

Anarcho-Lifestyleism

An Anarchist Philosophy and Practice

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Foundations for an Anarchist Philosophy

The importance of Philosophy is two-fold, stemming from two definitions of philosophy, that must work in tandem. The first of these definitions comes from Foucault, speaking on the influence of his philosophical approach.

“We have known for a long time that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is concealed, but rather to make visible what precisely is visible, which is to say to make appear what is so close, so immediate, so intimately connected with ourselves that we cannot perceive it. Where the role of science is to make known that which we do not see, the role of philosophy is to make visible that which we do see.”¹

This role of Philosophy is deeply connected with Foucault’s analyses of power, where he rejects the questions of legitimacy, morality, or even of explanation. Instead Foucault focuses on description, in relation to power focusing on the question “relations of power, in what do they consist?”² This role of philosophy serves to diagnose present possibilities and to map the world we find ourselves in and its institutions in hope that through understanding we may find paths of resistance, weak points to strike.³

The second definition is from Pierre Hadot, specifically his understanding of philosophy through his study of Hellenistic and Roman thought. Hadot writes of a philosophy of strangeness, that creates a rupture in daily life. This strangeness stems from a love of wisdom, “a state of perfection of being and knowledge.”⁴ The philosopher is one who brings conflict, “a conflict between the life one should live and the customs and conventions of daily life.”⁵ This role of philosophy, while creating a rupture in daily life, and in a way being disconnected from it, is still deeply connected with life. This connection of life however stems from the self to craft, from this rupture, new ways of living being and acting.⁶ And is connected with every facet of life through a focus on three domains, “tranquility of the soul, self-sufficiency, and cosmic consciousness.”⁷

These two approaches when combined thus aim to map what composes our daily lives, and create a rupture in that mode of living where it does not suit the self through the exercise of living beyond it. Bringing this approach to Anarchism then our goals should be two-fold; to make known the structures at play that dictate our lives (the methods of repression, privilege, brutality, complacency, exclusion and inclusion) and through this mapping of life as it is there must follow a crafting of life, in relation to the self, that is at first to oppose life as it is, to then create a positive form of life, not only in opposition to this way of life, but pushing beyond it and beyond opposition.

In his debate with Chomsky, Foucault cautions against formulating ideas of “human nature” or an ideal society while rooted within this one that idea will still be rooted in the values and models of this society. namely Bourgeois values and models.⁸ Adorno speaks of a similar concept. “To the question of the goal of an emancipated society, one receives answers such as the fulfillment

¹ Foucault “The Analytic Philosophy of Politics”

² Davidson, “Structures and Strategies of Discourse”

³ Veyne, “The Final Foucault and his ethics”

⁴ Hadot ‘Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy.’

⁵ Hadot ‘Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy.’

⁶ Davidson, “Introductory remarks to Pierre Hadot”

⁷ Davidson, “Introductory remarks to Pierre Hadot”

⁸ Chomsky Foucault, “Human Nature: Justice vs. Power”

of human possibilities or the richness of life... Tenderness would be solely what is most crude: that no-one should starve any longer.”⁹

Both Foucault and Adorno warn that in attempting to answer the question of what a liberatory society will concretely be we are destined to fail, because any conception would be rooted in ingrained ideology that comes with living in a capitalist society. This however should not leave us to believe that a liberatory society is impossible, but simply beyond our current conceptualization. Here then we should take Adorno’s advice, and strive first for a politics of “no-one should starve”, a politics first in opposition to the oppressive forces we find ourselves engulfed in. It is then from here that new desires may spring from us, and through these desires then we may reshape our lives positively.

Through these two conceptions of philosophy, and with this limit of conceptualizing a liberatory life, there are then three aims of an Anarchist Philosophy.

The first aim of this process is that of mapping. Within our lives we must find and reveal the things that go unseen to us due to the blinding effect of living it. Ideology affects every facet of life, from institutional organizing, such as the organizing of the individual into the workplace, to the ideas that shape our perception of the world, such as the distinction between food and weeds, to the material conditions that constrain us, such as hunger.

The second aim of this process is that of rupture, to create a separation in how things are and how things could be. This aim is opposition, anti-capitalism, anti-fascism, anti-work, anti-racism etc. Here these structures, ideas and practices of life that we have found to be destructive to ourselves we must aim to dismantle. Crafting methods of taking the worker out of the workplace, to dismantle the distinction between weeds and food, and to feed ourselves and others.

The third aim then is to craft new desires, a new way of living. Moving beyond mere opposition, beyond subsistence, when structures have been built that successfully remove the individual from the ideological constraints of this larger society, new ideals, values, cultures, meanings of life can be realized. When free from the constraints of work, hunger, and the ideological influences on our psyche and creativity, here the monolithic values of productivity, whiteness, imperialism etc. can be dismantled or replaced with new liberated ideals of life.

Aim #1: An Analysis of Life

To analyze every facet of life that is shaped ideologically would take many lifetimes. Not only is there seemingly endless number of ways that our lives are controlled but they are also constantly shifting, becoming more refined. This goal however is not hopeless, much literature already exists that aims to analyze these methods of control, perhaps more importantly though many of these works have also offered generalizable ideas of how power, institutions, ideology, architecture, language and many other methods work to shape our psyches.

First we must understand that every facet of society is both a possible avenue of control and resistance.

“There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it’s within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another. For example, in the crisis of the hospital as environment of enclosure, neighborhood clinics, hospices, and day care could at first express new freedom, but they could participate as well in mechanisms of control that are

⁹ Adorno “Minima Moralia” #100

equal to the harshest of confinements. There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.”¹⁰

So then it is not enough to simply identify some aspect of society as controlling or liberatory, but to analyze its functions, and which of those functions serve to control us and which of those can be used for liberatory ends. Through this analysis we can find that which we must oppose in these controlling aspects, and which must be removed from any liberatory alternative to these aspects of society, as well as any liberatory potential within them that may be within them which we can learn from and incorporate into our liberatory alternatives.

A great contemporary example of this analysis, which is still ongoing, is that of technology broadly. From Bookchin’s proposal of ‘liberatory technology’¹¹ to the primitivist arguments against technology¹² there is much debate within anarchism broadly as to whether technology is ‘good’ or if it must be done away with. Preceding though with the goal of purely accepting or rejecting technology does not go far enough. While analyses such as that of “The planet of the humans”¹³ offer a quite in-depth and robust delve into the controlling, oppressive and catastrophic effects of so-called ‘green tech’ the analysis however should not end there. Even with revelations such as the catastrophic capabilities of these technologies the goal of the analysis should not be to declare that this technology must be completely rejected (though that may be the outcome), it should instead be explored to greatest depths possible, to understand in what ways it is catastrophic, where are these catastrophic methods found in other things, what good (or supposed good) those things offer, are there other ways to attain this good, is this good a false one, how can we show others that this good is false, etc.

With these analyses it is not only important to build this knowledge within ourselves but to make available to others. Here writing is a crucial tool that can allow us to create a collective mapping of these functions of control. Writing is not just useful as a way of sharing new information but also synthesizing previous information. Creating interconnected understanding of these processes of control, combining works on individual methods of control, can help create a more integrated understanding of not only what these functions are, but how they are connected and where and in what ways they can be disrupted.

Aim #2: Oppositional Tactics

Oppositional tactics are those that are purely negative, against something. They are primarily manifested in four types of actions:

Survival tactics are those that aim to combat the use of death as a controlling force (through the controlling of resources, the threat of state sanctioned violence, or through ideological violence/hate crimes). Tactics such as serving food, providing housing, medical care, anti-police campaigns and de-arresting tactics, anti-abuse resources, and unionizing are just a few examples of ways that the threat of death can be combated.¹⁴

Unlearning tactics are tools for individuals and groups to challenge methods of control (primarily methods of control based in concepts), that influence the way we see and interact with

¹⁰ Deluze, “Post Script on Societies of control.”

¹¹ Bookchin “Post-Scarcity Anarchism”

¹² Jensen “Endgame Lecture”

¹³ Gibbs “Planet of The Humans”

¹⁴ Food not Bombs “Our Story”

the world and others. The primary example of this type of tactic is in anti-bigotry work, such as anti-racism and anti-sexist teaching that analyze and question race and gender, the power structures they create/support and other concepts that are influenced by these concepts, such as beauty, hostility, maturity, intelligence etc.¹⁵

Removal tactics are typically aimed at institutions. Tactics such as anti-voting, boycotting through alternatives, squatting, and dumpstering aim to remove the self or others from the institutions they circumvent, such as anti-voting tactics which aim to remove the individual from institutionalized politics towards non-institutional politics. By removing individuals from these institutions that institution no longer has a means of direct control over the individual, though unlearning tactics may be necessary to challenge indirect methods of control.¹⁶

Combative tactics are those that directly destroy or stop the thing (or part of it) that is opposed.¹⁷

While mapping controlling functions of society, tactics that combat these functions must be crafted. And through these tactics the foundations for a liberatory community can begin to emerge. Communities based on ensuring that individuals do not go hungry, communities built on the expression of individual autonomy, communities that reject work, and communities formed from organic relationships, not organizations.

Aim #3: Culture-in-Action

If it is impossible for us to truly imagine an emancipated world beyond the premise that “no-one should starve” given our current conditions.¹⁸ And if it is true that the means of a revolutionary movement directly affect the ends that they can accomplish.¹⁹ Then the means of an Anarchist movement should be to constantly push against current territorializations, the confines of control we currently find ourselves in both physically and psychically, through constant imagining and re-imagining of what an Anarchist society may look like, and putting those visions into action wherever possible.

In his preface to “The Theatre and it’s Double” Antonin Artaud discusses the ongoing demoralization of life, the lack of any meaningful culture, and the role of civilization as a means of control.²⁰ Through this examination Artaud posits culture as something that we must begin crafting ourselves as an extension of ourselves.²¹ In this way, through a new culture of life, or “culture-in-action”, not only is “civilization” combated but something positive can also be created.²² Through the re-envisioning and practicing of how a new life can be lived in an anarchist fashion we can not only push our conceptions of how we might live but through practice continue to refine and redevelop ourselves.

A Culture-in-Action must then create and identify tactics of creating new desires and modes of living. This is to be accomplished not just through imagining new ways of living, but putting

¹⁵ Zizek “Interview on Political Correctness”

¹⁶ Black “The Abolition of Work”

¹⁷ Seminatore “Indiscriminate Anarchists”

¹⁸ Adorno, “Reflections of a damaged life”

¹⁹ Bookchin, “Listen Marxist”

²⁰ Artaud, “The Theatre and it’s Double (Preface)”

²¹ Artaud, “The Theatre and it’s Double (Preface)”

²² Artaud, “The Theatre and it’s Double (Preface)”

them into action. In this way we should not only imagine what a possible anarchy may look like, but through that envisioning introduce those things that we imagine into our own lives. So if we are to imagine anarchy as living without hunger, in community with those you care about, without work, not only should we depict what this might look like through art but also implement what we depict into our lives, to see if leads to personal happiness and from there redevelop our thoughts. Through the redeveloping of these tactics and desires we can continuously push beyond the limitations of our thought, and through practice find what we enjoy the most.

Anarcho-Lifestylism

This anarchist philosophy, with its three aims, can be implemented in many ways, to many different aspects of life. The most general application however is the implementation of these aims in a lifestyle, a way of living that not only meets these aims for the individual but in realizing how they would interact with others, possibly extend this lifestyle and aims to a community. To achieve these aims individually and collectively then an anarchist lifestylism must: physically and mentally remove the individual from institutions, create viable alternative methods of survival outside of these institutions, create opportunities to attack these institutions directly, and create a new culture which constantly reimagines itself.

To list every institution that one must remove themselves from would be a near impossible task, and removing oneself from them is not easier, because of this an anarchist lifestyle is always 'being built'. However to give some examples, or better, a starting point, an anarchist lifestyle should remove the individual from employment, settler capitalist property relations, the way we are taught to view 'others', the education system, as well as many others. In this way the individual should not only for example quit their job, but also question the very nature of work, not only with theoretical critiques, such as alienation, but also examining the individual relation that one has to work, in which ways those are negative for the individual in question, and what the individual can do in a mode of living to eliminate the negative aspects and promote positive ones. In this way then an individual who quits their job physically leaves the institution of employment, and then in examining their relation to work (what work means to them, whether it can ever have positive aspects and what those are) they are able to also psychically exit the institution.

Being able to remove oneself physically from institutions can be extremely difficult, continuing the example of employment, being able to quit your job and lose your home can seem impossible if that is the only mode of living you have ever known. Through lifestylism then the lifestyle one lives should be an example of its possibility and where possible lifestylists should aim to reproduce the lifestyle not only by bringing the thought into the larger collective psyche but also through material possibility. In this way then things like teaching individuals how to dumpster, starting agriculturally sustainable squats and squatting in general can help create the material viability (the reassurance that individuals will not harm themselves) of a lifestyle and if these projects are successful create reproducible models on which the lifestyle can be recreated and even experimented with.

Within these lifestyles must also come methods of attack. Where the removal of the individual from an institution can limit or nullify the effect of that institution on the individual the institution continues to act on a large scale with direct or indirect consequences. Just as important as removing the individual physically and mentally from these institutions is physically and

mentally removing these institutions from the world. Just as important as attacking banks, is questioning our “economic” arrangements with each other and what relations we can have with each other that dismantle those institutions mentally, just as important as attacking dams is questioning our relationships with natural things, primarily our view of them as resources, and just as important as it is for us to attack the police and the “justice” system we must evaluate whether the ideas of justice are of any use to us and if so what a liberatory form of justice might be.

In this second mode of attack, mentally attacking the presupposition of these institutions, these attacks must become manifested within the lifestyle. For example for a lifestylist who aims to attack mentally the ideas of justice, the rejection of the states justice is only the beginning of the attack, from there the critique must pose an answer, and that answer implemented within the lifestyle. In this way then the attack becomes more refined where through the implementation of the critique in a lifestyle the critique can continue to develop, change as things are found not to work, or better methods are found.

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