

Authority and power under anarchy

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Anarchism, like atheism, is a rag, tag and bobtail category; just as government can take many forms, so can anarchy.

Anarchists usually tolerate differences in doctrine more readily than socialists, but this has the result that anarchists often do not know what the group as a whole really wants. Many anarchists co-operate with the Bolsheviks on this or that issue and find that effectively they are mere fellow travellers. When anarchists make a separate protest for what they want, it is usually too late, and they are shot by the Bolsheviks they have helped to put in power. This happened in Kronstadt and in Madrid. So it looks as if anarchists are, functionally, followers of Bolsheviks, with inconvenient prejudices against being too "clinical" and "organised".

Well, must this be so? Is it indeed true of all anarchists? Sid Parker seems to be one counter-example and I feel myself to be another. But there are differences between Sid and myself, and one of them could be the value of tight, "clinical" argumentative scrutiny. Like Feyerabend I am an epistemological anarchist but I do not follow his motto, "Anything goes". There are rules of thought but we may not yet have explicitly captured them, though tacitly we can see their force and accept their authority. My preferred motto captures Feyerabend's spirit without being absurd: "Nothing out of court."

But in taking a look at rules that have authority, are we not leaving anarchy behind? Does not anarchy mean no authority over the individual? No. Anarchy just means no government; it says nothing about authority.

Will there still be people in authority over us, in a future anarchist society? Well, can authority ever really be over us at all? I think there is an important distinction between

authority and power. Authority is a sort of esteem or prestige that we accept or build up. It is a form of good will. It is an error to take authority as a substitute for reason, but in itself authority is by no means unreasonable, and may even be essential to the process of reason. Authority could hardly stand over individuals and dominate them, for it is something they themselves maintain, or it is nothing. Power is another matter. It is based on authority, but in the short run coercion over others can be exercised by those with power. Although power is always backed up by authority, authority not only can be but usually is found free of power. For example, an author's authority has no power to coerce and neither has a doctor's. Eminent authors and doctors are daily dismissed by all who have a mind to dismiss them but the matter would be quite different with Al Capone. Capone was not necessarily the toughest or strongest man in his gang; he did owe his position to authority, but his position was one of power to force those who rejected him still to bend to his will. Power depends upon authority, not vice versa.

I do not suppose that power will fade away with the state. I would like it to, but for many reasons it will still be needed in the stateless society. We will need private property to enable the price system to function, so that the economic problem can continue to be tackled. Some people have always found it more beneficial to break the rules of private property by stealing. For different reasons, murder and other crimes may well continue in the new society. People will most likely insure themselves against such crime, and insurance companies will employ police who will resort to power, even in the form of naked violence. Many anarchists hold that this sort of thing is a problem only for anarchists. However, as Sid Parker makes plain, it is a problem for any anarchy that seeks to become the status quo. He says that this anarchism is not a social theory. Judging by their words and deeds, most of those who adopt the label "anarchist" tacitly hold a similar view, though they may be far from realizing it.

THE ANARCHIST UTOPIA

But must it be true that "anarchism is not a form of society"? Utopian schemes are of two types: null-set and not-yet. Sid Parker believes anarchism is null-set but I think it is only not-yet. Things rarely turn out quite the way we want them to. We have to face the unintended consequences of our actions. It could be that the "poets and tramps", intending to be no more than "the cutting edge of individualism", find that their tongues are so sharp that they effectively cut the state's throat, resulting in a diffusion of authority from the state into anarchy. Sid Parker might be a peddler of social salvation in spite of himself. Certainly, anarchy means a re-shaping of authority in society, rather than abolition of authority

The authority government has got is not deserved. It is time the planned chaos was replaced by anarchic order. Anarchism is the alternative to rule by government. As such, if it is possible at all, it is indeed a social theory put forth as an improvement on government. It can succeed only if the masses of individuals adopt it, as being better than government, in the way that the few individuals that advocate it have already done. But all criticism of government tends to aid the cause of anarchy. Sid Parker's anarchism may turn out to be more practical than he imagines it could be.

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