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5

Anarchism

History of the bogeyman

American history has always had its bogeymen—shadowy villains who creep from out the closets and under the beds of unwary citizens, secretly plotting the overthrow of the Republic, ever ready to unleash revolutionary violence at a moment's notice. Today, he is the turbaned terrorist of generic Arabian extraction; fifty years ago he was the stiletto-wielding communist spy cleverly disguised as your next-door neighbor. Perhaps the greatest bogeyman of all, however, was the black-clad, bomb-throwing anarchist of the American *fin de siècle*—a murderous psychopath invariably portrayed as a Jewish-Italian half-breed with a hook nose and a waxed mustache.¹ The anarchist embodied the Nativists' worst fears: a nation overrun by aliens and polluted with their dangerous "foreign" dogmas, inscrutable folkways, and mysterious languages.²

There were, of course, real bogeymen. Between 1870 and 1920, individuals identified as anarchists perpetrated countless acts of terror throughout Europe and North America.³ They also successfully assassinated numerous heads of state, including, but not limited to, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, President Sadi Carnot of France, Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas of Spain, King Umberto I of Italy, President William McKinley of the United States, Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin of Russia, Prime Minister José Canalejas of Spain, and King George I of Greece. Several other politicians, government officials, and captains of industry were targeted for assassination, often escaping within an inch of their lives. Most of these acts were carried out by solitary individuals, some of whom, like Leon Czolgosz, were mentally unstable or else did not belong to the anarchist movement in any real sense. Although many anarchists considered regicide a legitimate and useful form of "propaganda by deed,"⁴ several committed and well known members of the international movement unwaveringly condemned it and other individual acts of terror.⁵ Unfortunately this did not stop journalists and

politicians, both in the United States and abroad, from launching an iron-fisted crackdown on anarchist political activity. In the United States alone, the newspapers drove a massive antianarchist propaganda campaign that culminated in outright hysteria among an already xenophobic populace. Meanwhile Congress passed numerous antiradical bills (e.g., the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918, respectively), which led to the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of thousands of suspected anarchists and other radicals.⁶ In light of such systematic persecution is it any wonder that anarchism has been saddled with a reputation for violence, chaos, and disorder, or that anarchists themselves have been consistently branded as dangerous revolutionaries?

Perhaps this also explains why anarchism, unlike Marxism,⁷ is largely overlooked in the academy, where it is more often than not relegated to footnotes, if it is discussed at all:

As any scholar of anarchism (other than the most hostile) can testify, inquiry into the subject is greeted by colleagues . . . with prejudicial incredulity, condescension, and even hostility—beyond the normal ignorance of the over-specialized. Intellectual curiosity and rigour, the principle of charity, and all manner of noble academic characteristics—aside from basic human respect—go out the window and sheer intolerance and not a little stupidity become standard.⁸

How can a tradition that has attracted “some of the best minds of the twentieth century—from Bertrand Russell and George Orwell to Jean-Paul Sartre and Noam Chomsky”⁹—be so deeply misunderstood and widely vilified, even (and especially) by scholars? Partly it is a symptom of the unfortunate tendency to judge ideas not by their merits, but by the misguided actions occasionally carried out in their name. But, in fairness to academics, it is also because anarchism does not lend itself easily to generalized and systematic analysis of the sort to which they are accustomed. After all, one cannot speak intelligibly of “Anarchism” (with a capital A) in the same way that one can speak of Marxism, Leninism, or Trotskyism—that is, as an ideology; a uniform, comprehensive, self-contained, and internally consistent system of ideas; a set of doctrines; or a body of theory. Anarchism thus described simply does not exist. As Rudolf Rocker puts it, “Anarchism recognizes only the relative significance of ideas, institutions, and social forms. It is . . . not a fixed, self-enclosed social system . . .”¹⁰ Anarchism does not imply acceptance of or rigorous adherence to any one overarching philosophical system;¹¹ rather, it “leaves posterity free to develop its own particular systems in harmony with its needs.”¹² It has no constitution, platform, manifesto, or mission statement, nor any canonical texts comparable to *Capital* or *State and Revolution*. It was neither founded nor created by anyone and so is named after no one. As Malatesta says—rather

polemically!—anarchism “follows ideas, not men, and rebels against the habit of embodying a principle in any one individual. It does not seek to create theories through abstract analysis but to express the aspirations and experiences of the oppressed.”¹³

For these reasons, it is more appropriate to describe anarchism as a historically evolving set of attitudes and ideas that applies to a wide and diverse range of social, economic, and political theories, practices, movements, and traditions.¹⁴ As L. Susan Brown 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.”¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ At the same time, all “anarchisms” are properly so called in virtue of endorsing certain distinctive ideas and practices. The question of course, is what such ideas and practices might be.

Defining anarchism

Unfortunately, most scholars have approached this question from thoroughly inaccurate assumptions and misguided points of emphasis. Consider, for example, the inordinate focus on what has been called “classical anarchism,” a term which, on the most charitable interpretation, refers to the international anarchist movement as it existed prior to the Russian Revolution, the First World War, and/or the Spanish Civil War. More commonly, “classical anarchism” is used as shorthand for an altogether mythical nineteenth-century system of thought developed singlehandedly by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin—mythical because, as I just argued, no such system of thought exists or has ever existed. Furthermore, it is simply not the case that Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin shared anything resembling a homogeneous political or philosophical outlook, nor that these men, despite their enormous and far-reaching influence, were the only important thinkers in the pre-1917 anarchist movement. Much of the confusion surrounding anarchism has resulted precisely from these sorts of inaccuracies and, by extension, the preponderant attention paid to “classical anarchism” and the so-called classical anarchists.¹⁷ Because Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin were three of the most prolific and celebrated anarchist writers—not only of their own day, but of all time—and because there is considerable philosophical affinity among them, they will perforce figure heavily in any serious analysis of anarchism. Nevertheless, I must emphasize from the outset that they are not exhaustive of anarchist thinking and that my aim in drawing upon their work is merely to provide examples

of ideas and commitments that appear across a broad range of anarchistic perspectives.

There is an additional misconception about anarchism that should be immediately addressed, one which has been rehearsed repeatedly by the few Anglo-American philosophers who have bothered to discuss it.¹⁸ This is what I call the *reductio ad politicum*—that is, the tendency to define anarchism *as such* in terms of principled opposition to states, governments, or other sovereign political powers (and anarchy, by extension, in terms of the absence of any and all such entities). A.J. Simmons typifies the *reductio ad politicum* when he argues that “commitment to one central claim unites all forms of anarchist political philosophy: all existing states are illegitimate.”¹⁹ From this it follows that the “minimal moral content” of anarchist political philosophy is just that the subjects of illegitimate states lack general political obligations.²⁰ As I noted previously, 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 deny that citizens have general political obligations, though few would agree that that this is a sufficient condition for states to be *illegitimate*. Simmons and Wolff are among those who do believe that the absence of political obligations implies illegitimacy, though both agree that there may be other moral or nonmoral reasons to obey the laws of illegitimate states.

It is precisely such considerations that motivate Simmons to distinguish between what he calls “weak” (or “philosophical”) anarchism and “strong” (or “political”) anarchism. The former adduces nothing beyond the 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.”²¹ Simmons also distinguishes between “*a priori* anarchism,” which holds that all possible states are morally illegitimate,²² 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.²³ Richard Sylvan 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”).²⁴ He further refers to “diluted anarchism,” which holds that certain necessary features of states (e.g., rules, separation of powers, etc.), and by extension certain kinds of states (e.g., direct democracies), can be compatible with anarchism.²⁵ This suggests that, for Sylvan at least, “state” need not refer to a coercive institution, but can refer more generally to any system of organization designed to coordinate social and political life. If this is true, “diluted anarchism” is a largely vacuous distinction, since all anarchists endorse *some* form of social organization or other. Simmons, on the other hand, seems to think that “states” are coercive by definition. What matters to him, in all events, is not so much whether a state is coercive, but whether it is “legitimate” (that is, whether it has a right to rule, and whether its subjects have a corresponding moral obligation to

obey). This is why Simmons defines “anarchism” solely in terms of the claim that no existing states are legitimate.

I would suggest that this definition of anarchism *qua* anarchism, and all others like it, is extremely inaccurate. As has already been noted, the term “anarchy” is derived from the Greek word *αναρχία* (*anarkhia*), which can be translated roughly as [the state of being] “without a ruler.” *Anarkhia*, in turn, comes from *αναρχός* (*anarkhos*), which can be translated variously as “without chief, ruler, leader, or authority,” “without a top or head,” or “without a beginning or first cause.”²⁶ Thus, anarchy does not principally mean “without a government” or “without a state,” but rather, “without authority.” As Paul McLaughlin rightly notes, the term “authority” refers to a particular kind of power,²⁷ where “power,” in turn, is understood as an “effective capacity.”²⁸ Power may involve the ability to bring something about (“power to”), or else the ability to compel, force, prevent, inhibit, or otherwise limit the actions of someone or something else (“power over”).²⁹

Expanding on our previous discussion of power in Chapter 3, we see that authority may refer in one sense merely to the *de facto* possession of “power over,” such that “Jones has authority over Smith” just means “Jones claims and effectively exercises power (of some sort) over Smith.” In another sense, however, authority may refer not just to possessing “power over,” but to being entitled to, or justified in, the exercise of said power (e.g., by having a right to command and to be obeyed). According to this *de jure* definition, “Jones has authority over Smith” means “Jones has a right, or is otherwise entitled, to compel Smith to ϕ , prevent her from ϕ ’ing, or both,” where “right” or “entitlement” may be understood in various ways (e.g., as a legal right). Following the liberal correlativity thesis, moreover, Jones has a right to compel Smith to ϕ (etc.) if and only if Smith has a corresponding moral or political obligation to ϕ (i.e., obey Jones). For present purposes, let us postulate that “power over” is roughly synonymous with political authority in the first sense. It may be possible for *X* to *freely consent* to the authority of *Y* (i.e., for *Y* to exercise authority over *X* in accordance with, rather than contrary to, *X*’s will), in which case we must distinguish “noncoercive authority” from *domination* or *coercive authority* (that is, the power or right to compel the compliance of another against her will—for example, through the use or threat of force).³⁰ If anarchy refers chiefly to the absence of authority in this latter sense, then all anarchist theories share in common “the universal condemnation of all forms of coercive authority . . . hierarchy and domination.”³¹

Anarchists recognize that there are many types of authority relations, not all of which are coercive (thus, objectionable). As Richard Sylvan 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.”³²

Such authority relations, which Sylvan calls “transparent” or “open,” stand in opposition to:

“[O]paque” (or “closed”) authorities, who simply stand on their position or station. . . [or] appeal to a conventional rule or procedure (“that is how things are done” or “have always been done”) without being able to step beyond some rule book . . . which has been enacted (for reasons not open to, or bearing, examination) by a further substantially opaque authority.”³³

Two features of opaque authorities are worth noting here. First, they are content-independent—that is, their directives are self-justifying, serving as a reason independently of the action or belief prescribed.³⁴ Second, they are binding—namely, their subjects are obligated or duty-bound to obey them. Anarchists have typically objected to opaque authority relations because they lack precisely what authority in general claims to have, namely, adequate justification. In other words, opaque authority is arbitrary, which in turn implies that people have no reason to recognize its power over them. Bakunin summarizes the anarchist position well when he writes: “In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer . . . But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect . . . to impose his authority upon me.”³⁵ In respecting open authorities for their “intelligence . . . character . . . [and] knowledge” anarchists do not thereby relinquish the “incontestable right of criticism or censure.”³⁶ Nor do they privilege any particular kind of authority in their deliberations but consult among several, comparing various opinions and choosing whichever appears soundest. In so doing, Bakunin writes, they are deferring only to the authority of their own reason.³⁷ This corroborates Paul McLaughlin’s view that anarchism may be understood as a kind of principled skepticism toward all authorities, even those of an open or transparent nature.³⁸

Submission to arbitrary authority is by itself objectionable because it “divest[s] the personality of its most integral traits; it denies the very notion that the individual is competent to deal . . . with the management of his or her personal life.”³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Absent a theoretical or moral justification, opaque authority almost invariably backs up its power through coercion and violence, which anarchists oppose for the same reason they oppose opaque authority more generally: because it violates the “self-respect and independence” of the individual.⁴¹ As Bakunin 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.”⁴²

All political authority, he claims, “denotes violence, oppression, exploitation, and injustice raised into a system and made into the cornerstone of the existence of any society . . .”⁴³ 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 are essentially opposing arbitrary authority coupled with the use or threat of coercive means to back up said authority. They are doing so, moreover, because coercive authority is by definition at odds with individual freedom.

The “universal condemnation” of closed, coercive authority would obviously apply to the second (*de jure*) sense of authority mentioned above. To say that Jones has a right to ϕ implies an obligation—namely, that no one ought to inhibit or otherwise interfere with Jones’s ϕ ’ing. Thus, if Jones has a right to exercise closed, coercive authority, then no one ought to condemn him. But given the hypothetical characterization of anarchism just stated—namely, the universal condemnation of closed, coercive authority—it follows that no one can have a “right” to exercise such authority, since the existence of such a right would entail at least one form of closed, coercive authority, which ought not to be condemned. This explains why, for anarchists, no existing state is legitimate in the sense of having a right to rule and to be obeyed. For Simmons, recall, all anarchists believe the claim (call it *C*) that no existing state is legitimate; hence belief in *C* is a necessary condition for being an anarchist. But belief in *C* is not a sufficient condition since, for example, those who believe that only Nazi states are legitimate would also believe *C* (provided that there are no existing Nazi states). Simmons could just as easily say “commitment to one central claim unites all forms of Nazi political philosophy: all existing states are illegitimate” (i.e., because all existing states are non-Nazi).

However, suppose we modify Simmons’s definition such that anarchism is the belief (call it *D*) that *all* forms of coercive authority—not just states—are illegitimate insofar as people lack any general moral obligation to obey them. As in the previous definition, it is true that anarchists believe in the general descriptive claim being advanced (*D*), thus having such a belief is indeed a necessary condition for being an anarchist. But it is still not a sufficient condition, since the mere fact that people lack *moral obligations* to obey authorities does not by itself provide any reason to endorse or otherwise prefer anarchy (the state of being without such authorities). After all, there might be a host of nonmoral reasons why coercive authorities are good to have around and ought to be obeyed accordingly. Thus it is possible to believe *D* and not be an anarchist.

What matters, of course, is not *that* anarchists believe *C* and *D*, but *why* they do. As I intimated above, the definitive feature of all forms of anarchism is not the endorsement of descriptive claims like *C* and *D*, but rather of a

moral claim—namely, that all forms of closed, coercive authority are morally evil. Endorsement of this moral claim, moreover, is both a necessary and sufficient condition for being an anarchist in a way that the endorsement of *C* and *D* is not. If all states are closed and coercive by definition—and I submit that they are—then all anarchists are strong *a priori* anarchists by definition. After all, if an anarchist recognizes that all existing states are illegitimate precisely because of her opposition to closed, coercive authority, then it is inconsistent for her to *merely* recognize the illegitimacy of states without also condemning them (contra “weak anarchism”). Likewise, if all existing states are illegitimate by virtue of being closed and coercive, then no state could *possibly* be legitimate (contra “*a posteriori* anarchism”). All of this is by way of saying that the moral content of anarchism “is more than antistatism, even if government (the state) is, appropriately, the central focus of anarchist critique.”⁴⁴

Anarchism is better understood as (a) universal condemnation of and opposition to *all forms of closed, coercive authority* (political, economical, social, etc.), coupled with (b) universal affirmation and promotion of freedom and equality in all spheres of human existence. Slight variations on and close approximations of these general themes abound in anarchist literature:

As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy. (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1840)⁴⁵

We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it. For we are convinced that anarchy, meaning the unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people, must spring from liberty, equality, the new social order, and the force of the revolution itself the reaction. (Mikhail Bakunin, 1869)⁴⁶

The character of the revolution must at first be negative, destructive. Instead of modifying certain institutions of the past, or adapting them to a new order, it will do away with them altogether. Therefore, the government will be uprooted, along with the Church, the army, the courts, the schools, the banks, and all their subservient institutions. At the same time the Revolution has a positive goal, that the workers take possession of all capital and the tools of production. (James Guillaume, 1876)⁴⁷

Anarchy is the full and complete liberty of the individual who, freely and driven only by his needs, his tastes, and his sympathies, unites with other individuals in groups or in an association; the free development of associations which federate with other associations in the commune or in the neighborhood; the free development of the communes which federate together in the region—and thus would inevitably follow the regions in the nation; the nations in humanity. (Carlo Cafiero, 1880)⁴⁸

Anarchy is anti-government, anti-rulers, anti-dictators, anti-bosses. . . . Anarchy is the negation of force; the elimination of all authority in social affairs; it is the denial of the right of domination of one man over another.

It is the diffusion of rights, of power, of duties, equally and freely among all the people. (Albert Parsons, 1887)⁴⁹

All we anarchists want is equal freedom for all; the workers to provide for their own affairs by voluntary arrangements among themselves. (Louisa Sara Bevington)⁵⁰

Anarchy signifies the negation of authority . . . The Individual has a right to his entire liberty, to the satisfaction of all his needs; that is understood. Only, as there exist more than a billion individuals on the earth, with equal rights if not with equal needs, it follows that these rights must be satisfied without encroaching on one another . . . The Anarchists . . . says society should be based on the strictest solidarity. (Jean Grave, 1899)⁵¹

We are anarchists, but does that not mean, perhaps, that we are enemies . . . of all oppression of man by man imposed by the authorities? (Luigi Fabbri, 1905)⁵²

Anarchism, contrary to authority, is the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. (Peter Kropotkin, 1905)⁵³

Anarchism . . . teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all, and in which the opportunities for complete development of mind and body shall be the heritage of all . . . [It] teaches that the present unjust organisation of the production and distribution of wealth must finally be completely destroyed, and replaced by a system which will insure to each the liberty to work, without first seeking a master to whom he [or she] must surrender a tithe of his [or her] product, which will guarantee his liberty of access to the sources and means of production . . . Out of the blindly submissive, it makes the discontented; out of the unconsciously dissatisfied, it makes the consciously dissatisfied . . . Anarchism seeks to arouse the consciousness of oppression, the desire for a better society, and a sense of the necessity for unceasing warfare against capitalism and the State. (Voltairine de Cleyre, 1907)⁵⁴

As the word “anarchy” etymologically signifies the negation of governmental authority, the absence of government, it follows that one indissoluble bond unites the anarchists. This is antagonism to all situations regulated by imposition, constraint, violence, governmental oppression, whether these are a product of all, a group, or of one person. (Emile Armand, 1907)⁵⁵

Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations. (Emma Goldman, 1910)⁵⁶

... *Anarchy* is a form of social life in which men live as brothers, where nobody is in a position to oppress or exploit anyone else, and in which all the means to achieve maximum moral and material development are available to everyone; and *Anarchism* is the method by which to achieve anarchy through freedom and without government, that is without authoritarian organisms which, by using force, even, possibly for good ends, impose their will on others. (Errico Malatesta, 1925)⁵⁷

In the fewest words, anarchism teaches that we can live in a society where there is no compulsion of any kind. A life without compulsion naturally means liberty; it means freedom from being forced or coerced, a chance to lead the life that suits you best. (Alexander Berkman, 1928)⁵⁸

Anarchism may be briefly defined as the negation of all government and all authority of man over man; Communism as the recognition of the just claim of each to the fullest satisfaction of all his needs, physical, moral and intellectual. (Hippolyte Havel, 1932)⁵⁹

Anarchism may be understood as the generic social and political idea that expresses negation of all power, sovereignty, domination, and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution. (David Weick, 1979)⁶⁰

Anarchism is a movement for human freedom . . . Philosophically, it aims for the maximum accord between the individual, society and nature. Practically, it aims for us to organise and live our lives in such a way as to make politicians, governments, states and their officials superfluous. In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would be organised in non-coercive relationships within naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common. (Stuart Christie, 2004)⁶¹

The anarchist critique of closed, coercive authority has historically extended well beyond states and governments to include centralized, hierarchical, and exploitative economic systems (e.g., capitalism, state socialism, feudalism, slavery, etc.), religious ideologies, and sexual relations, *inter alia*:

The 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. (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1840)⁶²

Political power and wealth are inseparable. Those who have power have the means to gain wealth and must center all their efforts upon acquiring

it, for without it they will not be able to retain power. Those who are wealthy must become strong, for, lacking power, they run the risk of being deprived of their wealth. (Mikhail Bakunin, 1870)⁶³

Anarchy and communism are two terms which . . . ought to form a single term, since they jointly express a unitary concept . . . It is impossible to be an anarchist without being a communist. (Carlo Cafiero, 1880)⁶⁴

. . . [Anarchists] deem it necessary to abolish slavery, wage labor—this remnant of medieval serfdom—and the exorbitant privilege of a few that have, to a greater or lesser extent, all the assets (land, machinery, homes, factories, tools, labor, etc.) and therefore the means of producing the necessities of life. (Luigi Fabbri, 1905)⁶⁵

It is not only against the abstract trinity of law, religion, and authority that we declare war. By becoming anarchists we declare war against all this wave of deceit, cunning, exploitation, vice—in a word, inequality—which they have poured into our hearts. (Peter Kropotkin, 1909)⁶⁶

Anarchism, then, really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the domination of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. (Emma Goldman, 1910)⁶⁷

Anarchism . . . attacks not only capital, but also the main sources of power of capitalism: law, authority, and the State. (Peter Kropotkin, 1913)⁶⁸

Anarchism is the abolition of exploitation and oppression of man by man, that is, the abolition of private property and government; Anarchism is the destruction of misery, of superstitions, of hatred. Therefore, every blow given to the institutions of private property and to the government, every exaltation of the conscience of man, every disruption of the present conditions, every lie unmasked, every part of human activity taken away from the control of the authorities, every augmentation of the spirit of solidarity and initiative, is a step towards Anarchism. (Errico Malatesta, 1932)⁶⁹

Anarchism has in common with Liberalism the idea that the happiness and prosperity of the individual must be the standard of all social matters. And, in common with the great representatives of Liberal thought, it has also the idea of limiting the functions of government to a minimum. Its supporters have followed this thought to its ultimate logical consequences, and wish to eliminate every institution of political power from the life of society . . . In common with the founders of socialism, Anarchists demand the abolition of all economic monopolies and the common ownership of the soil and all other means of production, the use of which must be available for all without distinction; for personal and social freedom is conceivable only on the basis of equal economic advantages for everybody. (Rudolf Rocker, 1938)⁷⁰

We will say more about this below. For the time being, it is enough to note that all forms of anarchism are united by this all-encompassing critique of authority—a critique which is ultimately founded on a common moral position.

At the deepest and most fundamental level anarchism is an ethical doctrine; everything it affirms or denies, champions or condemns, must ultimately be understood in moral terms. Although I shall argue later that the anarchism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century bears certain important affinities with Nietzsche, it does not follow him in rejecting moral discourse *tout court*. This is one reason among many why Marx and his followers found fault with anarchism. As proponents of scientific materialism over and against Hegelian idealism, they strove to portray their projects as rational, objective, and descriptive, constructing a discourse based on actuality and necessity. Anarchists, in contrast, emphasized the *possible*, which in turn pushed anarchist discourse in a decidedly ethical and even aesthetic direction. As “Philo” (probably Max Baginski) explains at length in Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*:

The disharmony of life is more seeming than real; and what is real of it, is the folly and blindness of man. To struggle against that folly, is to create greater harmony, wider possibilities. Artificial barriers circumscribe and dwarf life, and stifle its manifestations. To break those barriers down, is to find a vent, to expand, to express oneself. And that is life, Aleck: a continuous struggle for expression. It mirrors itself in nature, as in all the phases of man’s existence . . . To suppress or thwart it, means decay, death. And in this, Aleck, is to be found the main source of suffering and misery. The hunger of life storms at the gates that exclude it from the joy of being, and the individual soul multiplies its expressions by being mirrored in the collective, as the little vine mirrors itself in its many flowers, or as the acorn individualizes itself a thousandfold in the many-leaved oak . . . Well, Aleck, as with nature, so with man.⁷¹

David Graeber provides a helpful summary when he notes that “Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy [whereas] anarchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice.”⁷² That ethical discourse, however, is noticeably different from the liberal and socialist modes of normativity discussed in previous chapters.

The political axiology of anarchism

I noted earlier that the term “anarchy” means, roughly, “without chief, ruler, leader, or authority.” I further noted that the ethical core of anarchism is the claim that all forms of closed, coercive authority are immoral. 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 morally condemnable. When one consults the writings of the anarchists, moreover, one finds this condemnation repeated so often that it takes on the appearance of a mantra. 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 closed, coercive authority. It also depends, quite crucially, on what is meant by closed, coercive authority. As far as the latter issue is concerned, we have seen that the state, private property, and organized religion are regarded as especially harmful and malevolent forms of authority, but they are by no means the only forms. For purposes of addressing the former issue, it is worth recalling why anarchists reject such institutions, and it is not just because they are at odds with the values of freedom and equality.

While there is no doubt that anarchists value individual freedom—as is made clear, for example, in many of the definitions of anarchism provided earlier—the same is true of liberals and socialists. In fact, several of the most radical early liberals understood closed, coercive authority in the same terms, and opposed it for the same reasons, that we have just outlined. Of particular relevance here is the English political philosopher William Godwin, who argues in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice* (1793) that individual freedom is logically incompatible with government. Indeed, Godwin valued individual freedom to such an extent that he openly advocated the abolition of the state. (It is not surprising, for this reason, that Godwin is often regarded as an important forerunner of modern anarchism.) Also worth mentioning is the radical individualist Max Stirner, whose 1844 magnum opus *The Ego and Its Own* argues for the total emancipation of the individual from all systems, institutions, and ideologies.

We must recall, however, that the “individual freedom” that Godwin and Stirner hold in such high esteem is *negative* freedom—that is, noninterference, “freedom from,” or what Bakunin colorfully describes as “the revolt of the individual against all divine, collective, and individual authority.”⁷³ To be sure, negative freedom is also valued by anarchists, and the liberal and individualistic conception of negative freedom in particular was extremely influential in the development of early anarchism, especially in postrevolutionary France. But as Bakunin points out, individualism

considers all members of society, the mass of individuals, to be mutually unconcerned rivals and competitors, natural enemies with whom each individual is forced to live but who block each other’s way . . . [and] . . .

impels the individual to gain and erect his own well-being, prosperity, and good fortune to the disadvantage of everyone else, despite them and on their backs.⁷⁴

An ideology which myopically and one-sidedly emphasizes “individual freedom” will, he thinks, inevitably promote the worst kind of criminal behavior and is itself a “continuous crime against human solidarity, which is the only basis of all morality.”⁷⁵ Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that 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—namely, the establishment of a federal system of voluntary associations. This is because Proudhon is a socialist, not a liberal, and like all early socialists his primary ethical and political concern is not individual freedom so much as *justice*, which he defines as “the recognition of the equality between another’s personality and our own.”⁷⁶

As I 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 to be a basic and constitutive feature of human association:

Everybody knows that when two men associate—for instance, in order to fish—if one of them catches the fish, he is none the less entitled to those caught by his associate . . . But is it possible that we are not all associated? Let us call to mind what was said . . . That even though we do not want to be associated, the force of things, the necessity of consumption, the laws of production, and the mathematical principle of exchange combine to associate us . . . Now, neither a commercial, nor an industrial, nor an agricultural association can be conceived of in the absence of equality; equality is its *sine qua non*. So that, in all matters which concern this association, to violate society is to violate justice and equality. Apply this principle to humanity at large.⁷⁷

At the same time, equality (i.e., equity or social proportionality) is an ideal state of affairs that is both desirable and realizable:

Equity makes it at once our duty and our pleasure to aid the weak who have need of us, and to make them our equals; to pay to the strong a just tribute of gratitude and honor, without enslaving ourselves to them; to cherish our neighbors, friends, and equals, for that which we receive from them, even by right of exchange. *Equity* is sociability raised to its ideal by reason and justice; its commonest manifestation is *urbanity* or

politeness, which, among certain nations, sums up in a single word nearly all the social duties.⁷⁸

According to Proudhon, although human beings have a natural tendency toward “sociability,” it is our capacity for reason that allows us to realize justice by recognizing our equality with others, and it is our sense of justice which impels us to realize equality through social proportionality.

Far from being at odds with liberty, Proudhon insists that equality and liberty are equivalent, “because liberty only exists in society, and in the absence of equality there is no society.” Furthermore, he writes, “Liberty is anarchy, because it does not admit the government of the will, but only the authority of the law; that is, of necessity . . . [and] . . . Liberty is infinite variety, because it respects all wills within the limits of the law.” In short, equality is not an obstacle to individual freedom but its condition of possibility—a point which Bakunin echoes repeatedly in his writings:

I am a fanatic lover of liberty, considering it as the unique condition under which intelligence, dignity and human happiness can develop and grow; not the purely formal liberty conceded, measured out and regulated by the State, an eternal lie which in reality represents nothing more than the privilege of some founded on the slavery of the rest; not the individualistic, egoistic, shabby, and fictitious liberty extolled by the School of J.-J. Rousseau and other schools of bourgeois liberalism, which considers the would-be rights of all men, represented by the State which limits the rights of each—an idea that leads inevitably to the reduction of the rights of each to zero. No, I mean the only kind of liberty that is worthy of the name, liberty that consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers that are 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.⁷⁹

The right to freedom, without the means to achieving it, is only a ghost. And do we not love freedom too much to be satisfied with its ghost? We want its reality. But what constitutes the real basis and the positive condition of freedom? It is, for each individual, the all-round development and full enjoyment of all physical, intellectual, and moral faculties; consequently, it is all the material means necessary for each individual’s existence . . . The freedom of individuals is by no means an individual matter. It is a collective matter, a collective product. No individual can be free outside of human society or without its cooperation . . . But this freedom is possibly only through equality. If

there be a human being freer than I, then I inevitably become his slave. If I be freer than he, then he will be mine. Therefore, equality is an absolutely necessary condition for freedom.⁸⁰

To be free . . . means to be acknowledged and treated as such by all his fellowmen. The liberty of every individual is only the reflection of his own humanity, or his human right through the conscience of all free men, his brothers and his equals. I can feel free only in the presence of and in relationship with other men. In the presence of an inferior species of animal I am neither free nor a man, because this animal is incapable of conceiving and consequently recognizing my humanity. I am not myself free or human until or unless I recognize the freedom and humanity of all my fellowmen. Only in respecting their human character do I respect my own . . . I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.⁸¹

Furthermore, the equality of which Proudhon and Bakunin speak is political, social, and economic “equality of opportunity” rather than “equality of outcome.” As Alexander Berkman writes, it does not promote conformity and homogenization but broadens and expands possibilities for individual activity and expression:

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 everyone 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.⁸²

If “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 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 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.”⁸³ Elsewhere she writes:

True liberty . . . is not a *negative* thing of being free *from* something, because with such freedom you may starve to death. Real freedom, true liberty, is *positive*: it is freedom *to* something; it is the liberty to be, to do; in short the liberty of actual and active opportunity.⁸⁴

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. 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 development of an individual human personality is a *social* process in which both community and the individual play a necessary and irreplaceable role. 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 individuality and individual freedom, Bakunin stresses, is only possible “in society and only by the collective action of the whole society.”⁸⁵ He continues:

[A human being] frees himself from the yoke of external nature only by collective and social labor, which alone can transform the earth into an abode favorable to the development of humanity. Without such material emancipation the intellectual and moral emancipation of the individual is impossible. He can emancipate himself from the yoke of his own nature, that is subordinate his instincts and the movements of his body to the conscious direction of his mind, the development of which is fostered only by education and training. But education and training are preeminently and exclusively social . . . hence the isolated individual cannot possibly become conscious of his freedom.⁸⁶

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 individual . . . [the] display of human energy.”⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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 is why Bakunin and other anarchists were often referred to as “libertarian socialists.” The anarchists also insist repeatedly that freedom and equality are not legal or metaphysical constructions but real and active powers. Thus Malatesta writes, “Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting: this is true among ourselves as well as in society as a whole. And it is by cooperation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative.”⁹⁰

Strictly speaking, then, freedom and equality are not independent concepts for the anarchists. At the same time, it would be a profound mistake to suggest that anarchism simply fuses the liberal concept of freedom with the socialist concept of equality in a kind of dialectical synthesis. Indeed, although some thinkers—including some anarchists, such as Rocker—have argued that anarchism represents a “synthesis” of liberalism and socialism, I am strongly opposed to any and all such ideas. Synthesis presupposes an initial opposition between its two terms, and, as we have just shown, anarchists rigorously deny that freedom is the antithesis of equality (or vice versa). On the contrary, freedom and equality are symbiotic, reciprocal, and interdependent. “Anarchy” is nothing more than the harmonious relationship between maximum freedom and maximum equality.⁹¹

I would suggest, further, that this “anarchy” is simply an expression of—a way of speaking about—life itself. By life, moreover, I do not mean biological life but rather the immanent processes of change, development, and becoming in terms of which anarchists like Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (*inter alia*) describe human existence itself. In *On Justice*, Proudhon draws a sharp distinction between the “system of transcendence, more commonly known as Revelation . . .”⁹² and the system of immanence, “the triumph of which the Revolution was intended to ensure.”⁹³ The former posits that justice has a “supernatural and superhuman” source and

an “origin superior to man, on whom it acts by an influence from above, free and mysterious.” According to the latter,

Man, though fully a part of the natural world, constantly produces society through the spontaneous development of his nature. It is only by abstraction that he can be considered in isolation and not subject to law other than selfishness. His conscience is not double, as taught by the transcendentalists: there is not one animal part and another from God; he is not polarized. As an integral part of a collective existence, man feels his dignity at the same time in himself and in others, and thus carries in his heart a moral principle higher than the individual. And this principle he does not receive from elsewhere; it is intimate, immanent. It constitutes its essence, the essence of society itself. This is the proper form of the human soul, a form which strives only to strengthen and improve itself more and more by the relationship that is born every day from social life.⁹⁴

Anarchy, like all human ideals and aspirations, originates in and is immanent to human life. It is not founded on mystical or supernatural revelation nor, as Malatesta insists, “on any real or imagined natural necessity, but . . . through the exercise of the human will.”⁹⁵ At the same time, human life does reflect the dynamic, interdependent, *anarchic* reality that Proudhon and others ascribe to reality as a whole. In both its potential to change and its actual transformations, in both its singularity and universality, human life, no less than existence, is a “unity in multiplicity.” Individual and social, social and the 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”).

Proudhon says that equality is liberty and that liberty is anarchy. To this we can add that *anarchy is life*, and it is life to which anarchist ethics ascribes the highest value. Domination and hierarchy, in turn, are condemnable inasmuch as they are opposed to life. Perhaps at the level of theoretical ethics it would be 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 immoral. For our purposes, however, a higher degree of specificity is necessary: we must indicate not only *that* domination and hierarchy oppose life, but also *how* they do. Todd May has argued, quite rightly in my view, that the principal mode of political domination is *representation*,⁹⁶ which I have already described above as the generic process of subsuming the particular under the general. In the political realm, representation involves divesting individuals and groups of their life, 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, it is an operation characterized 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 and across a community. The result is that individuals and groups come to identify with the normalized mode of representation, to conform to it, and so to regulate themselves in accordance with it 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 claimed at one point that Foucault was the first to teach us of “the indignity of speaking for others.”⁹⁷ 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 originally 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 the essence of political oppression is wresting this ability from others, and, more importantly that this “wresting” involves “giving people images [representations] of who they are and what they desire.”⁹⁸ 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 live-giving order of freedom,” Bakunin 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.”⁹⁹ When that power is taken over by or ceded to hierarchical, coercive institutions of any sort, the result is oppression, domination, unfreedom—in a word, *death*.

In a 2007 article I argued 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.”¹⁰⁰ Upon further reflection, however, I came 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,”¹⁰¹ extending into a far wider range of discourses, including morality. Kropotkin, 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.”¹⁰² In practice, if not also in theory, the prescription of universal normative principles and moral mandates is just one more form of representation. As Malatesta writes:

How often must we repeat that we do not wish to impose anything on anybody . . . We do not boast that we possess absolute truth; on the contrary, we believe that *social truth* is not a fixed quantity, good for all times, universally applicable, or determinable in advance, but that instead, once freedom has been secured, mankind will go forward discovering and acting gradually with the least number of upheavals and with a minimum of friction. Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions.¹⁰³

Malatesta does not want “to harden [his] anarchism into dogma, nor impose it by force.”¹⁰⁴ Like Kropotkin, he rejects “‘the will of God,’ ‘natural laws,’ ‘moral laws,’ the ‘categorical imperative’ of the Kantians, even the ‘interest clearly understood’ of the Utilitarians” because they are “metaphysical fantasies” whose authority and motivating force depends entirely on abstractions, including totalized conceptions of a universal human nature or essence and representations of “the human being” as such.¹⁰⁵ This is, again, the very substance of oppression.

In the place of normativity, the anarchists offer two alternatives: first, a sophisticated anthropological, sociological, and evolutionary analysis of the origins and functions of moral systems; and second, a pragmatic and procedural theory of action referred to as “prefiguration.”¹⁰⁶ The first alternative, the finest examples of which are provided by Malatesta, Goldman, and Kropotkin, explores the extent to which particular systems of morality, ranging from Kantianism to utilitarianism, have functioned in practice as mechanisms of domination and control.¹⁰⁷ Malatesta, for example, writes:

The existence of sentiments of affection and sympathy among mankind, and the experience of the individual and social advantages which stem from the development of these sentiments, have produced and go on producing concepts of “justice” and “right” and “Morality” which, in spite of a thousand contradictions, constitute a goal, an ideal toward which humanity advances . . . This “morality” is fickle and relative; it varies with the time, with different people, classes and individuals; people use it to serve their own personal interests and that of their families, class or country.¹⁰⁸

In a similar fashion, Goldman argues that the morality of puritanism “rests on an immoveable conception of life”¹⁰⁹ and “repudiates, as something vile and sinful, our deepest feelings.”¹¹⁰ As a result, it has given rise to some of the worst crimes in human history, including the church’s systematic persecution of non-Christians and its oppression of women.¹¹¹ Kropotkin, lastly, notes that

The priest accustoms the child to the idea of law, to make it obey better what he calls the “divine law,” and the lawyer prates of divine law, that the civil law may be the better obeyed. And by the habit of submission, with which we are only too familiar, the thought of the next generation retains this religious twist, which is at once servile and authoritative . . . During these slumberous interludes, morals are rarely discussed . . . People do not criticize, they let themselves be drawn by habit, or indifference. They do not put themselves out for or against the established morality . . . Little by little, youth frees itself. It flings overboard its prejudices, and it begins to criticize . . . And each time the question of morality comes up again. “Why should I follow the principles of this hypocritical morality?” asks the brain, released from religious terrors. “Why should any morality be obligatory?” Then people try to account for the moral sentiment that they meet at every turn without having explained it to themselves. And they will never explain it so long as they believe it a privilege of human nature.¹¹²

Malatesta, Goldman, and Kropotkin are not interested in the question of whether, how, and to what extent particular practices can be morally justified; rather, they are 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. In this sense they are very much of a piece with Nietzsche.

The second alternative refers to a practical principle observed more or less uniformly by anarchists over the past two centuries.¹¹³ Simply stated, the “prefigurative principle” demands coherence between means and ends.¹¹⁴ 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.¹¹⁵ As it happens this was a major point of contention within the First International. Whereas Marx and his faction favored using hierarchical, coercive methods in pursuit of ostensibly egalitarian and libertarian ends, “Bakuninists” such as James Guillaume claimed it was “impossible” for “an equalitarian and free society to issue from authoritarian organization [.]”¹¹⁶ Bakunin himself makes this same point repeatedly in his anti-Marxian polemical writings. In *Marxism, Freedom and the State*, for example, he notes that

The Communists believe they must organize the workers' forces to take possession of the political power of the State. The Revolutionary Socialists [anarchists] organize with a view to the destruction, or if you prefer a politer word, the liquidation of the State. The Communists are the upholders of the principle and practice of authority; the Revolutionary Socialists have confidence only in liberty. Both equally supporters of that science which must kill superstition and replace faith, the former would wish to impose it; the latter will exert themselves to propagate it so that groups of human beings, convinced, will organize themselves and will federate spontaneously, freely, from below upwards, by their own movement and conformably to their own interests, but never after a plan traced in advance and imposed on the "ignorant masses" by some superior intellects.¹¹⁷

One can also point to the debate between Kropotkin, who disavowed the individual use of violent "propaganda by deed," and the Russian revolutionary Sergei Nechayev, who advocated the use of terrorist tactics.¹¹⁸ As Paul Avrich notes, whereas Kropotkin insisted that means and ends are "inseparable," which in turn implied that anarchists should not use the violent methods of the state in pursuit of the abolition of the state, Nechayev believed firmly that the end alone justifies the means.¹¹⁹

As we shall see below, anarchists hold that power relations as such 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:

Freedom is never attained; it must always be striven for. Consequently its claims have no limit and can neither be enclosed in a program nor prescribed as a definite rule for the future. Each generation must face its own problems, which cannot be forestalled or provided for in advance. The worst tyranny is that of ideas which have been handed down to us, allowing no development in ourselves, and trying to steamroll everything to one flat universal level.¹²⁰

In order to avoid reproducing oppressive power relations, the means and methods employed in pursuit of freedom and equality ought to be consistent with their intended aims; the tactics used in pursuit of the value of freedom and equality 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.

Some critics have suggested that the reluctance of “classical” anarchists to frame their critique in normative terms belies a lack of philosophical sophistication and rigor. When one consults the historical record, however, one sees that this reluctance is not the result of an oversight but of a deliberate rejection of normative concepts coupled with a principled pragmatism. This does not strike me as the least bit surprising; after all, it seems obvious that a philosophy predicated in large part on the rejection of laws and norms in the political realm would be skeptical toward analogous concepts in the moral realm. The same is true of the anarchists’ pragmatism—that is, their tendency to judge concepts on the basis of their usefulness. Proudhon, as we have already seen, insists that the putatively “transcendent concepts . . . that we place like divinities at the summit of our intelligence are mere products of the analysis of our own intuition, of the hypotheses and postulates of our experience.”¹²¹ As Jesse Cohn points out, the point of philosophy for Proudhon isn’t to discover mind-independent, transcendent truth but to “*dégager de la masse des faits humains les principes qui les régissent*”—to ‘draw from the mass of human facts the principles that govern them’ (*De la Justice*, 1.280); that is, to discover ‘the logic of things.’”¹²²

In the interest of fairness, we should make it clear that not *all* anarchists rejected normativity in the manner just described. For example, the Americans Benjamin Tucker, Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and a few other self-described “individualist anarchists” followed William Godwin in endorsing a broadly deontological conception of rights, liberties, and obligations which further entailed that centralized government is incompatible with human freedom.¹²³ Like Godwin, moreover, the individualists did not advocate public ownership of the means of production or any other characteristically socialist positions. Thus, although they have often been referred to, or referred to themselves, as “individualist anarchists,” their political philosophy is better understood as an extremely radical form of classical liberalism.¹²⁴ To this extent, they have always occupied a marginal space within the broader anarchist tradition, which has tended to be predominantly socialist and anticapitalist in orientation.

It is clear, in any case, that the so-called classical anarchists reject normativity and to this extent anarchist morality is not describable in either deontojuridical or teleological terms. At the same time, it is also clear that anarchist philosophy—as reflected both in its meta-ethical investigations and its emphasis on prefiguration—is deeply historical in orientation. Like Marxists, anarchists have always appreciated the extent to which theory and practice are historically embedded and conditioned, though they categorically reject any concept of historical determinism. Kropotkin, for example, argues that systems of morality both constitute and are constituted by determinate historical contexts. Kropotkin’s argument, in turn, underwrites the concept

of prefiguration, which recognizes that political tactics must be constantly revised in light of changes in historical circumstances. The only categorical limitation on tactics adopted—a limitation that is practical rather than normative—is that they must be consistent with their intended ends. Anarchism's rejection of both normativity as well as historical materialism, which together constitute an important part of political modernity, is further evidence that it represents something altogether different, something that stands apart from, or outside, political modernity.

In concluding this section, I should like to add a brief postscript, one that should be regarded, at least for the time being, as a hypothesis rather than a substantive argument. Students of contemporary moral philosophy know that there is a *tertium via* that allegedly provides an alternative to both deontology and consequentialism on the other. That alternative, of course, is the "virtue ethics" advocated by the likes of Michael Slote, Rosalind Hurthhouse, Alasdair MacIntyre, and others.¹²⁵ The foundational idea of virtue ethics is that moral judgment should be grounded in moral psychology (specifically, in an analysis of character) as opposed to abstract normative principles. Here I want only to call attention to a few aspects of the virtue theory articulated by MacIntyre in his seminal works *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*¹²⁶ According to MacIntyre, "virtues" constituted and are constituted by "internal goods" embodied within intersecting social practices.¹²⁷ These social practices, in turn, emerge within and belong to their own specific contexts.¹²⁸ Interestingly, MacIntyre thinks that the relationship between the virtues and the "internal goods" to which they are directed is reciprocal and immanent. Simply put, all particular goods are produced by corresponding virtues, and all particular virtues are produced by corresponding goods.¹²⁹ (Virtue is quite literally its own reward.) Consequently, the value of "internal goods" does not depend on an instrumental relationship to consequences external or on a transcendent conception of "intrinsic worth." The virtues, moreover, arise within and belong to context-specific fields of practice, which are in turn populated by particular types of agents. MacIntyre therefore rejects both the universal, transcendent subject of deontology as well as the rational, deliberative subject of utilitarianism.¹³⁰ Within particular contexts, the practice and development of virtue has social preconditions, including institutions and resources. These particular contexts do not remain isolated, however; they intersect with each other, as do their particular practices and virtues, and this intersection produces what MacIntyre calls "traditions."¹³¹ As people are enculturated within particular traditions, they come to "appreciate" the virtues of that tradition as well as the "internal goods" immanent to these virtues. The cultivation and development of virtues in practice, however, also creates new practices, new virtues, and the possibility of new traditions.¹³²

Benjamin Franks has argued provocatively that the prefigurative ethic of anarchism exhibits some interesting parallels with MacIntyre's conception

of virtue—though his is scarcely obvious at first blush—and I find his argument persuasive.¹³³ Like MacIntyre's "internal goods," the good that I have variously termed "life," "freedom," and so forth, stands in an immanent relation to the prefigurative action which pursues it. Strictly speaking, the dynamic, self-creating, vital processes that underlie action are coextensive with the goal of said action, which is nothing less than that freedom or vitality itself. Secondly, prefigurative action, like MacIntyre's "practice," is tactical, micropolitical, locally oriented—in short, tied to specific contexts and fields of endeavor. The same is true, as we have seen, of the acting agent who is constituted fluidly by, and through, her actions. Lastly, although anarchism is generically committed to practices that embody, as far as possible, life-affirming, creative social relations at the level of both means and ends, there is no single locus within which such practices are carried out, nor is there a special class of actors capable of, or responsible for, undertaking them. As with MacIntyre, there is a multiplicity of contexts, each defined in turn by a multiplicity of practices and practitioners, and it is the intersection of these contexts that makes solidarity possible. This elucidates a crucial distinction between anarchist solidarity and Leninist vanguardism, the latter of which predicates a unitary locus of struggle and a single revolutionary class. For MacIntyre, moreover, the intersection of contexts produces "traditions," but these traditions do not subsume intersecting contexts into totalities, thereby eradicating their original particularity. In like fashion, the localized struggles of individuals and groups do not vanish into a totalized mass when such struggles intersect, join forces, act collectively, and so forth. The result is not Leninist "class consciousness" but anarchist solidarity, a concept that, on the face of it at least, seems analogous to MacIntyrean "tradition." (One might go so far as to say that the very idea of an "anarchist tradition" only makes sense when cashed out in MacIntyre's terms!)

Anarchism and power

Perhaps the most important difference between anarchism and the other political traditions previously discussed concerns the nature of power. Classical liberalism, as we have seen, tends to regard power as an external and essentially repressive force, "a weight pressing down—and at times destroying—the actions, events, and desires with which it comes in contact . . . a set of restraints-upon-action."¹³⁴ Most schools of socialism, including classical Marxism, regard power in a similar fashion, the crucial differences being that (a) power is always internal to a social context, (b) political power is reducible to economic power, and (c) repression is not a result of the *nature* of power so much as the monopolization of power by a particular socio-economic class. To this extent, both liberalism and socialism may be

seen as “strategic political philosophies” according to May’s taxonomy insofar as both regard power as something that emanates from a unitary source or locus. For classical liberals, that locus is the state or the sovereign, whereas for Marxists it is the bourgeoisie or capitalist class.

Here a distinction needs to be made between *how* power operates, on the one hand, and *whence* power emanates, on the other. With respect to the first issue, classical liberalism (and to a lesser extent socialism) endorses what might be called “the repressive thesis”—that is, the idea that power is by nature a force of repression, limitation, inhibition, and so forth. With respect to the second issue, Marxism and certain other political philosophies endorse what might be called the “concentration thesis”—that is, the idea that power is concentrated within and emanates from a single source. According to the repressive thesis, power as such is opposed to human freedom and to this extent must be contained, restricted, or even abolished. According to the concentration thesis, all particular expressions of power are reducible to a more general “type” of power aggregated within a single locus. It is clear from the foregoing that anarchism, as a species of May’s “tactical” political philosophy, rejects the concentration thesis. As May notes:

For tactical political philosophy, there is no center within which power is to be located. Otherwise put, power, and consequently politics, are irreducible. There are many different sites from which it arises, and there is an interplay among these various sites in the social world. This is not to deny that there are points of concentration of power or, to keep with the spatial image, points where various (and perhaps bolder) lines intersect. Power does not, however, originate at these points; rather, it agglomerates around them. Tactical thought thus performs its analyses within a milieu characterized . . . by the tension between irreducible and mutually intersecting practices of power.¹³⁵

Anarchists have always contended that domination exists in mutually irreducible forms that arise within multiple sites. Much to the chagrin of Marx and Engels, Bakunin adamantly refused to subordinate oppressive political and religious institutions to “economic requisites” and to reduce domination to the economic category of “enslavement.”¹³⁶ In *Science and the Urgent Revolutionary Task* he writes:

Every government has a twofold aim. One, the chief and avowed aim, consists in preserving and strengthening the State, civilization, and civil order—that is, the systematic and legalized dominance of the ruling class over the exploited people. The other aim is just as important in the eyes of the government, though less willingly avowed in the open, and that is the preservation of its exclusive governmental advantages and its personnel. The first aim is pertinent to the general interests of the ruling classes; the

second, to the vanity and the exceptional advantages of the individuals in the government.¹³⁷

This quote makes clear that for Bakunin the state is *not just* an “organ of class rule” even if that tends to be its principle function. When he argues in the same pamphlet that “political power and wealth are inseparable”—a claim echoed by Berkman¹³⁸ and Rocker,¹³⁹ among others—he means that state and capital exist in a symbiotic relationship of collusion and coconspiracy. For anarchists, all oppressive institutions exist independently of each other even though they *overlap* and *intersect* with one another.

What makes such institutions condemnable, again, is precisely their structures (how they are organized) and their functions (how they operate). No anarchist has ever claimed that political, social, or economic organization is oppressive in itself and by definition—that is, independently of its nature and function. On the contrary, anarchism has only directed its critique against specific organizational, institutional, and conventional forms that are essentially hierarchical, dominative, and coercive. Thus Bakunin writes: “It would be impossible to make the State change its nature . . . All states are bad in the sense that by their nature, *that is, by the conditions and objectives of their existence*, they constitute the opposite of human justice, freedom and equality.”¹⁴⁰ As Jesse Cohn points out, for Bakunin the “nature” of a thing is defined not so much by what it “is” but by what it does or is capable of doing (“the conditions and objectives of [its] existence”).¹⁴¹ Bakunin’s claim is that a “state” *just is* a thing that centralizes power, organizes authority hierarchically, and employs coercion to sustain and expand itself. A form of political organization that does not function and/or organize itself in this way is not a state. The same is true, for example, of capitalism, which does more or less the same thing with economic power that the state does with political power.

The most groundbreaking insight of the anarchists, as we already suggested, is that these and other forms of structural and functional domination rely crucially on the practice of representation. The state purports to represent “the people” it rules, allegedly on the basis of a social contract. But, Bakunin writes,

If we are to maintain the fiction of the free state issuing from a social contract, we must assume that the majority of its citizens must have had the prudence, the discernment, and the sense of justice necessary to elect the worthiest and most capable men and to place them at the head of their government. But if a people had exhibited these qualities, would it not mean that the people itself, as a mass, had reached so high a degree of morality and of culture that it no longer had need of either government or state? . . . What we really see in all states past and present, even those endowed with the most democratic institutions, such as the

United States of North America and Switzerland? Actual self-government of the masses, despite the pretense that the people hold all the power, remains a fiction most of the time. It is always, in fact, minorities that do the governing.¹⁴²

The fundamental difference between a monarchy and even the most democratic republic is that in the monarchy, the bureaucrats oppress and rob the people for the benefit of the privileged in the name of the King, and to fill their own coffers; while in the republic the people are robbed and oppressed in the same way for the benefit of the same classes, in the name of “the will of the people” (and to fill the coffers of the democratic bureaucrats).¹⁴³

In short, even those states that assume a “the most liberal and democratic form [are] essentially based on domination, and upon violence, that is, upon despotism—a concealed but no less dangerous despotism . . .”¹⁴⁴ This despotism, moreover, “by its nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organization and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people.”¹⁴⁵

In a similar fashion, capitalism purports to represent the welfare of consumers and producers alike by directing economic activity toward the “common good” or “general interest.” But as Malatesta notes:

The principal reason for the bad exploitation of nature, the miseries of the workers, the antagonisms of the social struggles is the right to property, which confers on the owners of the land, the raw materials, and all the means of production the possibility of exploiting the labor of others and organizing production, *not for the well-being of all, but to guarantee maximum profit for the owners.*¹⁴⁶

Likewise, Kropotkin:

The exploitation of man by man is expressive of the system of values underlying the capitalistic system. Capital, the dead past, employs labor—the living vitality and power of the present. In the capitalistic hierarchy of values, capital stands higher than labor, amassed things higher than the manifestations of life. Capital employs labor, and not labor capital. The person who owns capital commands the person who “only” owns his life, human skill, vitality and creative productivity. “Things” are higher than man. The conflict between capital and labor is much more than the conflict between two classes, more than their fight for a greater share of the social product. It is the conflict between two principles of value: that between the world of things, and their amassment, and the world of life and its productivity.¹⁴⁷

The idea, in both cases, is that representation subordinates individual values, interests, capacities, and so forth, to the interests of a dominating institution. Many other examples could be proffered, all of which would evince the same generic framework of subsuming multiplicity, particularity, and difference under totalized representations. This is not to mitigate or deny the particularity or uniqueness of distinct instances of injustice, inequality, and domination. The point is merely that oppression as such can be described, at a high level of generality, in terms of representational logic.

To the extent that the “good” of anarchism, which I have described at a similarly high level of generality, involves vitality, change, movement, multiplicity, difference, individuality, and so forth, its opposite involves stagnation, stasis, immobility, singularity, identity, conformity, and so forth. Representation is the principal force by which this opposition operates, but it does not do so in a uniform fashion or to a uniform degree. Whether a particular practice or institution is judged oppressive, and thus worthy of condemnation, depends on whether, how, and to what extent it depends upon representation at both structural and functional levels.¹⁴⁸ (In this way, anarchists are able to avoid equating brutal totalitarian regimes with relatively benign “social democracies,” corporate plutocracies with mixed economies, dogmatic religious institutions with more open-minded forms of spirituality, etc.¹⁴⁹)

Although few scholars would deny that “classical” anarchism rejects the concentration thesis, some have argued that it endorses the repressive thesis.¹⁵⁰ We have already seen that for anarchists such as Malatesta and Proudhon moral concepts (e.g., justice), no less than metaphysical concepts (e.g., being and substance), are “social truths” that are immanent to human consciousness. As it turns out, Proudhon also claims that “force is inherent or immanent in being”¹⁵¹ and that “power is immanent in society,”¹⁵² which means that power is a basic and constitutive feature of individual and social existence—not something external or transcendent. (It also suggests, among other things, that for Proudhon politics is indeed social physics.) Taken in context, one of the points of Bakunin’s famous adage—“the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too”¹⁵³—is that the same power is capable of both creating and destroying, of liberating and repressing, of affirming life and denying it. As Malatesta noted, one should avoid the “metaphysical tendency” to speak of this power *in se*—that is, as a transcendent essence or entity that exists apart from its concrete manifestation in practices and institutions.¹⁵⁴ Power cannot be conceived in this way. In and of itself, it is neither “good” nor “bad,” “liberatory” nor “repressive.” Strictly speaking it is all of these things and none of them simultaneously. This is because power is immanent to historical forms or expressions, all of which are immanent in turn to individuals, groups, practices, and institutions.

The lattermost observation is crucial: for the anarchists, repressive manifestations of power, no less than power itself, are not abstract external

forces that act upon us, but internal forces that we ourselves generate. When Malatesta claims that “all of us, without exception, are obliged to live, more or less, in contradiction with our ideals”;¹⁵⁵ when Proudhon claims that “everyone, alas, is an accomplice of the prince”;¹⁵⁶ when Bakunin claims that “each individual is . . . in a sort of conspiracy against himself”;¹⁵⁷ when Kropotkin claims that “all of us are more or less, voluntarily or involuntarily, abettors of this society”;¹⁵⁸ when Goldman claims that “the State is but the shadow of man, the shadow of his opaqueness, of his ignorance and fear”;¹⁵⁹ and when Landauer claims that the state is just a “name for that which we ourselves allow,”¹⁶⁰ they all raise the same basic point:

The State is not a thing or . . . a fetish that one can smash in order to destroy it . . . The State is a condition, a certain relationship among human beings, a mode of behavior between men; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another . . . *We are the State*, and we shall continue to be the State until we have created the institutions that form a real community and society of men.¹⁶¹

The state is an “abstraction”¹⁶² and an “illusion”¹⁶³ that “has no more existence than gods and devils have.”¹⁶⁴ The productive relationship between subjectivity and social forces is reciprocal; the claim is not just that individuals are constituted by social, political, and economic forces, but that social, political, and economic forces are constituted by individuals in turn. The question, therefore, is not “why do institutions like the state repress people?” but “why do people allow themselves to be repressed by such institutions in the first place?” The answer to the first question, according to Bakunin, is plain: “All political and civil organizations in the past and the present rest upon the following foundations: upon the historic fact of violence, upon the right to inherit property, upon the family rights of the father and husband, and the conservation of all these foundations by religion.”¹⁶⁵ As to the second, Malatesta observes:

When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organize spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilizing the services of all and directing them to his liking. If the roads are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges which in return for whatever services it renders expects to be supported and paid, as well as imposing itself and throwing its weight around; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his own prices both on the producer and the consumer. This is what has happened in our midst;

the less organized we have been the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals.¹⁶⁶

In other words, domination is not just conjured up willy-nilly by the authorities and capitalists, but by the fractured and disempowered mass of people which cannot, or will not, organize itself, perhaps because it does not know how to do so. Thus anarchy is not (or *not just*) the abolition of domination so much as the process of creating alternatives to it, of gradually relegating it to obsolescence, of replacing it with others ways of being and acting.

Here Malatesta calls attention to what is arguably the heart of anarchism: the union of theory and practice, as exemplified especially in the principle of prefiguration (“building the new world within the shell of the old”). That the key thinkers of the anarchist tradition were activists as well as philosophers and scientists is not surprising given their uncompromising dedication to freedom and their relentless condemnation of tyranny. Anarchist theory has seldom been—and, indeed, cannot consistently be—merely the stuff of discussion groups and debating societies: the kinds of doctrines it propounds cannot be easily held and affirmed without also generating a profound desire to act. Thus anarchism has always involved a commitment to actively promoting and pursuing its goals in practice, both at the level of everyday life and at the level of mass movements. The nature of this praxis is defined by fusing the theoretical (i.e., the valuation of life coupled with an ethicopolitical critique of all that stands opposed to life) with the pragmatic (i.e., the principle of prefiguration).

Because anarchist theory promotes individuality, autonomy, and self-determination, anarchist praxis emphasizes voluntary association—the free ability of individuals to associate with, or disassociate from, whomever they choose. As Bakunin points out, “any contract with another individual on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity . . .” would be “a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual . . . devoid of any sense of personal dignity.”¹⁶⁷ Through prefiguration, the goal (social existence predicated on voluntary association) shapes and determines the methodology (the formation of “collectives,” “associations,” or “affinity groups,” which come together in order to collaborate on particular projects or to jointly pursue a common goal).¹⁶⁸ Similarly, because anarchist theory promotes equality and solidarity, anarchist praxis emphasizes mutual aid, which Malatesta defines as “fraternal, equalitarian, and libertarian association, in which solidarity, consciously and freely expressed, unites mankind”¹⁶⁹ and “the coming together of individuals for the well being of all, and of all for the wellbeing of each”¹⁷⁰—in short, the creation of relationships based on voluntary cooperation and collaboration among equals rather than the domination or exploitation of the many by the few. As Emma Goldman notes, “What wonderful results this unique force of

man's individuality can achieve when strengthened by cooperation with other individualities! Cooperation—as opposed to internecine strife and struggle—has worked for the survival and evolution of the species . . . only mutual aid and voluntary cooperation can create the basis for a free individual and associational life.”¹⁷¹ Once again, prefiguration ensures that the means (action and organization based on equal cooperation rather than hierarchy and coercion) embodies the intended end (social existence predicated on mutual aid).

Anarchism and utopianism

The marriage of theory and practice reveals another distinguishing characteristic of anarchism: the disavowal of utopianism. “Anarchism,” writes Federico Urales, “must be made up of an infinite variety of systems and individuals free from all fetters. It must be like an experimental field . . . for all types of human temperament.”¹⁷² Anarchist critique, coupled with the prefigurative ethic, “is compatible with the most diverse political, economic, and social conditions, on the premise that these cannot imply, as under capitalist monopoly, the negation of liberty.”¹⁷³ In other words, anarchist theory establishes limits on the forms of political, economic, and social organization it would endorse. Within those limits, as I have suggested, a number of models and schemes have been advanced, and this is one way to account for the incredible amount of diversity within the anarchist “family.” In general, however, anarchists have avoided devising utopian “blueprints” which specify concrete goals in advance and which, in turn, affect the tactics and methods employed in anarchist intervention. As Malatesta writes:

An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organization, and of the kind it needs to attain power . . . But we anarchists do not want to *emancipate* the people; we want the people to *emancipate themselves*. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want a new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and to correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance.¹⁷⁴

Utopian ideology is simply a representation of the future, one that supplants real possibilities with images of what is possible, or what is necessary, or what must be done. But because “only life itself can create,” it follows that “life must inform theory.”¹⁷⁵ For anarchists, political action is always experimentation. Again, Malatesta: “None can judge with certainty . . .

which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom, coupled with experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there can be no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err.”¹⁷⁶ Experimentation does not proceed blindly, however. Anarchists have emphasized the importance of looking to the past—not just to the anthropological record, but to historical events such as the Paris Commune,¹⁷⁷ the Spanish Civil War,¹⁷⁸ the French uprisings of May 1968,¹⁷⁹ the ongoing Zapatista rebellion in Mexico,¹⁸⁰ and the antiglobalization movement¹⁸¹—as well as to various nonhierarchical, noncoercive social relations, which we already experience in our everyday lives.

Anarchists have often found it worthwhile to discuss what anarchist societies might be like and to formulate models of how they might operate and organize themselves. Such discussions, though purely speculative, are nonetheless important since, as Malatesta notes:

To neglect all the problems of reconstruction or to pre-arrange complete and uniform plans are both errors, excesses which, by different routes, would lead to our defeat as anarchists and to the victory of new or old authoritarian regime. The truth lies in the middle . . . It is absurd to believe that, once government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, “things will look after themselves” without the intervention of those who already have some idea, however loose or tentative, about what has to be done, and who would immediately set about doing it. Perhaps this could happen—and indeed it would be better if it were so—if there was time to wait for people, for everyone, to find a way, by trial and experience, of satisfying their own needs and tastes in agreement with the needs and tastes of others. But social life as the life of individuals does not permit interruption.¹⁸²

For the sake of bringing this discussion to a speedy close, I will only provide one example—a model historically favored by collectivists (like Bakunin) and communists (like Kropotkin). According to this model, an anarchist society would consist of a variety of small collectives or assemblies convened for specific social purposes.¹⁸³ For example, workplace assemblies would exist to coordinate production, neighborhood assemblies would exist to handle problems or issues that arise in a given neighborhood, and so forth. These assemblies, in turn, would coordinate their activities within a federation of larger groups called councils, consisting of delegates or “spokes” that have been chosen to represent the interests of their respective assemblies. Still larger regional councils could be convened on an as-needed basis, but these would be organized into a decentralized and federal system with all final “authority” residing within the assemblies. The convention of assemblies and councils, as well as the various decision-making processes operative within them, would be governed by the principles outlined above. Thus, for example,

everyone who participates in an assembly would do so freely and possess an equal say in any and all decision-making processes. Representatives and delegates to larger confederations would be chosen on an ad hoc basis and rotated, and would be charged solely with representing the various interests and decisions of their respective assemblies to other assemblies within a council or confederation. The focus in all this is to prevent power from being centralized within any one social body that would in turn possess the ability to coerce other social bodies.

This is obviously a very broad sketch that ignores a host of important issues, including how to deal with economic coordination, defense, and crime. Anarchists have discussed these issues, but in general, none of them have attempted to provide what could be called a “comprehensive analysis” of how an anarchist society would operate, nor of how such a society could or should be brought about. Though anarchists have a general sense of the kinds of societies they desire, as well as general ideas about how such societies could be actualized and maintained, their watchword is “experimentation.” Anarchist praxis, though guided by certain theoretical and tactical commitments, does not proceed according to concrete blueprints. Rather, it seeks to create forms of organization that, instead of representing social relationships, are immanent to those relationships themselves. The result of this immanentization is anarchy—the disappearance of representation and, by extension, of “government.” What forms of organization can accomplish this? How can we bring them about? Such questions can only be answered by activism, by practice, by experimenting with new ways of being and living, both individually and communally.

Nature, humanity, and science

It is commonly held, even by otherwise sympathetic philosophers, that anarchism relies on a “unitary concept of human essence” which regards human beings as essentially “good,” “altruistic,” “cooperative,” and so forth. If this claim were true, it would situate anarchism squarely in the framework of political modernity, which, as we have seen, relies heavily on essentialized representations of human nature. In point of fact, however, major and minor anarchist thinkers alike all affirmed in various ways that individuals are socially constructed and that subjectivity is socially produced. As early as 1847, Proudhon’s *Philosophy of Misery* offered a sustained critique of the concept of human nature:

Modern philosophers have erected against the Christian dogma [of original sin] a dogma no less obscure,—that of the depravity of society. Man is born good, cries Rousseau, in his peremptory style; but society—that is, the forms and institutions of society—depraves him. In such terms

was formulated the paradox, or, better, the protest, of the philosopher of Geneva . . . Now, it is evident that this idea is only the ancient hypothesis turned about. The ancients accused the individual man; Rousseau accuses the collective man: at bottom, it is always the same proposition, an absurd proposition. Thus, then, we are placed between two negations, two contradictory affirmations: one which, by the voice of entire antiquity, setting aside as out of the question society and God which it represents, finds in man alone the principle of evil; another which, protesting in the name of free, intelligent, and progressive man, throws back upon social infirmity and, by a necessary consequence, upon the creative and inspiring genius of society all the disturbances of the universe . . .¹⁸⁴

Neither understand that humanity, to use a biblical expression, is one and constant in its generations; that is, that everything in it, at every period of its development, in the individual as in the mass, proceeds from the same principle, which is *not being, but becoming*.¹⁸⁵

Jean Grave echoes this sentiment when he describes the idea of “the innate wickedness of man” as a “fiction.” Human beings, according to Grave, are no more fundamentally wicked than we are “originally good.” This is because “the human individual is a plastic being who is what he is made to be by heredity, corrected by education, and above all, by circumstances and milieu.”¹⁸⁶ Emma Goldman agrees:

Anarchism is . . . the teacher of the unity of life; not merely in nature but in man. There is no conflict between the individual and the social instincts: one the receptacle of a precious life essence, the other the repository of the element that keeps the essence pure and strong. The individual is the heart of society, conserving the essence of social life; society is the lungs which are distributing the element to keep the life essence—that is, the individual—pure and strong.¹⁸⁷

Bakunin, too, argues that it is a basic philosophical mistake to derive morality from an abstract, asocial, ahistorical, and idealistic conception of human individuality.¹⁸⁸ “The real individual,” he writes, “is from the moment of gestation in his mother’s womb already predetermined and particularized by a confluence of geographic, climatic, ethnographic, hygienic, and economic influences, which constitute the nature of his family, his class, his nation, his race.”¹⁸⁹ Human subjectivity does not consist of “ideas and innate sentiments.” There is no human nature apart from brute biological capacities “which every individual inherits at birth in different degrees.” For Bakunin, these “rudimentary faculties without any content” are the condition of possibility for subjectivity; subjectivity, in turn, is nothing more than the production of content (“impressions, facts, and events coalesced into patterns of thought”)

within these faculties vis-à-vis the complicated array of social, cultural, economic, and political forces that acts upon them.

It should be noted in passing that this view far exceeds the holistic thesis of socialism, which states that human nature can only be “actualized” or “realized” socially. It does not deny that there is such a thing as a physical or biological human nature, nor does it deny that this human nature is constituted by essential and “ready-made” characteristics. Subjectivity in general and human individuals in particular are still underwritten and determined by an essential human nature *in this sense*, which is in turn either cultivated or perverted by social life. As Bakunin writes:

Take the most intelligent ape possessing the finest characteristics, put it under the most humane conditions—and you will never succeed in making a man out of it. Take the most hardened criminal or a man of the poorest mind and, provided neither suffers from some organic lesion which may bring about either idiocy or incurable madness, you will soon recognize that if one becomes a criminal and the other has not yet developed the conscious awareness of his humanity and human duties, the fault lies not with them nor with their nature, but with the social environment in which they were born and have been developing.¹⁹⁰

Although Bakunin believes human beings have a natural capacity for thought and self-determination,¹⁹¹ he denies that we possess any innate, ready-made “qualities” or “characteristics,” especially those of a moral nature. On his view, such characteristics are *produced* by social forces (e.g., politics, economics, culture, and religion) and *nurtured* by social conditions, for example, “rational, all-around education accompanied by an upbringing based on respect for labor, reason, equality, and freedom; and a social environment wherein each human individual will enjoy full freedom and really be, *de jure* and *de facto*, the equal of every other.”¹⁹² Most importantly, they must be *developed* in various ways by the individual himself or herself since, as Reclus says, “a man may be truly moral only when he is his own master.”¹⁹³ The latter point is especially important because it underscores the anarchists’ rejection of social determinism. Although Bakunin and other anarchists believe that external social forces play a crucial role in constructing subjectivity, the individual subject is nonetheless capable of acting upon herself by developing certain characteristics and abandoning others—in short, of *creating* herself. To this extent, human beings are indeed born “free,” but this freedom remains one more “empty faculty” unless and until it is *realized* through the practice of self-creation. Human nature, or rather the human condition, is defined by the conflict between social construction and self-creation or development.

Kropotkin, too, denies that human beings are innately “rapacious and egotistic” and insists that “the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness

and ambition” is catalyzed by underlying social, economic, and political conditions.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, human beings have natural capacities both for self-interested behavior, such as dominating and exploiting others for their own ends, as well as altruistic behavior, such as sympathizing and cooperating with others.¹⁹⁵ For both Kropotkin and Bakunin, however, the experiencing subject is constituted by the conflicts which emerge among these and other internal psychological forces, as well as the social forces which act upon them (as opposed to Goldman, who sees these forces as acting in a more harmonious and complementary manner with one another). From the outset, the subject is internally divided, fractured, fragmented. The subject itself, no less than the social field it inhabits, emerges from the struggle of “diametrically opposed” forces—egoism and altruism, self-interest and solidarity, competition and cooperation, and so forth—and this struggle becomes internalized.¹⁹⁶ An individual person, in turn, is the “always changeable” product of “all his divers faculties, all of his autonomous faculties, of brain cells and nerve centers,” all of which are independent of, and to some degree in conflict with one another, and cannot ultimately be “subordinate to a central organ—the soul.”¹⁹⁷ This anarchist conception of subjectivity, far from being founded on any representation of human nature, views the subject as a product of forces struggling within itself, which is in turn an expression of the struggle of social forces.

At the level of politics, anarchism strives to create new social forms which synthesize conflicting social and psychological forces instead of repressing them. As Kropotkin writes,

[We] conceive a society in which all the mutual relations of its members are regulated, not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between members of that society, and by sum of social customs and habits—not petrified by law, routine, or superstition, but continually developing and continually readjusted, in accordance with the ever growing requirements of a free life, stimulated by the progress of science, invention, and the growth of higher ideals. No ruling authorities, then. No government of man by man; *no crystallization and immobility, but a continual evolution—such as we see in nature. Free play for the individual, for the development of his individual gifts—for his individualization.*¹⁹⁸

Like Proudhon, Kropotkin recognizes that human reality is not a matter of “being” so much as “becoming,” where “becoming” is understood in terms of the dynamic play of internal and external forces. These forces cannot be selectively manipulated, the “good” ones preserved and the “bad” ones eliminated. All of them serve a necessary function in making us who and what we are.¹⁹⁹ Nor can we prevent them from moving and changing by means of artificial mechanisms of “crystallization and immobility.” What we

can and must do, Kropotkin thinks, is to develop individual and collective identities that are fluid enough to accommodate change, pliable enough to adapt effectively to growth and development, and prudent enough to address conflict in ways that minimize harm and promote the happiness and well-being of all.

It cannot be emphasized enough that for Kropotkin and other anarchists, human beings are not *determined* by the play of multiple and mutually irreducible forces. Rather, human beings are marked by a fundamental mutability, a capacity to create and develop ourselves over and above the influence of instinct, habit, and other internal and external drives. In his famous studies of evolutionary development, Kropotkin's goal is not to demonstrate that human beings exhibit a natural propensity toward altruism or "mutual aid," but to argue, against the social Darwinists, that human nature cannot be defined in terms of *any* "inborn feelings" or essential predispositions.²⁰⁰ Evolutionary studies can establish the existence of biological instincts, some of which help, in various ways, to preserve the species over time, but brute biological facts only provide a "foundation" for ethical and moral-psychological analysis; at best they help illustrate what human beings are *capable of becoming*, as opposed to determining in advance *what we are*. Furthermore, although Kropotkin was, like the anarchist anthropologists of our own day,²⁰¹ familiar with anarchistic forms of life among tribal peoples, he was keen to point out that

The hospitality of primitive peoples, respect for human life, the sense of reciprocal obligation, compassion for the weak, courage, extending even to the sacrifice of self for others which is first learnt for the sake of children and friends, and later for that of members of the same community—all these qualities are developed in man anterior to the law, independently of religion, as in the case of social animals. Such feelings and practices are the inevitable results of social life. Without being, as say the priests and metaphysics, inherent in man, such qualities are the consequences of life in common.²⁰²

Social "feelings and practices" are not features of a universal human essence but are made possible by biological preconditions "always present in man." Like Bakunin, however, Kropotkin insists that these rudiments remain empty unless they are developed. Beliefs, feelings, and practices are the products of social forms rather than their cause.

In sum, the anarchists of the nineteenth century were among the first to suggest that, apart from biological conditions of possibility, humanity lacks an essential nature, that subjectivity is a production of forces—in short, that the individual is constituted, as Proudhon might say, by processes of becoming rather than absolute forms of being. As we have already seen, however, their critique of representation cuts an even wider swathe, applying

not just to the being of the subject but to that of the object as well. At the beginning of *On the Creation of Order in Humanity*, Proudhon writes:

I call "Order" any serial or symmetrical disposition. Order necessarily presupposes division, distinction, [and] difference. Whatever is undivided, indistinct, [and] undifferentiated cannot be conceived as ordered. These concepts are mutually exclusive.²⁰³

Human beings use thought, which is always and already constituted by language, to impose form, structure, and order upon experience. At the level of ontology, the thing-in-itself which underlies experience is "division, distinction, difference." The priority of explanation, therefore, begins not with existence, but with "grouping" or "classifying," which is in turn mediated by perception. "The production of order," he claims, "is the object of metaphysics,"²⁰⁴ and "order is unity in multiplicity."²⁰⁵ According to the anarchist Herbert Read, Proudhon et al. argue that the very idea of "reality" is "one of those conventions that change from age to age and are determined by the total way of life."²⁰⁶ Jesse Cohn writes:

This is a powerful transformation of Aristotle's insight that to "be" is, in an important sense, to have form and structure, to connect and coherent; it is directly informed by Kant's recognition of the role of the subject in giving form to its own experience; it also reflects the influence of Hegel's monistic claim that "the real is the rational and the rational real"; it anticipates Heidegger's description of the way in which perception of "things" is always a construction of these "things" through the intrinsically associative, generalizing, and categorizing power of words, so that "thinging gathers," and so that culture, as the ensemble of linguistic constructs, enables us to inhabit a *world* that is within but distinct from the *earth*.²⁰⁷

Whereas the philosophies of political modernity contend, each in their own ways, that there is a "real world" that can be apprehended faithfully through the mediation of reason and perception, the anarchists argue that "there is no single way, even no normal way, of representing the world we experience."²⁰⁸

In a similar vein, Bakunin writes that "the nature of everything in existence is to be born and perish, or rather to transform," and that "Nature is the sum of the actual changes which occur and reoccur among its parts . . . the universal, natural, necessary and real, but by no means predetermined, nor preconceived or planned combination of the infinite range of particular actions and reactions that all actually existing things exercise constantly upon one another."²⁰⁹

Apart from this Heraclitean flux, Bakunin insists, there is no "general idea" of nature, or rather that "the general idea is always an abstraction

and, for that very reason, is some sort of negation of real life.”²¹⁰ Human thought is only capable of investing the “relations” and “laws” underlying and immanent to these “continual transformations” (what Proudhon calls “the logic of things”), “but never their material, individual side, palpitating, so to speak, with reality and life, therefore fugitive and intangible.”²¹¹ All the while, he contends,

Man, like the rest of nature, is an entirely material being. The mind, the facility of thinking, of receiving and reflecting upon different external and internal sensations, of remembering them when they have passed and reproducing them by the imagination, of comparing and distinguishing them, of abstracting determinations common to them and thus creating general concepts, and finally of forming ideas by grouping and combining concepts according to different methods—intelligence, in a word, sole creator of our whole ideal world, is a property of the animal body and especially of the quite material organism of the brain.²¹²

The mistake of theologians and metaphysicians alike for Bakunin is that in “lifting [themselves] in thought above [themselves]” they achieve nothing but “the representation of perfect abstraction”—the “absolute nothingness” of God or Nature.²¹³ The same is true of science, which is useful as “the compass of life” but is folly when identified with life itself.²¹⁴ “Science creates nothing,” Bakunin writes, “it establishes and recognizes only the creations of life. And every time that scientific men, emerging from their abstract world, mingle with living creation in the real world, all that they propose or create is poor, ridiculously abstract, bloodless and lifeless, stillborn . . .”²¹⁵ Representation and abstraction—whether scientific, philosophical, or theological—claim to operate *sub specie aeternitatis*, to affect a transcendent, suprahistorical “God’s-eye view” of existence. But for Bakunin there is no such vantage because existence as such is defined by an “infinite range” of changes and movements that outstrip and overflow our attempts to understand them: “No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world. I cleave to no system. I am a true seeker.”²¹⁶ What remains are contingent, historically situated opinions that masquerade as “truth.”

Malatesta, like Bakunin, agrees that science is useful for purposes of “grouping and linking known facts” and “as a useful instrument for research [and] . . . the discovery and interpretation of new facts.”²¹⁷ He insists, however, that scientific theories are not “truth.”:

I do not believe in the infallibility of Science, neither in its ability to explain everything nor in its mission of regulating the conduct of Man . . . I only believe those things which can be proved; but I know full well that *proofs* are relative and can, and are in fact, continually superceded and cancelled out by other proved facts; and therefore I believe that doubt

should be the mental approach of all who aspire to get ever closer to the truth, or at least as much of truth that it is possible to establish.²¹⁸

Malatesta therefore rejects "*scientism* . . . the belief that science is everything and is capable of everything,"²¹⁹ but he maintains a scientific approach that accepts truths "only *provisionally, relatively*, always in the expectation of new truths which are more true than those so far discovered."²²⁰ By "more true," Malatesta obviously means something like "more useful" or "more productive" or "more fruitful," which places him squarely in the pragmatist camp.

Even Kropotkin, who, unlike the others we have discussed, was actually trained as a scientist, denies that science provides a transcendent and universal *archē*:

After having fixed all their attention on the sun and the large planets, astronomers are beginning to study now the infinitely small ones that people the universe. And they discover that the interplanetary and interstellar spaces are people and crossed in all imaginable directions by little swarms of matter, invisible, infinitely small when taken separately, but all-powerful in their numbers. It is to these infinitely tiny bodies . . . that today astronomers look for an explanation of our solar system, the movements that animate its parts, and the harmony of their whole . . . Thus the center, the origin of force, formerly transferred from the earth to the sun, turns out to be scattered and disseminated. It is every and nowhere . . . [T]he harmony of the stellar movements is harmony only because it is an adaptation, a resultant of all these numberless movements uniting, completing, equilibrating one another. The whole aspect of the universe changes with this conception. The idea of force governing the world, pre-established law, pre-established harmony, disappears to make room for the harmony that Fourier had caught a glimpse of: the one which results from the disorderly and incoherent movements of numberless hosts of matter, each of which goes its own way.²²¹

The totalizing representation of science, which seeks to impose stable identities, is not possible in a universe without things-in-themselves, a universe where everything is in flux, where "*tout devient et rien n'est*." For the anarchists, each particular thing is "defined" solely in virtue of its relations to, and differences from, all other things. The universe, as Bakunin says, is simply an organic system of differential relations. It is a turning world without a still point.

"The end of morals," Kropotkin insists, "cannot be 'transcendental,' as the idealists desire it to be: it must be real. We must find moral satisfaction *in life* and not some form of extra-vital condition."²²² By "extra-vital conditions," he means the various "metaphysical conceptions of a Universal Spirit, or of

a Creative Force in Nature, the Incarnation of the Idea, Nature's Goal, the Aim of Existence, the Unknowable, Mankind (conceived as having a separate spiritual existence), and so on" which would situate value in an abstract and transcendent locus exterior to life. In their place, as Jesse Cohn points out, Kropotkin and other anarchists emphasize life—that is, the immanent and immediate processes of growth, development, and change.²²³ In the place of instrumentality and rationality, of stability and order, they emphasize movement, becoming, fertility, creativity, gratuity, excession, energy, and proliferation. Thus Kropotkin exclaims:

The condition of the maintenance of life is its expansion. "The plant cannot prevent itself from flowering. Sometimes to flower means to die. Never mind, the sap mounts all the same," concludes the young anarchist philosopher. It is the same with the human being when he is full of force and energy. Force accumulates in him. He expands his life. He gives without calculation, otherwise he could not live. If he must die like the flower when it blooms, never mind. The sap rises, if sap there be.²²⁴

This profound emphasis on life pervades anarchist thought. To this extent, anarchist philosophies are first and foremost philosophies of immanence and of vitality. If all thought, all action, all desires emerge within and only within life, the same must be true of our analyses. For Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and many others, *Lebenleugnung* is the most basic error, the most dangerous enemy of human thought.

The specter of Nietzsche

At this point, the reader will no doubt recognize a strong affinity between the positions I have attributed to the anarchists and those of Nietzsche. This might seem odd for a number of reasons. First, it is well known that Nietzsche reserved some of his most venomous opprobrium for anarchists, whom he referred to as "dogs" and regarded as the epitome of "herd-animal morality."²²⁵ The anarchists and socialists, Nietzsche thought, sought to undermine "the prosperity of a single stronger species of man" in favor of elevating "mankind in the mass," and to this extent were guilty of "modern *misarchism* (to coin an ugly word for an ugly thing)."²²⁶ Interestingly, there is no evidence that Nietzsche read the works of Proudhon, Bakunin, or any other anarchist thinkers. Rather, his familiarity with anarchism and other revolutionary movements came chiefly from the newspapers. (Alarmist accounts of the French Commune, for example, made the "hypersensitive" young Nietzsche "seriously upset" and left him "absolutely shattered"²²⁷). In like fashion, Nietzsche was all but unknown to the anarchists of the nineteenth century. It was not until the early twentieth century that certain

key members of the anarchist movement began to take notice of and appreciate him. As Daniel Colson notes, “Pelloutier, one of the founders of the *Bourses du Travail* movement, certainly read [Nietzsche] during his more individualist phase. Libertad, and the ‘Libertarian Discussion Groups’ he founded in 1902, referred to Stirner as well as Nietzsche.”²²⁸ To this list we can add Georges Palante,²²⁹ Louis Guilloux,²³⁰ Guy Aldred,²³¹ Max Baginski, Hippolyte Havel, and Emma Goldman—who delivered at least twenty-five public lectures on Nietzsche.²³²

There is no doubt that Nietzsche’s critique of transcendence, of abstract concepts “thought of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle between power-complexes but as a means of preventing all struggle in general,”²³³ of stable identities that preclude the creation of “human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves,”²³⁴ is remarkably similar to the anarchist critique described above. More importantly and interestingly, those aspects of the anarchist critique that are paralleled in Nietzsche appear in works that predate *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), such as Proudhon’s *On the Creation of Order in Humanity* (1843). Furthermore, most of Bakunin’s writings and Kropotkin’s early works were published in the 1870s during the first phase of Nietzsche’s career. As we already noted, there is no evidence that Nietzsche himself was familiar with these works, or, for that matter, that Bakunin and the younger Kropotkin were familiar with Nietzsche.

None of this is to diminish the importance and intrepidity of Nietzsche’s philosophy. The point is merely that several key Nietzschean insights, or at least close approximations of them, seem to have been discovered independently by the anarchists (much as the calculus, for example, was discovered independently by both Newton and Leibniz). This suggests, notwithstanding Habermas’s claims to the contrary, that Nietzsche was not the only thinker, nor even necessarily the first, to provide a “turning point” or “entry” into postmodernity.²³⁵ It is more accurate, I think, to say that Nietzsche has emerged historically as the chief spokesperson for a mode of thought that developed in scattershot, piecemeal fashion throughout the nineteenth century. The preponderance of ideas constituting this mode of thought, however, is found not in the *oeuvre* of a single author, but in the countless tracts, pamphlets, newspapers, and monographs of the nineteenth-century anarchist movement. If this fact has gone unnoticed or unappreciated in twentieth-century scholarship, it is mostly a consequence of the obscurity of anarchist authors as well as the initial lack of any systematic collection of their writings. Thanks in large part to the proliferation of archives, anthologies, and reprints in the second half of the twentieth century, scholars are now in a much better position to recognize anarchism for what it is: namely, the first genuinely “postmodern” political philosophy.

Conclusion

The first part of this book established a framework within which to think about political philosophy in general and political modernity in particular. I have argued that politics is best understood as a kind of “social physics”—that is, as a description of the various ways that humans beings affect each other and are affected in turn by and through sociopolitical power. So, too, I have argued that political philosophy is produced from within the arena of social-physical conflict and to this extent is an inexorably self-reflexive phenomenon. However, the characteristic strategy of much Western political philosophy has been to reduce social physics to a foundational problematic which political philosophy attempts to “solve.” It does this, moreover, by adopting an allegedly impartial and objective point of view—external to social-political conflict itself—whence it imposes an all-encompassing “archic” order upon the chaos of social-physics. By convention the preferred “archic” principle throughout most of Western history has been the state, and this doesn’t really change with the advent of modernity.

What changes, as we have seen, is the conceptualization of the state’s relations to the individual and to civil society (by liberals and socialists, respectively), which is in turn a result of a host of characteristically “modern” developments in philosophy, science, economics, political theory, and so forth. I am not alone in suggesting that the foundational, “archic” concept of political modernity is representation, nor that the anarchists distinguish themselves from liberals and socialists precisely in their rejection of representation. I am going one step further; I am suggesting that the anarchists’ rejection of political modernity is a kind of *postmodernism*—perhaps the first of its kind.

The evidence in this chapter makes it clear that, contrary to popular belief, the anarchists shared little in common with their liberal and socialist peers. In rejecting representation, they also rejected both universalism and relativism in ethics, rationalism and scientism in epistemology, idealism and (vulgar) materialism in metaphysics, individualism and statism in politics. Most everything that liberalism and socialism accept—everything that can be called “politically modern”—the anarchists either repudiate outright or finesse into something entirely novel. The result is a political theory that is neither wholly modern nor wholly premodern. In the last chapter, I shall make a case for calling it postmodern.