

Anarchism and Poststructuralism

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Conventional anarchism relies too heavily upon categories that are politically and epistemologically suspect. These include scientific discourse, humanism and rationalist semiotics. As long as anarchists continue to employ this suspect thinking it is extremely unlikely that they will be able to develop a revolutionary theory or praxis that will provide meaningful challenges either to capitalism or the state apparatus that sanctions that economic system.

Lewis Call¹

There have been a number of attempts in recent years to achieve a meld of anarchism and poststructuralism. These attempts have been based on perceived similarities between the two bodies of theory, particularly with respect to the iconoclastic approach of anarchism to the state, authority and accepted norms, and its proposal, as an alternative to centralised power, of diffused networks of local empowerment. Such attempts have received added impetus from a desire to render anarchism more relevant to the current age. The traditional anarchism of nineteenth century origin is held to be an anachronism in the contemporary world, a hoary, theoretical remnant from the days when dreams of reason, revolution and progress could still be entertained and applauded. As Lewis Call comments;

It is becoming increasingly evident that anarchist politics cannot afford to remain within the modern world. The politics of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin – vibrant and meaningful, perhaps, to their nineteenth century audiences – have become dangerously inaccessible to late twentieth century readers.²

Thus, the argument runs, in a postmodern society, where ‘metanarratives’ such as anarchism are, as Jean-François Lyotard insisted, to be regarded with ‘incredulity’,³ anarchism has no purpose or immediacy unless it can be reworked to make it appropriate to the age. The tools for this job are to be found it seems, somewhat paradoxically in the very theories, of poststructuralism and postmodernism, that its critics have claimed reveal its deficiencies and irrelevance.

The shape of the argument is very similar to that pursued by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical*

¹ Lewis Call, “Anarchy in the Matrix: Postmodern Anarchism in the novels of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling”, *Anarchist Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, 1999, p.100.

² Ibid, p.99.

³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, (Minneapolis, Minn., University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Democratic Position,⁴ where they argue for a reworking of Marxism in the light of poststructuralism. The post-Marxist debate that this engendered was fast and furious. The parallel attempt at reformulation in anarchist theory has occurred later, and has occasioned nothing like the clamour. But it is worth noting in this context that the term ‘post-anarchism’ has been used.⁵

The present paper will survey a number of approaches taken to anarchism from a poststructuralist standpoint, and develop a critique of the various arguments presented. While there will not be as vehement a reaction to post-anarchism as that of Norman Geras⁶ or Ellen Meiksins Wood⁷ to post-Marxism, nevertheless it will be contended that, just as Geras and Meiksins Wood argued that a poststructuralist Marxism was simply not Marxism, so a poststructuralist anarchism has lost those essential characteristics that go to make up a distinctly anarchist view of the individual and society. Indeed, it ends not so much as a political theory as an extension of the poststructuralist critique. At the same time the historical or traditional form of anarchism will not be defended without reservation. The call for contemporary relevance has some force, and poststructuralist scepticism towards the legacy of the Enlightenment can be instructive in the framing of approaches that may address the issue.

It is necessary to begin with some definitional discussion, since both of our terms, anarchism and poststructuralism, can raise questions of interpretation, particularly in the way the latter term has been utilised by the proponents of poststructuralist anarchism.

It is, one hopes, unnecessary to distinguish anarchism from anarchy, but perhaps it should be emphasised that anarchism is very much about order, but an order, both personal and social that is to be achieved without authority. Nor, one hopes, will anarchism and violence be seen as indissolubly linked. Anarchist supporters of

⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Position*, (London, Verso, 1984).

⁵ Saul Newman, “War on the State: Stirner’s and Deleuze’s Anarchism”, *Anarchist Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, 2001, P.161.

⁶ Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances*, (London, Verso, 1990).

⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New “True” Socialism*, (London, Verso, 1985).

violent revolution, like Michael Bakunin, were by no means unique. The necessity of violent revolution as a catalyst for social change was a commonplace among radical thinkers and activists of the nineteenth century. It is unfortunately true that anarchism gave rise to the first modern terrorists, with the movement of *le propaganda par le fait* in the 1880s. Indeed, the figure of the caped, moustachioed anarchist with the smoking bomb has cast a long shadow over the public perception of anarchism that still persists today. But it should also be remembered that both Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi, perhaps the two most influential theorists of pacifism, were also anarchists.

Anarchism is essentially about individual autonomy and community, a notion that implies if not complete, then a large measure of, equality. All anarchists are in agreement that true autonomy cannot be realised in the presence of centralised political power, that is the state. Where they differ is over how the community should be constructed. William Godwin believed in free production and distribution on an individual basis; the communist anarchists like Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman in something akin to the Marxist vision but without the proletarian state, where the rule would be, “From each according to their ability; to each according to their need”, although, as with Marx, they are a little hazy about how it would work in practice; Proudhon and his anarcho-syndicalist descendants believed in worker ownership and return to labour and so on. There are a considerable number of variants.

It is vital that the two key elements of anarchism, autonomy and community do not become separated. Often they are treated as if they are independent variables. But this is not the case. Anarchism is not about autonomy and community, but autonomy in community.⁸ It is the idea of community, of living with other human beings in a voluntary social order, that is vital both to the central concern of anarchism for equality, and to the notion of constructing one’s freedom in a cooperative interchange with others. Sometimes, as with liberalism, autonomy becomes the main focus. The result can be a variant, not of anarchism as portrayed here, but of its right-wing cousin, libertarianism. It is worth noting that libertarianism has produced a claimed

⁸ I have developed this argument elsewhere. See Paul Nursey-Bray, “Autonomy and Community: William Godwin and the Anarchist Project, *Anarchist Studies*, Vol.4, No.2, 1996.

form of anarchism in the so-called anarcho-capitalism of Murray Rothbard,⁹ a type of free market model, based on competitive individualism in the absence of the state and political authority.

Anarchism began in the 1790s with William Godwin and his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793.¹⁰ It developed alongside and as a development of the liberal tradition. Godwin, an ally and supporter of Thomas Paine, was, like Paine, a member of the English radical movement and an advocate of freedom and rights. However, he felt that Paine had not gone far enough in his assault on the privileges of monarchy and the entrenched aristocratic classes. Representative government and minimal interference in rights was not enough. An end to domination and the triumph of human freedom required the removal of all forms of government whatever their character. Godwin was only accorded his status in the anarchist tradition much later, by Kropotkin in fact, but the point of origin is important for our present purposes. It demonstrates very clearly that anarchism was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment. Godwin was an apostle of reason in the style of the *philosophes*, and a fervent supporter of reason and perfectability. Anarchism remained a tradition with its roots firmly embedded in Enlightenment thinking and thus in modernity.

Poststructuralism was born, of course, as a reaction to Structuralism, which in turn had developed in the early part of the second half of the twentieth century from the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure. Poststructuralism continued Structuralism's focus on language, but shifted the emphasis from structure to indeterminacy. Language as a symbolic order of signs, of signifiers, sets an arbitrary and yet impervious barrier, it was argued, to our apprehension of reality. It represented a major challenge to the epistemology of Enlightenment thinking. No basis for the old absolutes remains. It was Jacques Derrida, one of the two key thinkers of the movement together with Jacques Lacan, who best exemplifies the leading ideas. Attacking the idea of any logos, he denied the centrality of any idea or essence, be it God, reason of humanity. The human subject was dissolved into the semiological mix, and theoretical anti-humanism followed. As he famously

⁹ See his essay on anarcho-capitalism in J. Roland Pennock and John Chapman, (eds.), *Anarchism*, (New York, New York University Press, 1978), (*Nomos*: 19).

¹⁰ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969).

observed; “There is nothing outside the text”. In short, the subject is now seen as constituted by discourse. Derrida’s central idea of *différance*, with its implications of a constant slippage of meaning, coupled with the associated procedure of deconstruction, negates the idea of absolute or unitary truth, suggesting plurality and diversity as the inevitable consequence. The influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger are obvious and acknowledged. Lacan, of course, developed his unique reworking of Freud along similar lines, while Roland Barthes, under the influence of Derrida and Lacan, repented of his earlier structuralist errors.

The characteristic position of poststructuralism, then, is associated with the attack on the idea of an absolute or single truth, a consequent dismissal of any centre and the acceptance of plurality, a rejection of reason and humanism, a shift of focus away from the human subject as agent to the idea of discourse as constitutive of subjectivity, and, above all, a firm denial of representation. Postmodernism, insofar as we can make distinctions, adopted all of these philosophical positions and grafted on, in the hands of people like Jean Baudrillard, specific cultural concerns, such as loss of affectivity, pastiche, loss of historicity, simulation and hyperreality.

It is difficult to place Michel Foucault in all this, although he is a vital cog in the arguments of the proponents of poststructuralist anarchism. Foucault can, it is true, be broadly seen as a structuralist in his ‘archeological’ phase and as a poststructuralist in his ‘geneological’ phase. Yet, it is also true that Foucault, with some degree of asperity, explicitly denied being either a structuralist or a poststructuralist. Indeed, it can be argued that the sheer originality, diversity and breadth of Foucault’s work, which accounts for its widespread and pervasive influence, precludes any narrow categorisation. However, for the sake of the argument his designation as a poststructuralist by the proponents of poststructuralist anarchism will be accepted.

There is also a tendency on their part to elide any difference between poststructuralist theory and postmodern theory. While there is certainly a substantial overlap, and while it is true that postmodern theory incorporates the basic ideas of poststructuralism, nonetheless one could make a case for specific developments taking place that are normally seen as associated with postmodernism rather than

poststructuralism. For instance we can cite the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their emphasis on flux, or those of Jean Baudillard with his focus on simulation and hyperreality. But Todd May, in his *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*,¹¹ identifies, as his theorists of poststructuralism, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard, the latter also often identified with postmodernism. Saul Newman compares Deleuze with Stirner,¹² while Koch uses Stirner, Derrida and Lyotard.¹³ We are not seeking to be pedantic, merely to comment on the definitional difficulties, and to note the acceptance, at their face value, of the arguments presented.

Poststructuralism represented, if one is allowed the word, a fundamental challenge to the previously dominant positions of philosophy, most especially of political philosophy. In challenging the preconceptions of modernity poststructuralism was challenging the preconceptions of the Enlightenment tradition, reason, humanism, agency and progress. Poststructuralism, then, would seem at first sight to be completely antithetical to anarchism, a doctrine, as noted, that completely incorporated and expressed the fundamentals of Enlightenment thinking. Given this clear confrontation, it is obvious that the task of forging a form of poststructuralist anarchism is one that will prove taxing.

Poststructuralist Anarchism

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to develop a form of poststructuralist anarchism has been made by Todd May in his book *The Political Theory of Poststructuralist Anarchism*,¹⁴ and so this will occupy a substantial proportion of our attention. His starting point is the observation that anarchists, like poststructuralists, reject representation. “The state”, he says, “is the object of critique because it is the ultimate form of representation”,¹⁵ and further claims that the critique of

¹¹ Todd May, *The Political Theory of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, (University Park, Penn., University of Pennsylvania University Press,).

¹² Newman, op.cit.

¹³ Andrew M. Koch, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993 and “Max Stirner: The Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist”, *Anarchist Studies*, Vol.5, No.2, 1997.

¹⁴ May, op.cit.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.47.

representation in the anarchist tradition “runs deeper than just political representation...Representation, in the anarchist tradition, must be understood not merely in its political connotations but more widely as an attempt from people to make decisions about their lives”.¹⁶ This seems to be an accurate portrayal of the anarchist position, but whether this can be seen as equivalent to that of the poststructuralists is seriously open to question. Representation for the poststructuralists, if we may be allowed to generalise in the manner of our protagonists, indicates a procedure whereby human experience becomes represented as signs and produces an epistemologically closed system. The attack on representation, as Koch notes, “results in the conclusion that the communication of intended meaning is always inhibited because the meaning of the sign can never be clearly communicated”.¹⁷ It would seem to be drawing a very long bow to make a connection with the anarchist views on the subject, which have to do with autonomy and will rather than semiology.

Associated with this discussion of representation is May’s concern to show that the anarchist approach to power corresponds with that of poststructuralism. “The picture of power and struggle that emerges in the anarchist perspective”, he asserts, “is one of intersecting networks of power rather than of hierarchy”.¹⁸ Linkages are made with Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between ‘arborescent’, that is tree-like or hierarchical systems of power, and ‘rhizomatic’, which are grass-like diffused and spreading power networks.¹⁹ The argument is further developed with reference to Foucault. His account of the operation of power, his focus on how power is exercised rather than who exercises it, is hailed as essentially in line with an anarchist perspective. Referring to the four propositions that Foucault advances in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* may asserts that they “form the basis of what could be called and ‘anarchist’ view of power”.²⁰

Where traditional anarchists are at fault in May’s view is that their approach to power, in contradistinction to Foucault, is one that always treats it as suppressive, on

¹⁶ Ibid, p.48.

¹⁷ Koch, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism”, op.cit., p.337.

¹⁸ May,op.cit.,p.31

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁰ May, op.cit., p.72.

the basis that power relationships always suppress or deny the positive essence of human beings.

Power,...constitutes for the anarchists a suppressive force. The image of power with which anarchism operates is that of a weight, pressing down – and at times destroying – the actions, events and desires with which it comes into contact. This image is common not only to Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the nineteenth century anarchists generally, but to contemporary anarchists as well. It is an assumption about power that anarchism shares with liberal social theory, which sees power as a set of restraints-upon-action, prescribed primarily by the state and whose justice depends on the democratic status of the state.²¹

Before turning to how May believes this defect is to be remedied, which opens the way for poststructuralist anarchism, a number of comments on his treatment of power are needed. Firstly, it is surely unacceptable to extract either Deleuze and Guattari's or Foucault's approach from the body of their work. It produces comparisons that are, at best, facile. To discuss Foucault's ideas on power without situating it within the complexities of the power/knowledge relationship and in relation to discourse and discursive practice is not satisfactory. Secondly, while the depiction of the anarchist approach to power is correct in broad detail, it is deficient in detail. No distinction is made between power and authority or, crucially, between centralised power and community power.

Noting that Lyotard, Deleuze and Foucault all reject the view that power is a negative, repressive force, May argues that this is linked to a rejection of subjectivity and any notion of a human essence that is somehow to be liberated. Poststructuralist anarchism must, if it is to throw off the alleged negativities of its view of power, develop, in a like manner a theoretical anti-humanism. Thereby, the basis will emerge of a 'new anarchism'. "If poststructuralist political thought could be summed up in a single prescription", May asserts, "it would be that radical political theory, if it is to achieve anything must abandon humanism in all its forms".²²

This new anarchism retains the ideas of intersecting and irreducible local struggles, of a wariness about representation, of the political as investing the entire field of social relationships, and of the social as a network rather than a closed holism, a concentric field, or a hierarchy. Yet the new anarchism rejects the strategic basis, that for traditional anarchism had formed the

²¹ Ibid, p.61.

²² Ibid, p.75.

scaffolding of these ideas: it substitutes instead a perspective that is tactical “all the way down”.²³

Poststructuralist anarchism, on May’s account, puts in place of traditional anarchism’s focus on the individual subject and humanism an emphasis on the positivity and creativity of power, and “the idea that practices or groups of practices (rather than the subject or structure) are the proper unit of analysis”.²⁴ May has thus dispensed with some of the essential defining characteristics of anarchist political theory. Inevitably, having removed subjectivity, human agency must also disappear. History “is to be understood as a more or less contingent intersection of practices”, and thus “the effect of a single practice is not reducible to the goal of the actors engaging in that practice”.²⁵ The adoption of this poststructuralist position implies that a belief in reason and universal normative values has also been eschewed.

What remains of the original anarchist position? Very little it would seem. Without a human subject, without human agency in a world of contingency, without any notion of community, there can surely be no theoretical position corresponds to anarchism, old or new. The observations regarding the parallels that can be drawn between an anarchist approach to political power and that associated with poststructuralism, most particularly with Foucault, are not without interest or appeal, but they do not in themselves constitute political theory and, the addition to them of a number of characteristic poststructuralist positions does not provide them with any real ballast. What we are left with may be a variant of poststructuralism, but it is not a variant of anarchism. In his effort to create a poststructuralist anarchism May has deconstructed anarchism to the point of non-existence.

The question that is begged by all this is whether it is ever possible to erect a normative political theory, be it anarchism or any other, on a poststructuralist basis. Todd May is not insensitive to the difficulties involved. He rounds off his account by an attempt to construct an ethics of poststructuralism which, he hopes, will provide the necessary support for his poststructuralist anarchism.

²³ Ibid, p.85.

²⁴ Ibid, p.89.

²⁵ Ibid, p.85.

May frankly admits that this project is one that the very thinkers he is discussing would have wholeheartedly repudiated. Indeed, that single, but essential, fact substantially undermines the position that he wishes to establish. Nevertheless, let us briefly review his argument. May asserts that poststructuralism does possess a broad ethical commitment. He makes this claim firstly on the basis of the idea of resistance, and secondly on an alleged opposition to capitalism.

Resistance signifies, May feels, an important commitment to liberation, particularly in the work of Foucault. However he notes that Michael Walzer²⁶ and Peter Dews²⁷ both argue against the significance of resistance in Foucault as a concept of liberation on the basis that there is simply an endless network of power relations and that “power is primarily positive and productive”.²⁸ He concludes, somewhat defiantly, but correctly, that “if power is everywhere, then isn’t the result of all resistance just another set of power relationships?...And if there is no point to resisting the exercise of power, then poststructuralism as a *political* theory loses its point.”²⁹ While this is something that May, for obvious reasons, does not want to accept, one can only concur. It is surely a misreading of Foucault to suggest that his notion of resistance is intended as more than a negative charge that keeps the circuit of power in balance. Power relationships may shift, but overall remain in place.

May’s second point concerns the general anticapitalist stance of poststructuralist theory. This is not surprising given that most of the theorists began as Marxist and the general tenor of their theoretical approach is critical of all systems, capitalist or otherwise. But all of the theorists involved explicitly or implicitly rejected a Marxist position, a position, which, like anarchism, sits ill with their stated critical stance.

However, what constitutes May’s poststructuralist ethics? He develops two principles. The first principle that forms the alleged basis of poststructuralist ethics is

²⁶ Michael Walzer, “The Politics of Michel Foucault”, in David Cousins Hoy, (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), p.55.

²⁷ Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration : Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, (London, Verso, 1987), pp.161-166.

²⁸ May, *op.cit.*, p.122.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.123.

“that representing others to themselves - either in who they are or in what they want – ought as much as possible to be avoided”.³⁰ May notes that Deleuze praised Foucault “for being the one ‘to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others’”, and believes that “he is laying out a principle of behaviour that it would be unimaginable to assume he does not think ought to bind the behaviour of others.”³¹ The second principle he articulates is that “alternative practices, all things being equal, ought to be allowed to flourish and indeed be promoted”.³² It is difficult to see either of these as ethical statements. The first principle of anti-representation is generally stated not so much as an ethical principle as the obverse of the procedure of deconstruction. The second principle is more a description than anything else. It is what happens when you employ the principle of deconstruction.

The strongest point against the existence of a poststructuralist ethics is, however, the one noted earlier, that is the clear fact that poststructuralist theorists explicitly deny their connection with any ethic or normative theory. As noted May admits this freely. “by precluding all binding universal values”, he notes, “Foucault and Lyotard are also precluded from assessing any discourse or practice as oppressive or dominating”.³³ He further admits that “Deleuze is the most vehement in his rejection of traditional ethics”.³⁴ His biggest concession is with respect to Foucault. Throughout “his life”, he concedes, “Foucault avoided either making recommendations for actions or suggesting principles for deciding which actions should be promoted and which avoided”.³⁵

Having conceded so much ground it is somewhat surprising to find May continuing in the face of these demurrals. His position is, to say the least, audacious. The basis for poststructuralist ethics, he claims, is that “**despite themselves**, (my emphasis), Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard predicate much of their political work on several intertwined and not very controversial ethical principles”.³⁶ It is surely preferable to

³⁰ Ibid, p.130.

³¹ Ibid, p.131.

³² Ibid, p.133.

³³ Ibid, p.127

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, p.129.

³⁶ Ibid, p.130.

take them at their word and accept that no basis exist for normative theory exists, and that as a consequence, no basis for anarchism can be found.

The Stirner Connection

An indirect connection between anarchism and poststructuralism has been made through the ideas of Max Stirner by Andrew M. Koch in his articles, “Poststructuralism and the Epistemological basis of Anarchism” and “Max Stirner: The Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist?”³⁷, and by Saul Newman in his “War on the State: Stirner’s and Deleuze’s Anarchism”.³⁸ The general line of argument is that Max Stirner, identified as an anarchist in his emphasis on individual autonomy and his attack on the state in *The Ego and Its Own*,³⁹ also, in his attack on Enlightenment ideas, particularly in his dismissal of the idea of human essence, indeed of any ‘fixed idea’, which issues in an anti-humanism, anticipates the position of the poststructuralists. As Newman argues, “Stirner’s critique of the state anticipates the position of the poststructuralists”, and refers to the “ways in which their ant-essentialist, post-humanist anarchism transcends and, thus, reflects upon the limits of classical anarchism”.⁴⁰

It is true that many of Stirner’s preoccupations seem to anticipate the iconoclasm of poststructuralism, as did the ideas of his younger contemporary, Nietzsche, acknowledged by Foucault and others as an important influence. His attack on the idea of human essence in his critique of Ludwig Feuerbach certainly indicates a lot of common ground. But, even given that parallels can be drawn between Stirner’s ideas and that of poststructuralism, the case for poststructuralist anarchism remains to be made. Leaving that aside, however, there is also the question of Stirner’s status as an anarchist, which must be considered to be at best ambiguous, even if his considerable influence within the tradition is noted. Certainly, Stirner mounts a damning critique of the state, certainly, he extols a form of total autonomy identified with egoism but not excess. “I am my own”, he declared”, only when I am master of myself, instead

³⁷ Koch, op.cit.

³⁸ Newman, op.cit.S

³⁹ Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, (edited David Leopold), (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.148.

of being mastered by anything”.⁴¹ But his anti-humanism and rejection of any moral order in the face of ego makes this idea of autonomy very different from that espoused by Kropotkin or Malatesta for example. After all, Stirner does not hesitate to affirm that crime is acceptable if it is consistent with the code of egoism.

Most significantly there is no notion of community in Stirner; community is incompatible with ‘ownness’ because it binds us to obligations. The only social order he describes is what he calls a ‘union of egoists’. This is a purely instrumental association whose good is solely the advantage the individuals separately derive from the pursuit of their individual goals. There are no shared goals and the association is not valued for itself. What it most resembles, in fact is a *laissez-faire* market relationship. Stirner, if he can escape the frequent charge of nihilism would seem to have more in common with Libertarianism than with anarchism.

Anarchism Reconsidered

It would seem then that no satisfactory union of anarchism and poststructuralism is possible. An attempt to embrace the ideas of poststructuralism in any broad or general way must inevitably undermine those very concepts that lie at the heart of an anarchist view of the world, and, arguably, give it its appeal. Without humanism, without a human subject whose autonomy is vital, and without any notion of a community of interacting, equal social beings, anarchism ceases to be anarchism. The parallels that can be drawn between the two bodies of thought, in terms of power, the approach to the state and the like, are suggestive and interesting but nothing more. They do not make Foucault and anarchist, any more than they do any other poststructuralist thinker. Poststructuralism, as its own proponents concede, is not designed to be a basis for normative theory.

Is there nothing to be gained from this interchange? To answer in the negative would be foolhardy. It would be to suggest that anarchism can march into the twenty-first century without any recognition of the theoretical and practical crises that assail radical theory. The end of communism, while the end of a system that Western

⁴¹ Stirner, op.cit., p.153.

Marxists and anarchists alike reviled, nonetheless was a watershed. It represented an emphatic punctuation mark to the nineteenth century search for an alternative, ideal society, and accentuated the doubts about the utility and direction of radical theory. Lyotard's incredulity towards meta-narratives expressed the tenor of these doubts.

One does not have to accept *tout court* the poststructuralist critique, but it is hard to avoid the notion that many of the cherished notions of modernity, an unqualified belief in reason and progress above all, are ripe for review. It is also clear that the concerns of the allied tradition of postmodernism in terms of superficiality, plurality, simulation, hyperreality certainly bracket phenomena in the culture around us. These may well be the outward manifestations of what Fredric Jameson optimistically calls 'late' capitalism,⁴² but it does not remove their ability to perplex, confuse and mislead. As Jameson argues, in seeking to chart a path for contemporary Marxism, we need to develop new ways of mapping our social existence, what he calls 'cognitive mapping'. It would be foolish for anarchism to pay no heed to these developments, and to believe that it can continue with the traditional approaches inherited from the nineteenth century without some effort at review and reconsideration.

To retain the essentials of anarchism, the human subject, autonomy and community, we must retain the links with the Enlightenment, that is the modern, project. But the critique of poststructuralism can be used to good effect as a kind of sceptical review of the state of play, a form of healthy questioning. In a paradoxical way it could be seen as a continuation of the attack by the *philosophes* on the orthodoxies of their day. Because it must be admitted that Enlightenment thinking had become a species of orthodoxy. In the form that such thinking was present in the great radical traditions of Marxism, socialism and anarchism there was a kind of rationalist *hubris*, bound up with a theological view of an ideal society. This was most evident in the Marxist tradition, but was also clearly associated with the anarchist tradition. In both there was an addiction to an end-state vision of society. In this they were both incorporating and expressing the Enlightenment vision of linear progress, epoch by

⁴² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991).

epoch, to the ultimate goal. It was the vision of Turgot, the vision of Condorcet. It was a grand meta-narrative.

Arguably anarchism, in its practical applications remains handicapped by this heritage of the end-state vision of an ideal society. If we believe that anarchism can only have any relevance if it can be seen to work as a whole, within a fully completed, rational model of human cooperation without authority, then we remained trapped in utopian dead end. The answer is for anarchism to abandon the orthodoxy of an end-state vision, and focus instead on a pragmatic application of anarchist principles. In this light, anarchism is not necessarily a prescription for an alternative society, but a body of principles that can address the practical issues of how we live in the world as it is. Like liberalism or democratic theory it would be applicable in a variety of conditions and to a variety of degrees. Above all, it would seek to make relevant the delicate balance between liberty and equality that is uniquely anarchist.

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