philosophy: all existing states are illegitimate" (19). 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).

Many liberal philosophers define political legitimacy in this way—that is, in terms of subjects having political obligations of various sorts. Interestingly, several of these same philosophers would also deny that citizens have general political obligations, although few would agree that this is a sufficient condition for states to be *illegitimate*, and obviously none would self-identity as anarchists. A. J. Simmons and Robert Paul Wolff are among those who do believe that the absence of political obligations implies illegitimacy, although both concede that there may be other moral or nonmoral reasons to obey the laws of illegitimate states. This is precisely what enables Simmons (1996) to distinguish between what he calls "weak anarchism" and "strong anarchism." The former is a position that adduces nothing beyond the aforesaid "minimal moral content" of anarchism, whereas the latter holds that "a state's illegitimacy further entails a moral obligation or duty to oppose and . . . eliminate the state" (22). Simmons also distinguishes between "a priori anarchism," which claims that all possible states are morally illegitimate (20–1), and "a posteriori anarchism," which maintains that all existing states are illegitimate but denies that it is impossible for there to be a legitimate state (20–1).[1]

Wolff's and Simmons's 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 Weick (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" (139; cf. Kropotkin 1970b) 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 centralized and hierarchical forms of government (e.g., monarchy, representative democracy, state socialism, etc.), economic class systems (e.g., capitalism, Bolshevism, feudalism, slavery, etc.), autocratic religions (e.g., fundamentalist Islam, Roman Catholicism, etc.), patriarchy,

heterosexism, white supremacy, and imperialism.[2] 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 that 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 rather than normative; it is not a prescription or a recommendation but rather a value judgment, 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 judgment—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 of 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 recognize that there are many types of authority relations, not all of which are objectionable. As Richard Sylvan (1993) 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" (221). Such authority relations, which Sylvan (1993) 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. (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 recognize 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 not only 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).

Absent a theoretical or moral justification, opaque authority invariably backs up its power with coercion and violence. Anarchists oppose coercion for the same reason that 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, however. After all, while anarchists obviously value freedom, the same is true of liberals and nonanarchist socialists. In fact, several of the most radical early liberals understood coercive authority in the same basic way as anarchists and opposed it for the same basic reasons. Of particular relevance here is the English political philosopher William Godwin (1793), 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" that 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, moreover, he does so only to motivate his positive proposal—viz., 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 realizable. 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:

> Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced quality 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 leveling, 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. (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 centralization and hierarchy. Such equality is necessary, moreover, in order to maximize individual freedom—not just "freedom from" (negative liberty) but "freedom to" (positive liberty).

Positive liberty, as Emma Goldman (1998) 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] realize the true force of the social bonds that tie men together, and which are the true foundations of a normal social life" (439). This quote underscores two indispensable features of the anarchist conception of freedom: first, that freedom involves the capacity of the individual to create himself or 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 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, atomic agent of liberalism recognizes 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 realization of individual freedom, as Bakunin stresses, depends on recognizing 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).[3] 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," that 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 not only as the cultivation 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—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*) 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.

Todd May (1994) has argued, quite rightly in my view, that the principal mode of political domination is *representation*, which we have already described earlier as the generic process of subsuming the particular under the general (47). 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 "normalized" within a community. The result is that individuals and groups come to identify with the normalized representation, to conform to it, and so to regulate themselves absent 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) claimed at one point that Foucault was the first to teach us of "the indignity of speaking for others" (209). Had Deleuze read Proudhon, Bakunin, or Goldman, he may 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, to open up and pursue new possibilities for themselves—in short, to *live*. So, too, it was the anarchists who realized 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, un-freedom—in a word, *death*.

I have argued elsewhere that anarchists are properly so-called in virtue of endorsing a moral principle, the principle of antiauthoritarianism, according to which "all forms of coercive authority ought to be opposed" (Jun 2007, 139). Upon further reflection, however, I have come to believe that this claim is mistaken. 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 antiauthoritarianism, 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), 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 totalized 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 that 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. 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 criticized 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 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 (1989), who advocated the use of terrorist tactics. As Paul Avrich (1987) 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 (e.g., 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 an ongoing process or pursuit rather than a uniform end to be achieved once and for all. In order to avoid reproducing oppressive power relations, 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. This 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 judgment. 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 totalized 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, perhaps these considerations explain why anarchists have not distinguished themselves as especially "sophisticated" philosophers even though it is clear that anarchism has an extremely sophisticated philosophical core. Perhaps they also explain why anarchists have always maintained a fundamental unity-in-diversity as concerns political theory.

Anarchist Philosophy in Working-Class Struggle

In its self-mythologizing, anarchism is occasionally said to have evolved piecemeal among the peasants and laboring classes of Europe—again, as compared with Marxism, which was allegedly cooked up all at once in Marx's brain (!!). Malatesta (1965) 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" (198). As is often the case there are tiny grains of truth to be found in the mythology. Proudhon, de Cleyre, Goldman, and Rocker, for example, all came from poor families (Rocker was orphaned) and were mostly self-educated. In contrast, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Reclus, and 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 working people 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 workers 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 Voltairine de Cleyre and Emma Goldman in the U.S., 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 serialized pamphlet form to facilitate reading by busy laborers.

Compared with 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 toward *belle écriture* was often disparaged as frivolous by scientific socialists, a charge that contributed mightily to anarchism's reputation for theoretical shallowness. (Lukács, Gramsci, and Luxemburg are remembered not as stylists so much as philosophers, whereas Pietro 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" the workers but to inspire, uplift, and even entertain them.

We learn from Paul Avrich's *oeuvre*[4] 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 highly valued activity. In New York, Chicago, Boston, and other cities throughout the U.S., anarchist groups and radical labor 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 theorizing. 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 either something wrong 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) list of reasons why anarchism has never been especially popular among academics (1–3). 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 subdisciplines, 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 toward 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 writing a book called *A Theory of Justice*, say, or any book of political philosophy for that matter, if it does not provide any possibility for meaningful political intervention? On the other hand, what good is protesting against the government or the corporations if you are unable to explain *why* you are protesting or *what* you 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, with a few important exceptions (e.g., Proudhon's work), the fact that anarchism is not comprehensive or systematic may provide another reason why anarchist texts tend to be relatively brief and simple. Anarchism obviously has nothing comparable to *Capital* or *State and Revolution*. What is more, the anarchists usually had no trouble giving credit where it was due, even as concerns their historical "enemies." 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 labor 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 academe.) Anarchism has been struggling toward resurrection ever since, and while there have been a few false starts (e.g., 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 antiglobalization 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 four years then 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 antiglobalization protesters have since earned doctoral degrees and are doing important—in some cases groundbreaking—research on all conceivable aspects of anarchism. This was not the case ten 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.)

Conclusion

Is contemporary anarchism a working-class movement? The honest answer—at least in the U.S.—is "not yet," but that may be changing somewhat. 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 that had prevailed among American radicals since the heyday of the New Left are slowly giving way to class-based, labor-oriented politics. Perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon is the colorful and conspicuous reemergence of the Industrial Workers of the World, the

Wobblies, who of late have been applying themselves full force to the organization 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 semiannual conferences for anarchist scholars and activists such as Renewing the Anarchist Tradition in Montpelier, Vermont and Finding Our Roots in Chicago.

For the time being, however, it is clear that anarchist philosophy is mostly ghettoized 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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Notes

1. Richard Sylvan (1993, 216) makes a very similar distinction between what he calls "principled anarchism" (corresponding to a priori anarchism) and "*de facto* anarchism" (corresponding to "a posteriori anarchism").
2. Morris (1995, 35–41); cf. Rocker (1938, 20); cf. Proudhon (1969): "[t]he economic idea of capitalism, the politics of government or of authority, and the theological idea of the Church are three distinct ideas, linked in various ways, yet to attack one of them is equivalent to attacking all of them" (43). See also Malatesta (1974), who claims that in fighting the "exploitation and oppression of man by man," the anarchists likewise seek "the abolition of private property [i.e., capitalism] and government" (75).
3. As Malatesta (1965) 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" (23).
4. See especially Avrich (1989, 1996).

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