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INTRODUCTION

“The anarchist,” wrote Theodore Roosevelt, “is the enemy of humanity, the enemy of all mankind, and his is a deeper degree of criminality than any other.”¹ From 1880 to 1920 in the United States, these “criminals,” whose “perverted instincts [led them] to prefer confusion and chaos to the most beneficent form of social order,”² were mercilessly vilified by the press, repeatedly beaten and imprisoned by the police, and, in several notorious instances, deported and executed by the federal government. In France an estimated 10,000 of them were butchered when the Paris Commune fell in 1871. In Russia under the Czars, thousands were rounded up by the Okhrana and shot like dogs in the streets; under the Soviets, thousands more were captured by the Cheka and worked to death in Siberian mines. In Spain untold numbers were routinely incarcerated and massacred without cause, first by Primo de Rivera and later by Generalissimo Franco. Who were these people and what did they do to merit such brutal treatment?

As it turns out, most of these so-called enemies of mankind were members of already oppressed and marginalized groups—immigrants, exiles, and refugees; vagrants, beggars, and wanderers; artists, dissidents, and freethinkers; women, homosexuals, Jews, and ethnic minorities—whose sole crime was that of criticizing “the most beneficent form of social order” in both word and deed. They published newspapers and pamphlets; organized unions and cooperatives; initiated strikes, marches, and demonstrations; preached “the Idea” from street corners and soapboxes—in short, struggled militantly against a system that, far from being beneficent, appeared in their view fundamentally opposed to the goals of freedom, equality, and peace. In the United States, anarchists and other socialists campaigned for and helped achieve the eight-hour working day, the abolition of child labor, the enactment of safety regulations in the workplace, the minimum wage, and the right to unionize, among other things. They vigorously condemned America’s incursions into Cuba and the Philippines, its attempts to overthrow the Bolsheviks in Russia, and its involvement in the First World War. They protested against racial and ethnic discrimination, championed the rights of women, and promoted tolerance for gays and lesbians.

Unfortunately a very tiny handful of them, both in the United States and abroad, resorted to murder, assassination, and terrorism in pursuit of such

ends. Then, as now, the bad apples not only spoil the bunch but inevitably receive the most attention as well. As a result, the anarchist of popular imagination has long been, and continues to be, a fanatic, an extremist, a terrorist. Americans, already notorious for our historical amnesia, are unlikely to know or even learn about Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, or Lucy Parsons. On the rare occasions that we are able to recognize and remember a “famous anarchist,” it is most likely Leon Czolgosz, the madman who assassinated President William McKinley. The philosophy of anarchism, in turn, continues to be associated with violence, with terror, with “confusion and chaos.”

It goes without saying that some people who have been identified, or who have identified themselves, as anarchists were indeed depraved lunatics or malicious hoodlums who gloried in the creation of chaos for the sake of chaos. Although historians recognize that such individuals constituted a small minority within the broader anarchist movement, this has not prevented them from consigning that movement to marginalia and footnotes, if not ignoring it altogether, and continuing to play up and sensationalize its most fanatical elements. Philosophers and political scientists, meanwhile, have paid scant attention to anarchism as a political theory. Within the so-called Anglo-American tradition, the precious few who have studied, or attempted to study, anarchism have consistently misinterpreted and misunderstood it.

From a purely academic vantage, the attempt to accurately understand and correctly interpret philosophical theories is generally considered a worthwhile pursuit, even when the theories in question are viewed as obscure, insignificant, or of little interest to anyone save the pure historian—and it is safe to assume that this is how many if not most Anglo-American political philosophers regard the study of anarchism. As the anthropologist David Graeber points out, however, anarchist political philosophy “is veritably exploding right now [and] anarchist or anarchist-inspired movements are growing everywhere; traditional anarchist principles—autonomy, voluntary association, self-organization, mutual aid, direct democracy—have gone from the basis for organizing within the globalization movement, to playing the same role in radical movements of all kinds everywhere.”³ Why, then, has anarchism continued to be mostly ignored within academia and especially in Anglo-American philosophy? Although there are no easy answers to these questions, one tentative answer concerns the fundamentally conservative nature of Anglo-American philosophy. As the late David Mitrany noted, “most political philosophers in the past few generations have what the psychoanalysts might call a ‘state fixation.’”⁴ Liberalism is not just one theory—albeit the dominant one—among many theories, but instead has become the *de facto* framework within which all political theorizing is carried out. In such a context, the idea of abolishing the state, let alone capitalism, is at best hopelessly utopian and at worst patently absurd.

Ironically, mainstream Anglo-American philosophy (or what is often referred to as “analytical” philosophy) is more than a little marginalized within the American academy, having largely cut itself off from other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The same is not true of various strands of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy (e.g., phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, and poststructuralism), which have tended to be interdisciplinary in orientation, drawing freely upon research in other academic fields as well as literature, visual art, cinema, and music. Over the last forty years, a wide range of scholars (literary theorists, art historians, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc.) have “returned the favor,” as it were, by drawing upon the insights of European philosophy in their own scholarly endeavors. In consequence, many American academics have implicitly or explicitly inherited the Marxist political orientation that colors much European philosophy. As Graeber notes, although “there are thousands of academic Marxists of one sort or another . . . most [of them] seem to have only the vaguest idea what anarchism is about or else dismiss it with the crudest stereotypes.”⁵

The marginal status of anarchism in the academy is therefore a partial consequence of entrenched liberalism, on the one hand, and entrenched Marxism, on the other. This is an exceedingly odd state of affairs for at least two reasons: first, much of the European theory that has become a mainstay of American humanities departments has actually disavowed Marxism to greater or lesser extent; and second, Marxism has ceased to be a powerful or even relevant force within most contemporary radical movements. Regarding the second point, Graeber notes that “anarchism has by now largely taken the place [in contemporary social movements] that Marxism had in the social movements of the 60s: even those who do not consider themselves anarchists feel they have to define themselves in relation to it, and draw on its ideas.”⁶ As for the first point, even those academics who recognize that traditional Marxism has been surpassed continue to frame their analyses in largely Marxist terms (hence the use of “post-Marxism,” “neo-Trotskyism,” and similar descriptors).

One of the broadest goals of this book is to pull academia out from behind the curve. If it is indeed true that the major radical movements of the day are not just “post-Marxist” but anarchist in orientation—and this is scarcely in dispute—then scholars who desire to analyze and understand these movements can no longer afford to overlook anarchism. It is not enough, moreover, to consider anarchism in its current theoretical and practical manifestations. The anarchism of today is part of a tradition that stretches back to the early nineteenth century and even earlier in the strictest sense. In order to understand contemporary anarchistic movements such as Zapatismo, one must look to their historical precursors. This requires, in turn, that one situates anarchism in its proper historical and intellectual context.

All too often, historians have portrayed anarchism as a minor sect within the larger socialist movement. Socialism, in turn, has been identified as one of the two major political ideologies of the modern era, the other being liberalism. This would seem to imply that anarchism is just one more component of political modernity, albeit a small and largely insignificant one. However, if we construe modernity as more or less coextensive with Enlightenment thought and praxis—that is, as a set of distinctive movements, practices, and institutions underwritten by certain distinctive ideas and modes of thought associated with the Enlightenment—then anarchism is not, nor has it ever been, a component of modernity. On the contrary, anarchism has from the beginning defined itself against modernity—not by stealing Romantic glances at a premodern past, but by looking for something new, something that stands apart from, exists outside of, or altogether moves beyond, modernity. To this extent it is rightfully termed the first “postmodern” philosophical and political movement.

As far as I am aware no one has ever made such a claim about anarchism. In fact, almost everyone who has attempted to trace the origins of “postmodern” thinking to the nineteenth century has invariably associated them with Nietzsche. Such associations are not entirely inaccurate. After all, there is no doubt that Nietzsche was a systematic critic of modernity, a man who subjected every aspect of modernity, including its most basic theoretical foundations, to rigorous and devastating critique. Many would also argue that Nietzsche was the most important and influential critic of modernity. He was not, however, the *first*. As we shall see, that credit belongs to Proudhon and other key thinkers in nineteenth-century anarchism, whose critique of modernity is remarkably similar to Nietzsche’s even though it developed somewhat earlier.

The “postmodern” impulse that I associate with Nietzsche and the anarchists appeared alongside and coexisted with the modern—not as an outgrowth, a supplement, or a replacement, but as a kind of nagging opposition: a gadfly. Throughout the nineteenth century and since, it has manifested itself in every thought—whether from Nietzsche or Proudhon, Derrida or Foucault—that has not only questioned the foundations of modernity but has attempted to *think otherwise*. The problem, of course, is that every practical expression of this thought, every attempt to translate it into action, has thus far ended in failure—sometimes owing to the kind of naked aggression mentioned earlier, other times owing to more subtle strategies of appropriation and appeasement. In any case, the “postmodern” has as yet failed to be anything other than an impulse, an attitude, an abstraction. More damningly, it has tended to be understood chiefly, if not solely, as something negative, a negation of the modern. The unifying feature of everything that has been called “postmodern”—from art to architecture to philosophy—is opposition to Enlightenment in both its theoretical and practical expressions. If there is anything positive to be

found in “postmodernism,” it has typically been ignored or overlooked or dismissed as cynical. The result, not surprisingly, is that the postmodern impulse is frequently viewed as a *nihilistic* impulse, a will to negate, a will to nothingness. At its best it is clever and “playful”; it parodies or plays with the failures of modernity from within modernity, a space that it cannot, and knows it cannot, escape. At worst it is the most solemn pessimism imaginable, one that would suggest that we are always and already slouching toward another Auschwitz, or that Auschwitz is a locus that we are doomed to occupy forever.

Nowhere is this problem more evident than in what has been called “postmodern” political philosophy. We are told repeatedly that Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard have done nothing save elevate the Nietzschean critique of modernity to a critical mass or a point of no return. We are told that they have not bothered formulating alternatives to modernity because they do not believe any such alternatives exist; that in attempting to think otherwise they have discovered that there is no otherwise to be thought. In recent years a number of philosophers have begun to challenge such claims. They have done so, moreover, by looking to what so many of their peers have ignored and continue to ignore: namely, the tradition of anarchism. Their investigations purport to reveal that postmodern political philosophy is not a nihilism but an *anarchism*, one which takes certain important cues from older anarchist traditions but ultimately transforms them into something altogether new. This “something new” is nothing other than the long-lost positive content of postmodern philosophy.

As I have already suggested, anarchism cannot be regarded as a fundamentally modern political philosophy that just happens to contain bits and pieces of postmodernity. Unfortunately, this is how many “postanarchists” have tended to characterize it. If we look hard enough, they claim, we will find those same bits and pieces scattered about the writings of Foucault and Deleuze. When we put them together, moreover, they end up constituting the moral and political framework of a postmodernism-which-is-an-anarchism. Unlike “classical anarchism”—a term which is almost always used pejoratively—this new “postmodern anarchism” or “poststructuralist anarchism” or “postanarchism” does not rely on conceptions of universal rationality, human nature, or any of the other paradigmatically “modern” illusions which Deleuze et al. have so skillfully and summarily dismissed.

Although I heartily welcome this renewed interest in, and enthusiasm about, anarchist political philosophy, I do not believe it has achieved much for anarchism *or* postmodernism. By and large, this is because much of what has been written about the connections between them leaves much to be desired. Every major writer on the subject has tended to treat anarchism as something akin to Marxism—that is, as a uniform and comprehensive system of thought devised by a handful of “canonical” thinkers, the doctrines of which are shared in common by all anarchists. But no one who engages

the history of anarchism with a modicum of rigor or precision can think of it in this way. There is no such thing as “classical anarchism.” In fact, there is no such thing as “Anarchism” (with a capital A)—only a diverse array of theories and practices developed by a diverse array of individuals who, despite their myriad differences, share certain basic commitments in common. It is a mistake to privilege the ideas of any one of these individuals except for the sake of scholarly expedience (some of them wrote more than others, after all). Likewise, it is a mistake to assume that Bakunin’s philosophy, say, is fundamentally the same as Kropotkin’s philosophy (it’s not!).

These same writers have attributed numerous ideas to the so-called classical anarchists that they simply do not hold. It is not true, for example, that Kropotkin believed in a fundamentally altruistic or cooperative human “essence” or that Bakunin believed that all power *as such* is repressive. Nowhere do the anarchists make such claims; in fact, they repeatedly deny them. But this doesn’t seem particularly important to the postanarchists. They have produced a helpful caricature of anarchism, a straw man that has been used again and again to play up the alleged novelty of postmodernism—the idea that postmodernism has somehow found in anarchism a “diamond in the rough,” that it has scrubbed and scoured away the rough parts so that only the diamond remains; that this diamond, when placed in a suitably postmodern setting, will chase away the shadows of nihilism.

To be clear, I agree wholeheartedly that certain “postmodern” philosophers—especially Deleuze and Foucault—articulate a political philosophy that is anarchistic in nature. I am even willing to agree that these philosophers expand, elaborate, and to some degree improve upon earlier forms of anarchism in various important ways. What I take issue with, first of all, is the idea that “postmodernist” political philosophy represents an altogether new form of anarchism. In fact, all of the features that allegedly characterize that philosophy were already present to greater or lesser extent in classical anarchism more than a century before Deleuze, Foucault et al. began writing. It is not just that postmodernism is an anarchism, therefore, but that *classical anarchism is arguably the first political postmodernism*. Second of all, I find fault with the interpretive strategy that certain writers have used to draw out connections between postmodernism and classical anarchism—chief among them, the attempt to show that they both espouse common normative principles. In fact, I believe that anarchists and poststructuralists alike categorically reject normativity. The upshot is that these writers often misinterpret poststructuralism at least as badly as they do classical anarchism.

There is no doubt that anarchism is a timely subject, one that is undergoing an important and influential resurgence. Other scholars have realized this, and I applaud them for bringing the long-ignored theoretical tradition of anarchism the attention it deserves. At the same time, I cannot help but feel

that their efforts, however well intentioned, have misrepresented anarchist theory. Prejudiced scholars have long assumed that there is no such thing as an “anarchist theoretical tradition” or that, if there is, it is deeply fragmented and incoherent. Postanarchist analysis of classical anarchist theory—the theory which historically precedes postanarchism and which postanarchism is supposed to supersede—has only corroborated such assumptions. It has portrayed classical anarchism as a theory at odds with itself, a theory that equivocates and contradicts itself, that is hopelessly muddled and inconsistent.

To help academia and the broader world understand anarchism in the present—how it connects with newer philosophical trends, why it is such a powerful force in contemporary social and political movements, and so forth—we must clear away the detritus of postanarchism and start from the very beginning. My foremost claim is that anarchism presents a vision of political postmodernity, one that is expressed immanently in both “classical” and “poststructuralist” modes. To defend this claim, however, I must start by defining the terms through which it will be articulated: the political; the meaning and purpose of political philosophy; and the nature of “political modernity” and the political philosophy that underlies it. Only then will I be in a position to define anarchism and, more importantly, to demonstrate why it is a vision of political postmodernity. From there, my goal is to explain whether, how, and to what extent this originary vision can be transformed by the insights of more recent philosophy. As such, this book will take a threefold approach.

In the first and second chapters, I analyze the category of “the political” and its relation to philosophy. In the second and third chapters, I explore the nature of political modernity in terms of its major theoretical traditions—namely, liberalism and socialism. These traditions are analyzed along four conceptual trajectories: descriptive theory, normative theory, political theory, and economic theory.⁷ In the fifth chapter, I provide a historical, exegetical, and critical examination of the anarchist political tradition in order to illustrate its connections to, and deviations from, both modern and postmodern political philosophy. In the sixth and final chapter, I argue that contemporary postmodern political philosophy—both in its negative and positive dimensions—*should* be understood as an expansion of or elaboration upon the anarchist tradition, but not in the way that philosophers such as May, Newman, and Call have suggested. On the contrary, I contend that anarchism is and always has been a kind of postmodernism in its own right.

The starting point of this book is a brief analysis of the category of “the political” and its concomitant relation to philosophy. In addition to discussing various classical approaches to these topics, I will devote special attention to Todd May’s conception of the political and his highly influential threefold schematization of political philosophy. As I will argue, May’s attempt to situate

the political in the interstice between facts and norms, though interesting in many ways, runs afoul his main project (viz., to unearth and demystify the positive content of postmodern political philosophy). In the first place, the distinction between facts and norms is clearly a product of modern rather than postmodern political discourse, and this for a number of reasons. To name just one, this distinction is founded on a conception of transcendental subjectivity rather than exterior forces, which produce, condition, affect, or otherwise underlie subjectivity, the latter being one of postmodernism's most central and characteristic preoccupations. In the second place, May's approach does not provide a means by which to distinguish "the political" from other categories that exist between *is* and *ought* (for example, practical reasoning more generally)—a crucial distinction that May very clearly wants to preserve.

So, too, May's threefold schematization of political philosophy (formal, strategic, and tactical) fails to provide sufficiently clear distinctions among competing theoretical approaches. He is simply wrong, for example, to suggest that liberalism is a purely formal political philosophy, or that Marxism is a purely strategic political philosophy. In point of fact, such theories can and often do contain a mixture of formal, strategic, *and* tactical components. We must therefore look elsewhere for a means by which to distinguish them from each other. As I shall argue, the category of "the political" should be analyzed genealogically rather than formally. In other words, it ought not to be analyzed in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions so much as the conditions of possibility that give rise to it as a distinct conceptual category in the first place. I contend that politics is a social physics—a *reciprocal affectivity among power relations*. "The political," by extension, is a purely *descriptive* category that refers to (a) the various ways in which power relations affect and are affected by other power relations, (b) the conditions of possibility for said affectivity, and (c) the conditions of possibility for social formations which power relations produce. Unlike May, therefore, I do not presuppose any distinction between facts and norms in my definition of the political because I do not presuppose any entities that are already "subject" to norms.

The concept of normativity only becomes germane once we consider the relation between politics and philosophy. May, not to speak of many of his precursors, regards political philosophy as a negotiation between the descriptive (i.e., the sociophysical) and the prescriptive (i.e., the ethiconormative). Its purpose is to "apply" the latter, which is philosophical, to the former, which is scientific or empirical, in order to affect a reconciliation between them. On my view, however, the object of political philosophy isn't the political itself so much as the aforesaid *relation* between politics and philosophy. By "philosophy," moreover, I am not referring solely or even principally to ethics, but to the entire spectrum of philosophical analysis. As will become clear, my own approach to "philosophical analysis" is problematic rather

than theorematism. Following Deleuze and his peers, I understand philosophy in terms of the creation of concepts, which creation itself is undertaken in order to expose—not necessarily to “solve”—problems. According to this view, the purpose of political philosophy is to expound problems that emerge in the relation between the sociophysical and the political theories we invent to describe and/or explain it. This process, in turn, may involve creating new concepts that describe the nature and limits of said problems.

Having clarified my own approach to political philosophy generally, my aim in Chapters 3 and 4 is to provide a historical, exegetical, and critical overview of political modernity. As I have already noted, I take “modernity” to refer to various concrete formations that correspond to abstract or intellectual formations (viz., of the Enlightenment). My discussion of modern political philosophy therefore revolves around the relation between political modernity and the philosophical ideas that simultaneously affect and are affected by political modernity. Particular attention is paid to the liberal tradition (in both its classical and modern forms) and the socialist tradition, both of which are analyzed along four conceptual trajectories. Ultimately I conclude that the politicophilosophical “core” of modernity is *representation*—the generic practice of dictating to people who they are, what they should want, and so forth.

Chapter 5 discusses classical anarchism. Although anarchist political philosophy is by no means a unified movement—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, and so forth—all “anarchisms” are properly so called by virtue of certain distinct ideas, practices, and commitments. One of the chief questions I seek to answer in this chapter is what such ideas and practices might be, which in turn requires a detailed historical, exegetical, and critical analysis of key thinkers and movements within the anarchist tradition. Rather than argue, as May and others have done, that postmodernism is a kind of anarchism, I instead contend that *anarchism as such is and always has been a kind of postmodernism*. Among other things, such an argument yields a much fuller justification for interpreting the positive content of postmodern political philosophy through the lens of anarchism. More importantly, it provides the initial ingredients for a theory of political postmodernity.

My discussion of postmodern political philosophy proceeds in a similar but distinct fashion. Here I initially address how various “postmodern” thinkers—chiefly Deleuze and Foucault—have problematized and criticized modern political theories and concepts. In other words, I begin by way of *via negativa*, calling attention to the critical or oppositional side of postmodern political philosophy in order both to distinguish it from modern political philosophy and to motivate subsequent analysis of its positive content vis-à-vis an exploration of its connections with classical anarchism. Against the

postanarchists, I argue that the positive content of Deleuzean/Foucauldian political philosophy both produces and is produced by the same problems that constitute anarchism as discussed in the previous section. One of the most crucial implications of this argument is that anarchism, far from being a “solution” to said problems, is in fact presupposed by them. This is because the “postmodern” reading of anarchism offered in Chapter 3 reformulates anarchism as a problem or a precondition for problems rather than a principle. Instead of prescribing opposition to coercive authority anarchism calls attention to the problems that generate both descriptive and normative political theories—chief among them, the problem of representation. The political philosophies of Deleuze and Foucault are properly termed “anarchistic” largely because they attend to related if not altogether identical problems.

The point, however, isn’t merely to reiterate Deleuzean/Foucaultian criticisms of reactive social formations such as the state and capitalism. Rather, it is to show how Deleuze and Foucault lay an anarchistic groundwork for *thinking otherwise*—that is, for imagining a political theory and praxis that lies outside the framework of modern political philosophy. As I will argue, the main point of intersection between classical anarchism and postmodernism is a general critique of representation, both in its epistemic and political manifestations. This, in turn, requires a discussion of political normativity—a method for describing political relationships and a set of criteria by which to judge or evaluate them. Particular attention is paid to what I call “traditional normativity”—a classical liberal concept which subsumes human behavior under abstract, universal, and transcendent principles or laws (e.g., Kant’s categorical imperative, Bentham’s principle of utility, etc.). Some thinkers, most notably Paul Patton and Todd May, have attempted to situate Deleuzean normativity within this paradigm. May, for example, tries to found Deleuze’s political philosophy on a pair of normative principles that, he thinks, are intimated below the surface of Deleuze’s writings. As I will show, although he is correct to point out that Deleuze “promotes” ways of thinking and acting that affirm life, this promotion need not—indeed, cannot—be cashed out in terms of traditional normativity. Instead, I briefly explore an alternative reading of Deleuze on normativity, one that relies on the concept of “absolute deterritorialization,” or what I call “pragmatic norms.”

Ultimately, however, I argue that anarchism replaces normativity with an ethics or axiology based on the value of life (understood as the process by which an individual or group creates itself, transforms itself, etc.). For Deleuze and Foucault, no less than the anarchists, ethics presupposes the importance of experimenting, escaping along lines of flight, opening possibilities, and pursuing the new. More importantly, ethics would be conceptually prior to normativity if normativity is maintained—that is, it would function as a ground or guiding light for the creation and adoption

of norms. In the end I suggest that Deleuze and Foucault can adopt an ethics or axiology of life without forsaking the pivotal concept of immanence. Furthermore, I emphasize the extent to which such an ethics, in virtue of being nonteleological and antiutopian in orientation, precludes absolute moral judgment as well as practical speculation about the future. For anarchists, revolution is an ongoing process rather than a singular event. Thus I focus on how traditional anarchist strategies and practices—for example, an emphasis on local rather than global struggles; the discourse of diffuse forces rather than of class/modes of production; the principles of voluntary association, mutual aid, solidarity, direct action; and the creation of new institutions rather than single-minded opposition to existing institutions—is reinforced by postmodern political philosophy.

The overarching point of this book is to offer a preliminary revision of “classical anarchism” and, by extension, of its place in postmodern political discourse. Although many questions are left unanswered, my hope is that it not only provides a sturdy foundation for future investigations, but also a better understanding of the anarchist tradition in the here and now. As I suggested at the outset, such an understanding is desperately needed. In the “real world” of social and political struggle, anarchism has rolled steadily ahead, leaving academia largely behind. It is not just important but imperative that academics generally, and philosophers in particular, catch up with a movement that is “veritably exploding.” However, in order to understand why and how that movement is exploding, as well as where that explosion might lead, we must first achieve an accurate understanding of its origins and its history. It is to this task that I now turn.